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Notes & Comments: October 2016

Campus hi(s/r)jinks

One of the great curiosities of this decadent age is the extent to which hallowed values and ambitions from the past have mutated into their opposites. As we've had occasion to observe in this space before, what started out as the free-speech movement at Berkeley in 1964 now appears as a politically correct demand for speech codes, safe spaces, trigger warnings, and constant vigilance against possible "microaggressions." Or think about race relations. In the early 1960s, the rallying cry was for racial integration. Today, at many campuses across the country, colleges are bowing to demands for segregated housing for black students only. (Memo to white students: this tactic will not work for you.) There is also a more general mutation, focused not on one issue but a general approach to life. In the Sixties, one saw a rebellion against the idea that colleges stood *in loco parentis* in matters of social and sexual behavior. Students wanted, or said they wanted, the freedom to do as they liked. Today, we see a strange, authoritarian return of the panoptic proctor who seeks simultaneously to impose a new, puritanical regime on campus while at the same time nurturing every certified mode of putatively victimized infatuation. Campuses are hothouses for the exfoliation of every LGBT+ extravaganza (that plus sign is a newish innovation meant to forestall laughter at the ever-expanding tail of letters) while at the same time threatening every traditional heterosexual encounter with the stigma of rape. It is an odd, yeasty, unstable environment.

Let us pause to note that we used the word "decadent" in our first sentence advisedly. A decadent society is not necessarily one that is libertine, although it may be that. It is essentially one in which inherited institutions and ideals have been hollowed out, ironized, inverted. Thucydides, in his description of the revolution in Corcyra in Book III of his *History of the Peloponnesian War*, describes how existential upheavals in society precipitate broader semantic and linguistic upheavals: "To fit in with the change of events, words too had to change their meanings." What used to be described as prudent circumspection was now dismissed as culpable naïveté. Conversely, sneaking dishonesty was now admired as brash cleverness. "As the result of these revolutions," he noted, "there was a general deterioration of character throughout the Greek world. The simple way of looking at things, which is so much the mark of a noble nature, was regarded as a ridiculous quality and soon ceased to exist."

Thucydides' words resonate especially in troubled times, like our own, when fundamental values seem not only under attack but also internally sclerotic, uncertain, pusillanimous. In 1975, in another moment of societal upheaval, Yale University published the so-called Woodward Report, named for the distinguished historian C. Vann Woodward, who chaired a committee to define the nature and appropriate limits of free speech on campus after students had angrily shut down or prevented the appearance of several controversial figures at Yale, including William

Shockley, George Wallace, and General William Westmorland. The report is a rousing defense of free speech. An epigraph from Oliver Wendell Holmes indicates the tenor of its argument: "If there is any principle of the Constitution that more imperatively calls for attachment than any other it is the principle of free thought—not free thought for those who agree with us but freedom for the thought that we hate."

Yale has never explicitly disavowed the Woodward Report. Indeed, it periodically pays homage to it as a sort of sacred tablet. Nevertheless, there is some irony that a new, expanded edition of the report was published this summer under the title *Campus Speech in Crisis: What the Yale Experience Can Teach America*. The moving force behind the publication was not the university, but The William F. Buckley Jr. Program at Yale, an independent think tank whose mission is to promote the intellectual legacy of Buckley across the country. It is grimly apposite that a new edition of a report arguing that "the paramount obligation of the university is to protect [the] right to free expression" should appear at the very moment that Yale, like many academic institutions, was ostentatiously turning its back on that obligation.

Yale made national headlines last November when a controversy over the policing of Halloween costumes (it does sound ridiculous, doesn't it?) escalated into a histrionic, obscenity-laced showdown between students (the source of the obscenities) and the Master of a residential college. The pathetic episode was captured on video and went viral. The Master and his wife have since left their positions, the title "Master" has been retired, and Peter Salovey, the craven President of Yale, promised $50 million to enhance "diversity" and soothe wounded racial sensitivities on campus through the creation of such initiatives as the Center for the Study of Race, Indigeneity, and Transnational Migration. It didn't end there. Even as copies of *Campus Speech in Crisis* were rolling off the press this summer, Salovey announced the creation of a Committee to Establish Principles on Renaming and a separate committee to scrutinize public art on campus. The former would render judgment on such monuments of offensiveness as Calhoun College, named for John C. Calhoun, the nineteenth-century Congressman, Senator, Secretary of War, and Vice President. Calhoun was also a robust and articulate supporter of slavery, which makes the presence of buildings named in his honor offensive to some historically illiterate social justice warriors.

The second committee, on public art, was established after a janitor smashed a stained glass window depicting slaves. Its brief is to identify objects that might be deemed offensive and then have them removed and spirited away "for further study."

Is anyone or anything safe? Even as Yale embarks on its projects of politically correct sanitization, it is moving forward with "on-line anonymous reporting systems" to police alleged sexual misconduct. Note the word "anonymous." Had an unhappy date? Anonymously report it to your local Title IX Commissar and the miscreant might well be expelled.

Of course such insanity is not confined to Yale. Indeed, it is pandemic. At Brown University, for example, a public debate over the term "rape culture" was thought to be so traumatizing that the university provided a "safe space" for upset students. "The room," one account of the episode reports, "was equipped with cookies, coloring books, bubbles, Play-Doh, calming music, pillows, blankets and a video of frolicking puppies, as well as students and staff members trained to deal with trauma." No wonder the total cost of attending Brown is $68,106 per annum.

Meanwhile, at Vanderbilt University, a Faculty Senate Gender Inclusivity Task Force provides guidance on the troublesome topic of how to address people who are uncertain about which sex they are. "I'm Steve and I use he/him/his pronouns. What should I call you?" "My pronouns are they/them/theirs. May I ask yours?" Don't be surprised if the creature you are addressing responds, "I use the Ze, Zir, Zirs pronouns." Vanderbilt suggests that professors include this critical information on class forms, rosters, etc. Much confusion can be avoided by "substituting language such as *everybody*, *folks*, or *this person* for gender binary language: *ladies and gentlemen*,

boys and girls, *he or she*." Heaven forfend that anyone should speak of "ladies and gentlemen." But what if you make a mistake? "Graciously accept correction. . . . 'Thank you for reminding me. I apologize and will use the correct name and pronoun for you in the future.'" Vanderbilt is an absolute bargain at $63,532.

The novelist Lionel Shriver put a lot of this nonsense in perspective in a recent speech she gave in Australia on the subject of "cultural appropriation." She began by recalling a surreal episode at Bowdoin College in Brunswick, Maine, where students threw a tequila-themed birthday party for a friend. *Horribile dictu*, they distributed sombreros to their guests *which the guests actually wore.* Photos of the partygoers circulated on campus. College administrators, with Yale-like alacrity, threatened the "culprits" (Of what were they culpable? Wearing hats?) and opened an investigation into this "act of ethnic stereotyping." The revelers were placed on "social probation," the hosts were expelled from their dormitory and removed from their positions in the student government. This insanity can be yours for only $61,650 per annum. (Actually, that's per *this* annum: costs escalate every year.)

As Shriver notes, this impulse, which began in the hothouse of academia but has now spread to the culture at large, puts huge swathes of cultural expression out of bounds. In principle, nothing is safe from interdiction.

> [A]ny tradition, any experience, any costume, any way of doing and saying things, that is associated with a minority or disadvantaged group is ring-fenced: look-but-don't-touch. Those who embrace a vast range of "identities"—ethnicities, nationalities, races, sexual and gender categories, classes of economic under-privilege and disability—are now encouraged to be possessive of their experience and to regard other peoples' attempts to participate in their lives and traditions, either actively or imaginatively, as a form of theft.

Rigorously pursued, the imperatives of identity politics render social life intolerable: "Seriously," Shriver notes with some bemusement, "we have people questioning whether it's *appropriate* for white people to eat pad thai." The enforcement of identity politics would also, she cautions, make the writing of fiction impossible. For what is fiction but an act of imagination, which is to say the projection of possibilities based upon the reformulation, the appropriation, of experiences we have not had but can imagine. Shakespeare was not a Danish prince or a Roman dictator or a young Italian girl in Verona. But he saw deeply into the mind of Hamlet, the ambition of Caesar, the heart of Juliet.

Shriver's speech, which naturally called forth anguished cries of protest, is only one in an accelerating series of dissents against the inanity of political correctness, identity politics, and the circumscription of free speech. In fact, signs are accumulating that the whole enterprise of repression, having evolved from political protest to infantile posturing, is approaching a Wizard-of-Oz denouement. As the economist Herb Stein observed in another context, what cannot go on forever, won't. The shrunken man huddling behind the curtain stands exposed to the condign ridicule of the public. There will be more Yales and Vanderbilts, Browns and Bowdoins. But there will also be more and more colleges following the lead of institutions like The University of Chicago, which recently stunned the PC establishment with a brief but pointed memo from John Ellison, the Dean of Students. Like many such communiqués, the memo affirmed a commitment to free expression. Every college does that. But then Dean Ellison tore back the curtain: "Our commitment to academic freedom means that we do not support so-called 'trigger warnings,' we do not cancel invited speakers because their topics might prove controversial, and we do not condone the creation of intellectual 'safe spaces' where individuals can retreat from ideas and perspectives at odds with their own."

It's too early to say for sure, but we suspect that the reign of political correctness may itself be on the brink of a correction. The unsustainable insanity that has coruscated through our culture shows signs of exhaustion as it descends into ever more preposterous demonstrations of skirling self-parody. How silly it will all look when it is finally exposed, exactly like the little man who pretended to be "Oz the Great and Powerful."

Populism: II

Populares & populists

by Barry Strauss

It was the summer of 133 B.C. In Rome, Tiberius Sempronius Gracchus, Tribune of the Plebs, and his supporters gathered in the pre-dawn hours and occupied the Temple of Jupiter on the Capitoline Hill high above the Forum. The political situation was tense and had been escalating ever since he passed a land reform bill over the Senate's opposition earlier that year. To protect himself and his legislation, Gracchus was now running for an unprecedented second term in succession as tribune. The Senate opposed this unconstitutional procedure. Many Senators thought that Gracchus wanted to ride a wave of popular support to make himself tyrant. For their part, Gracchus and their supporters feared for their lives.

Rome was a republic. Its champions saw it as the epitome of what the ancients called a mixed constitution. The historian Polybius, writing during Gracchus's lifetime, praised it as a regime that balanced monarchy, aristocracy, and democracy. Rome's powerful magistrates, headed by two consuls annually elected for one-year terms, represented the monarchical element. The Senate (literally, the Elders), a council of ex-magistrates who supervised the regime, represented the aristocracy. The people took part in electoral and legislative assemblies—the democratic element. Furthermore, the people had special representatives, the ten tribunes, elected annually for one-year terms. The tribunes had the power to veto the action of any other part of the Roman government, but they rarely used that potent tool. Ordinarily the tribunes were ambitious men, on the way up, and took care not to offend the powerful. Gracchus was different.

He wanted to solve the knotty problem of land, poverty, and the army. The ideal Roman soldier was a peasant farmer. To serve in the military he had to meet a minimum property requirement—the Romans did not want to give weapons to landless men. By 133 B.C., however, things were out of joint. While off for years fighting Rome's wars, many soldiers had lost their farms to creditors at home. To add to the problem, they also lost the ability to graze their herds on so-called "public land," that is, land that the Romans had confiscated in the process of conquering Italy. Wealthy and powerful senators had gobbled up public land in violation of an earlier law limiting private ownership of such land. Gracchus wanted to solve the crisis by settling Roman citizens on public land in Italy and thereby making them eligible for military service.

To his supporters Gracchus was a hero, to his opponents a rogue aristocrat. Who was Gracchus? His father, also Tiberius Sempronius Gracchus, had served twice as consul; his mother, Cornelia, was the daughter of the great Scipio Africanus, the conqueror of Hannibal and a general whom J. F. C. Fuller judged greater than Napoleon. His great-uncle had conquered Macedon; his brother-in-law had destroyed Carthage. Gracchus was, in short, a man of the establishment—and then he turned reformer. Some said he was a revolutionary. He started

out with a certain amount of restraint and with the backing of other powerful elites, but he quickly generated enormous opposition. He responded by becoming increasingly radical and lost some of his original elite support. He certainly broke the rules, and he threatened powerful interests by proposing to redistribute land from the rich to the poor, with only limited compensation paid to those who lost property; the land belonged to the Roman people anyhow, he argued, and the rich had taken it in an illegal power grab.

He was a powerful speaker, as even Cicero, who was no admirer, attests. Earlier that year when addressing the crowd from the Rostra, the speakers' platform in the Forum, Gracchus spoke on behalf of his proposed law. As Plutarch notes, he pointed out that many of those who would benefit had lost their land while away fighting for their country in the legions

> "The wild beasts that roam over Italy," [Gracchus] would say, "have every one of them a cave or lair to lurk in; but the men who fight and die for Italy enjoy the common air and light, indeed, but nothing else; houseless and homeless they wander about with their wives and children. And it is with lying lips that their imperators exhort the soldiers in their battles to defend sepulchers and shrines from the enemy; for not a man of them has an hereditary altar, not one of all these many Romans an ancestral tomb, but they fight and die to support others in wealth and luxury, and though they are styled masters of the world, they have not a single clod of earth that is their own."

Over enormous opposition Gracchus's bill was passed, but its future was a question mark. Its opponents tried to use another one of the ten tribunes to thwart Gracchus, but he countered by having the man deposed from office. Then he intervened in the senate's bailiwick of financial affairs and foreign policy by taking control of a bequest to the Roman state from abroad and earmarked it to fund the commission that would redistribute land. All was turmoil in Roman politics. And so Rome reached the violent summer of 133 B.C.

On that day on the Capitoline Hill, Gracchus and his supporters expected trouble, and they were right. At a meeting of the senate, Scipio Nasica, the Pontifex Maximus, chief priest of Rome's state religion, demanded that the consul stop the tyrant, but the consul refused. He said that he didn't want to condemn a Roman citizen without trial. So Nasica stood up and called on everyone who wanted to save the state to join him. A number of senators did—clearly, they were prepared because their attendants came to the meeting with staves and clubs to use as weapons. As they exited the senate house, Nasica covered his head with his toga. It was a sign of priestly piety, but the Romans were no pacifists; the altars of paganism were stained with blood.

On the Capitoline Hill, Gracchus's followers picked up legs from wooden benches crushed by the crowd as they fled, but it was not enough to protect them from the angry senators. What followed was a massacre: three hundred Gracchans were killed, including Tiberius Gracchus himself. Their bodies were hauled down from the hill and dumped in the Tiber River to float out to sea, in spite of pleas from their families for burial.

So ended what some called the first factional conflict in Rome since the abolition of the monarchy (traditionally, 509 B.C.) to end in bloodshed and the murder of citizens. Modern scholars see it as the start of the Roman Revolution, the intermittently violent—sometimes very violent—process that convulsed the republic and ended up making Rome a monarchy again, this time under the Caesars, about a century after Gracchus's bloody tribunate.

That tribunate also marked the seminal moment for a phenomenon that would shape Roman politics for the next century: the *populares* (singular, *popularis*). The term populares refers to a series of politicians in the Late Roman Republic who said that they were acting on behalf of or with the help of the people. The ancients considered Tiberius Gracchus to be the first of four great populares, the others being his brother, Gaius Gracchus (People's Tribune, 123–122 B.C.), Saturninus (People's

Tribune, 103 and 100 B.C.), and Sulpicius (People's Tribune, 88 B.C.). Also worthy of mention is Cicero's archenemy Clodius (People's Tribune, 59–58 B.C.). Then there were populares consuls: Cinna (cos. 87–84 B.C.), Lepidus (cos. 78 B.C.)—father of the Lepidus in Shakespeare's *Julius Caesar*—Marius (six times consul between 107 and 86 B.C.), and the most famous popularis of them all, Caesar. Not only was Caesar consul (five times consul between 59 and 44 B.C.), but also dictator, eventually dictator in perpetuity—a new office and one entirely out of keeping with a free republic (four times dictator between 49 and 44 B.C.). If you want to take the fevered temperature of politics in the Late Roman Republic, consider this: every single one of these populares was murdered.

Although no popularis, Cicero too was murdered in the death throes of the republic. The junta that took over the Roman state a year and a half after Caesar's assassination on March 15, 44 B.C., purged him. Before his death, Cicero had worked heroically to form a united front on the part of the wealthy and virtuous in Rome—or, as he later widened it, in all Italy—to save the republic from the populares, whom he blamed for bringing Rome to its knees. He failed but is rightly honored for his courage. Yet we need to ask if the populares were in fact guilty as charged. And we need to consider what lesson we might draw for today. What, if anything, does the story of ancient populares tell us about modern populists?

Begin with definitions. "Popularis" has much in common with the modern word "populist" but the two are not synonyms, although some treat them as such for convenience's sake. I have done so myself: *mea culpa*. Opponents of the populares thought of them not as principled populists but as panderers of the crowd, rabble-rousers, and fomenters of violence. They condemned them as careerists and unprincipled opportunists.

Populists today represent an ideology, at least a vague ideology: populism. Populism is a modern term derived from the Latin word *populus*, the people or the common people. The People's Party in the United States coined the term "Populists" in the 1890s. Many see populism as democracy's ugly twin. While democracy respects the rule of law, adheres to constitutional limits, and seeks a balance between classes and groups, populism is ambiguous. It promotes the people while denouncing the elite and cares less for law than results.

Admittedly, populism is a loosely defined if not nebulous and constantly shifting ideology, but the term "populares" is arguably vaguer. The ancients did not talk about populism, because the populares represented neither a political party nor a coherent program. And the ancients emphasized the *tactics* of the populares as much as the *substance* of their policies. To the Romans, populares were not just popular champions but men who tended to get business done via popular assemblies instead of by consulting the senate. And as their opponents often complained, a popularis might cynically manipulate the people for his own selfish ends. Still, the ancients had no doubt about the general bent of the populares: they agitated on behalf of the liberty of the people and the improvement of their material condition at the expense of the wealthy, educated, and restrained.

Another difference between populares and populists is that the former had visible opposite numbers while the latter did not. The Populists were a political party, but there was no party of The Elitists. Populares were not a party but a tendency and so were their opponents, men who called themselves the *boni* (the good men) or the *Optimates* (the best men; singular, *optimas*). Similarly, they sometimes referred to the populares as the *improbi* (the bad men). The optimates believed in government by a narrow elite of wealth, birth, and public achievement—that is, the senatorial nobility; some optimates also accorded a measure of political power to the equestrians or Roman knights, a non-senatorial but very wealthy social group. Optimates preferred to accord little or no power or authority to the common people or their political institutions.

Still, for all the differences between ancient populares and modern populists, the two offer

a similar diagnosis: there is something rotten in the state because the elite is mistreating the people and denying them their liberty, property, and happiness. They call for overthrowing the elite and empowering the people. They often use emotion, in particular, anger. Cicero, for example, records a description that paints the tribune Clodius as one of the furies. He writes:

> As for this monster, what crimes did he not perpetrate—crimes which, without reason or plausible hope, he committed with the fury of some savage beast, maddened with the violence of the brutal mob.

True, this portrayal is less than fair to Clodius, a political opponent who led to Cicero's exile from Rome (he was soon recalled). Yet even on a sympathetic account, Clodius did stir up the urban guilds and engage in violent tactics.

To return to the comparison between ancient and modern, in both cases the leader plays a crucial role. He or she is often charismatic, from the Gracchi to Eva Perón. Not infrequently, populist leaders are demagogues, that is to say, someone who appeals to prejudice rather than reason. One can think of examples from Cleon the Athenian to George Wallace. The Greek term from which our word derives, *dêmagôgos*, literally means "leader of the people" and did not originally have a pejorative meaning. It quickly gained that connotation in ancient times, however, as successive generations of Athenian democratic politicians raced to the bottom in order to outbid each other in the pursuit of popular favor, offering ever greater benefits (paid for by redistribution or conquest) and pursuing ever less dignified rhetorical stagecraft—the people preferring slapstick to Aeschylus, after all.

Cleon said that righteous indignation in the heat of anger made for better treatment of wrongdoers than calm and patient reasoning:

> For after a time the anger of the sufferer waxes dull, and he pursues the offender with less keenness; but the vengeance which follows closest upon the wrong is most adequate to it and exacts the fullest retribution.

The populares were not democrats. They came from the ruling elite and had no intention of turning over governmental decision-making power to the poor. Nor do modern populist leaders need to be democrats; in fact, as often as not the leader is a dictator who gets things done for the people without fussing overly about how he does it. So, William Jennings Bryan was a democrat but Hugo Chávez was not. Neither, of course, were various fascist leaders through whose policies there runs a vein of populism. As for the populares, Tiberius Gracchus bent the constitution, but he was a piker compared to Caesar, who, according to a plausible report by Suetonius, dismissed the republic as a mere name, a thing without form or substance.

Lincoln defined democracy as government of the people, for the people, and by the people. Populism, by contrast, advocates measures *for* the people but not necessarily *of* or *by* the people; on that, populares and populists would agree.

Politics sometimes comes down to a popularity contest, but sensible people know that it shouldn't. That points to the problem with populism. Just because the people want something doesn't make it good. The people of Athens, for example, voted to massacre the men and enslave the women and children of Melos during the Peloponnesian War, but the deed rightly lives on as a byword for atrocity. The Roman people enthusiastically reaped the plunder of empire won by violence, theft, destruction, and enslavement and demanded not so much peace as a greater piece of the pie—hitherto hogged by the Roman elite. The people of America's Old South wanted slavery (and so few Northerners were willing to fight them over it that Lincoln had to justify the Civil War as a war to save the Union, not a war to abolish slavery). That didn't make slavery right, of course, although Stephen A. Douglas and others tried to justify it under a doctrine of "Popular Sovereignty."

The highest standard in politics shouldn't be popularity but justice. Rather than adopt the most popular policies, a good regime should choose policies that promote the

common good. But how can we establish such a regime? By turning the government over to experts? By making it a series of town meetings instead? By appointing a dictator? Classical political thinkers argued that a mixed constitution, one that combines the best traits of different forms of government, was the practical road to a good and just regime. To be sure, Plato and Aristotle envisioned ideal regimes that would embody the highest form of justice, but they were unrealistic. Aristotle sees a more practical path in what he calls a polity, a regime that blended the wealth of the rich and the freedom of the poor and employed measures—from education to redistribution—to create a large and dominant middle class. Thanks to anti-poverty and full employment programs, most citizens would belong to the middle class. That majority group would be neither rich nor poor but moderately prosperous and content with its lot. It would dominate politics and endow it with its moderate outlook on life. Because there would be relatively few differences of wealth, citizens would be relatively similar and equal. Aristotle believed that the result would be a prudent, stable, and just regime.

As brilliant as Aristotle's description is, and as stimulating and provocative, it feels light, years away from life today. Cicero's mixed constitution is messier, less egalitarian, and less stable, which might all be reasons why it speaks more forcefully to our current condition. The rogues, knaves, fools, and infrequent heroes who spring out of his imperishable prose and onto each other's throats with venom, vitriol, and the occasional dagger would have no trouble fitting in with the Washington or Whitehall elite.

Cicero advocated a "tempering of the republic" (*On the Laws*, 3.12), a mixed constitution that was a dynamic balance rather than a blending. He considered equality neither desirable nor possible. The purpose of the state was to protect private property and hence to permit inequality. The people were united by a common law, but inequality would lead to disagreement about its interpretation. Democracy was tantamount to mob rule, but a narrow oligarchy would fail to take the interests of the people into account. The solution was not similarity and equality, as Aristotle recommends, but rather a balancing of the interests of the various groups in society. Thus the people would have *libertas* (liberty), the nobles would have *auctoritas* (authority, influence, weight, dignity), and the magistrates would have *potestas* (power). So Cicero puts it in his *De Republica* (*On the Republic*, 1.69, 2.57). In *De Legibus* (*On the Laws*), he offers a simpler division. He says, "when power is in the people [and the popular Assembly] and authority is in the senate, a moderate and harmonious state of the commonwealth will be maintained." He offers a nice Latin tag: *potestas in populo, auctoritas in senatu*. Cicero leaves no doubt about the relative distribution of powers. "The Senate shall be the master of public policy," he writes, "and everyone should defend what it decrees."

"What rights did the tribunate of Tiberius Gracchus leave to the good men (that is, to the boni or optimates)?" is the rhetorical question asked by Cicero's brother Quintus, a speaker in one of Cicero's dialogues (*On the Laws*, 3.20). Quintus no doubt accurately reflects the opinions of his class when he blames the populares and the institutions they employed—the tribunate and the popular Assembly—for making the lowest equal to the highest and for introducing violence and revolution.

Cicero was an elitist but not a knee-jerk one. Although generally aligned with the optimates, he called for a more broadly based ruling group than the diehards who wanted to keep power in the hands of a few old senatorial families. He called for a *concors ordinum* (concord of the orders), a union of the two most elite groups in Roman society, the nobles (those whose ancestors were senators), and the equestrians or Roman knights (those of great wealth but not senatorial status). He described this as a *consensus omnium bonorum* (consensus of all good men) and eventually envisioned it including *tota Italia* (all of Italy).

Nor did Cicero entirely neglect the interests of the people. He had no doubt that "the best

men" should govern and that private property should be sacrosanct, but he believed that the people should have a modicum of liberty. He did not, for example, want to abolish the People's Tribunes because he thought they could serve to calm the people as well as to incite them. He was all in favor of the people voting as long as there was no secret ballot (as Rome had in certain cases), so that the optimates could supervise the vote and correct it as necessary. "Let the people's vote be free but observed by the optimates," he proposed.

Cicero recognized that government by the elite should also be government on behalf of the people. It was the job of Rome's magistrates, he wrote, to increase the glory of the people (*On the Laws*, 3.9). He stated that those who administer the republic should

> keep the good of the people so clearly in view that regardless of their own interests they will make their every action conform to that; second, to care for the welfare of the whole body politic and not in serving the interests of some one party to betray the rest.

He bemoaned the current state of affairs and looked toward something better:

> Now, those who care for the interests of a part of the citizens and neglect another part, introduce into the civil service a dangerous element—dissension and party strife. The result is that some are found to be loyal supporters of the populares, others of the optimates, and few of the nation as a whole.

For Cicero, agitation by elite leaders on behalf of the people—a kind of populism, if you will—was neither just nor prudent. In fact, he blamed the populares for the troubles of the republic. The best regime, he thought, was a broad-based oligarchy in which the people have limited but genuine powers.

But what would happen if the oligarchs—"the best men"—misbehaved? What if they abused their power and oppressed the people? That is precisely the problem of the Late Republic.

In its early days the gap between rich and poor in Rome was relatively narrow. But as Rome conquered an empire, enormous wealth poured in and it was not shared equally. In fact, as they turned from prosperous farmers into rich herding magnates, Italy's one percent grabbed the public land on which the poor had depended for herding their livestock and converted it to private use. The rich took the lion's share, and then they took the mouse's share too.

The problem that Tiberius Gracchus addressed was the driving of the Italian peasantry off the land. It was a multiplex crisis: social, economic, humanitarian, political, and military, since Roman soldiers were supposed to meet a minimum land-ownership requirement. Inequality threatened the stability of the republic by striking at the twin institutions of the small farmer and citizen-soldier. A citizenry composed of small landowners tended to be conservative, moderate, and invested in the future of their society—and so less likely to be swayed by a demagogue. Service in the nation's militia would only add to such a citizen's patriotism and sense of civic duty. On this, Greco-Roman thinkers agreed. Yet Rome's elite was willing to gamble with their society's future by letting the agrarian crisis go unresolved.

It was a bad bet. The failure of land reform ultimately transformed the Roman legions from an army of small farmers to an army of landless proletarians. They no longer had the property to give them a stake in society, but they did have swords. For ambitious military leaders they were political foot soldiers, legionaries who demanded land on demobilization—or else. And so Rome evolved from the era of the Senate and its loyal commanders under Cato and Scipio to the day of *dux* and dictator under Marius and Sulla and Pompey and Caesar. The final outcome of the agrarian crisis and the struggle between optimates and populares was Augustus, Rome's first monarch in 500 years. He "renovated" the republic (as the Latin phrase he proudly advertised, *res public restituta*, may be translated) and turned it into the Roman Empire. He thereby achieved stability but at the cost of liberty. By the way,

Augustus was careful to provide land for his veterans. Tiberius Gracchus's proposed solution was much cheaper!

Whatever blame accorded to populares for their opportunism and demagoguery is more than matched by the greed and inflexibility of the optimates for failing to share the wealth of empire with ordinary citizens. Although giants walked among the politicians of the Late Republic, there were too few men of vision, moderation, and willingness to compromise. They couldn't foresee that the price of inflexibility would be liberty itself.

Their character did not rise to the occasion. Cicero recognized the extent to which a regime depended on the good character of its leaders. It was one thing to grant *auctoritas* to the senators, but another for them to be worthy of it. He understood the danger to the commonwealth posed by corrupt elites. Cicero wrote:

> Corrupt leaders are all the more pernicious to the republic because not only do they harbor their own vices but they spread them among the citizenry; they do harm not only because they are themselves corrupt but because they corrupt others—and they do more harm by the example they set than by their own transgressions.

Cicero needed no lessons in how power corrupts. He wrote:

> The great majority of people . . . when they fall prey to ambition for either military or civil authority, are carried away by it so completely that they quite lose sight of the claims of justice.

He added that unfortunately it was the greatest souls and most shining geniuses that had the greatest ambition for power and glory, making them all the more dangerous. He was thinking of Caesar in particular but the same could be said of Cato, Pompey, Brutus, and, to a degree, of Cicero himself. Indeed, it applies to a wide segment of the optimates, in their words and deeds, from the response to Gracchus in 133 B.C. to their last stand a century later at the Battle of Philippi in 42 B.C. In their unwillingness to compromise or recognize the legitimate claims of the people they opened the door to populares with armies at their backs. And so the defenders of the republic contributed to its demise.

Rome offered one solution to the problem of bad elite actors: if senators, they faced ejection from the senate by the censor, a sort of one-man Supreme Court when it came to public morals. That was hardly adequate, however, for dealing with an elite that was mean and foolish instead of generous and shrewd.

And so we come to populism. When an elite is corrupt, narrow-minded, and grudging; when it fails to recognize the legitimate claims of the people; when its injustice and misbehavior is not merely a rhetorical trope but a fact, then it is legitimate, indeed necessary, for the people to challenge it. In an ideal world, the challenge will be legal, constitutional, and respectful. It will root its claims not in the brute power of the people but in a philosophically defensible principle of justice. Far from engaging in demagoguery, its rhetoric will be as polite as the table manners of the guests reclining on the couches in a dining room of a Roman villa. We don't live in an ideal world, however, any more than Cicero's myopic and rigidly principled contemporary Cato the Younger lived in Plato's Republic—Rome in its turmoil and corruption was more like the Sewer of Romulus. We no longer live in a world run by America's founders, those eighteenth-century gentlemen in powdered wigs; actually, we never did, because those same gentlemen skewered each other in print and murdered each other in duels.

Modern populists, like ancient populares, are likely to be vulgar, angry, and confrontational. Such tactics are regrettable, but at times they are necessary. Principled populists will limit any resort to class conflict, will aim at the rule of law and not at mob rule, and will try to compromise with the elite rather than engage in revolution. Or, more likely, nowadays, when everything's a revolution, they will talk radical change but strike a bargain. Shrewd populists will want to adjust the regime, not destroy it.

Wise elites, for their part, will take populist movements as a wake-up call. Instead of merely denouncing populism as false consciousness, bigotry, resentment, bad manners, mental illness, peevishness, superstition, or class warfare, and instead of adopting a "Problems? What problems?" attitude when faced with protests, they will inquire as to whether genuine grievances might underlie populism's appeal. Then, having recognized human suffering, they will try to ameliorate it in turn. In that way they will do the right thing while also saving their political skins.

The problem of populism is the problem of elitism. The more just and astute the elite is, the less angry the people are. The more the elite treats politics like a big tent, in which no one should be left out, the less likely they are to face populist challenges.

Let's go back to where we began, in Rome in 133 B.C. If the Roman elite had compromised with Tiberius Gracchus instead of blocking and then killing him, or if they had co-opted his land reform and made it their own, then they might have rescued the republic from a century of war and revolution. They might even have spared their great-grandchildren the loss of political liberty that Augustus's monarchy entailed. To do that, however, would have taken moderation, courage, and wisdom—leadership, in a word—that is beyond the reach of all but the greatest statesmen.

We don't live in Plato's Republic, alas, so we will have populism. Let's respond to it wisely.

The passing of a Sixties showman

by Peter Collier

When I once complained to him about an unflattering mention I'd gotten in a *New Yorker* article about Allen Ginsberg, Warren Hinckle shot me a derisive look and said out of the corner of his mouth in his distinctive gravelly voice, "Listen, Collier, the only bad press you ever get is your obituary." This was not just a bon mot but a first principle, so it was ironic that, when Hinckle died in his native San Francisco a few weeks ago at age seventy-seven, his own obituaries were the best press he had gotten in many years, acknowledging his significant achievement midwifing the rebirth of muckraking journalism as the editor of *Ramparts* magazine in the mid–1960s and giving New Left ideas a raucous four-color presence in the political culture that calamitous era created.

When I joined *Ramparts* in 1966, Hinckle was already well on his way at age twenty-seven to becoming a living legend. While most of the staff came to work in street-fighter chic, he had his own homemade version of *bella figura*, showing up most days in a tie and three-piece suit, although sometimes changing pace with patent leather dancing pumps and a maroon velvet jacket. Jowly and plump and conveying an impression of fluid retention, he was an imperious alcoholic and only those who didn't realize how Irish he was regarded it as paradoxical that he should become more fluent and inventive the more he drank, and that he never—even after several hours at Cookie Pacetti's, the working-class watering hole where he went to escape intellectuals and politicos—appeared drunk.

He had lost an eye in a childhood accident, and the eye patch he wore with as much panache as the Hathaway Man became a sort of calling card. (When my son Andrew, then four, first saw Warren, he called him with precocious accuracy "that pirate guy.") He kept a capuchin monkey named Henry Luce in a large cage in his office, sometimes letting him ride on his shoulder as he dictated letters to his long-suffering secretary, Maureen, who also cleaned Henry's cage. When Maureen handed him a letter too critical of *Ramparts* or too importunately demanding payment of past due bills, he would grab a felt-tip pen, scrawl "fuck you" over the text, and return to sender.

He was something of a boulevardier who vastly preferred the company of Howard Gossage, Herb Caen, and other San Francisco personalities of the day to that of the baleful utopians who hung around the magazine. He liked living large and on the brink, kiting checks to fly often and always first class to New York where he stayed at the Algonquin to insinuate himself into the company of its literary ghosts while basking in the glory *Ramparts* brashly reflected from the West Coast. (Undeterred by a domestic air strike, he once made the round trip via London at the cost of a then-staggering fifteen hundred dollars.) He would sometimes take selected staff members for lunch to Andre's, an excellent French bistro a few doors up from the *Ramparts* headquarters on Broadway (the leg of lamb smothered in flageolets lingers on the palate of memory) and after the dishes were cleared horrify the

maître d' by pulling out his fountain pen and outlining some convoluted story in splotchy ink on the starched tablecloth.

Most of the rest of us were radicals for whom journalism was revolution by other means. Warren, however, had been editor of his high school paper and also of *The Foghorn* at the University of San Francisco; his first job out of college was as a reporter for the *San Francisco Chronicle*. But even though he wanted to be Citizen Hinckle or at least one of those characters in suspenders who emerge periodically from their offices in *Front Page* to yell "Stop the presses!," Warren understood better than anyone that the Sixties' Zeitgeist was headed in another direction. So when Edward Keating, a wealthy Menlo Park attorney who had started *Ramparts* in 1962 as a post–Vatican II liberal Catholic quarterly, offered him a job promoting stories such as an exposé of the key role played by New York's Cardinal Francis Spellman in deepening the U.S. involvement in Vietnam, Warren immediately seized the main chance.

He eventually convinced Keating to hire him full time, to take the magazine monthly, and to move it to San Francisco. Then, when Keating's modest fortune was exhausted by Warren's depraved spending habits, Warren found other investors and used them as a fulcrum to take over *Ramparts* himself, leaving Keating standing in the rear view mirror of history with the look on his face of an air crash survivor.

A political agnostic himself, at least at the beginning, whose only ideology was *Toujours l'audace!*, Hinckle nonetheless understood that the new politics of the mid-Sixties, fed steroids by the war in Vietnam, would destroy the postwar liberal consensus, thus creating a target of opportunity for radical "theorists" such as Robert Scheer, whom Hinckle hired and who, in turn, brought Sol Stern, David Horowitz, and others in his circle on board. The idea was that the New Leftists would provide the steak while Hinckle himself would continue to provide the sizzle.

Warren regarded the publications traditionally produced by the Left as necrotic material, headed on a non-stop journey from the mimeograph machine to oblivion. *Ramparts*, however, would be the New Left's version of *Time*. He hired the talented commercial artist Dugald Stermer to produce glossy covers that were Velcro for the mind and eye: Ho Chi Minh in a junk on the Mekong channeling Washington crossing the Delaware; a U.S. soldier crucified on a lonely cross in an Asian jungle; a jigsaw puzzle portrait of JFK with pieces left out around the head; a close-up of hands holding Scheer's, Stern's, Stermer's, and Hinckle's own draft cards—all of them on fire.

Hinckle and Scheer believed that the centrist liberals who had built American postwar power and stumbled into Vietnam were paper tigers. *Ramparts* attacked them and their creation in one story after another. This *cherchez la femme* journalism helped create the intellectual conditions that allowed the New Left to take over of the Democratic Party in 1972 and then inhabit the corpse—and name—of the liberalism it had just assassinated.

Amidst the swagger and posturing there were real coups, especially the 1967 story of how the CIA had infiltrated and used the National Student Association in its Cold War games. The exposé was a bombshell, extravagantly publicized by *The New York Times*. Warren scorned the *Times* because it had suppressed the Bay of Pigs invasion in the interests of national security—a decision, he believed, that summarized everything wrong with American journalism before his arrival—but he also obsessively craved its approval.

The NSA story, and other *Ramparts* exposes about, particularly, the machinations of the CIA, all proclaimed with full-page ads in the *Times*, helped bring muckraking, dormant since Ida Tarbell, back into vogue. (So much so, in fact, that within a few years "investigative journalism" was embraced by the mainstream press with superior resources that would help make *Ramparts* itself obsolete.) Other scoops followed, including the publication of Che Guevara's diaries and a photojournalistic essay on America's maiming of Vietnamese children that was said to have convinced Martin Luther King to come out against the war.

Buoyed by the advent of the counterculture and the growing importance of California as a state of mind, *Ramparts*'s San Francisco headquarters became a destination resort for the individuals and causes that defined radical chic. The magazine located a Green Beret named Donald Duncan who had left the Army because of his disillusioning experiences in Vietnam and put a formal portrait of him on the cover in his uniform and with all his medals for a searing first-person story—one of the first—about the futility of the war in which he'd fought. It helped get Eldridge Cleaver out of prison where he was serving time for rape and made him and *Soul on Ice* nationally famous. Cleaver soon joined Huey Newton and the Black Panthers. Warren was ecstatic the day he brought some of them to our office for a sit-down with the widow of Malcolm X. As they emerged from their cars, armed in accordance with their philosophy of "self-defense," cops swarmed our intersection and one of those tense cinematic standoffs quickly evolved in which everyone is frozen with hands on weapons waiting for the tiny movement—a sound, a neural tic—that would trigger an apocalypse.

Many of the people who passed through the *Ramparts* orbit—Tom Hayden, Timothy Leary, Ken Kesey, etc.—did not interest Warren, who was at this point in his life allergic to political asceticism and moral posturing. But he immediately warmed to others like Hunter Thompson whom he saw as kindred spirits in their impatience with dogma, their creative heterodoxy, and their willingness to indulge large and self-destructive appetites without remorse. I met Thompson shortly after he published his "strange and terrible saga" of the Hell's Angels and took him to the *Ramparts* office. He and Warren assimilated to each other immediately. We all went to Andre's to eat and drink. While we were gone, Henry Luce got out of his cage and into Thompson's rucksack. He ate some of the uppers he found stashed there and was comatose when we returned and had to be rushed to the vet to have his stomach pumped.

Warren loved the rococo conspiracy theories that bubbled up like gastric reflux during the Sixties. He joyously embraced the Jim Garrison "investigation" of JFK's assassination and hired William Turner, a former FBI agent with experience in "black bag" operations, to be the magazine's liaison with the New Orleans D.A. "Great fucking story," Warren would say, his grandest compliment, when the hallucinatory copy rolled in about Clay Shaw, David Ferrie, Guy Bannister, and the other characters in Garrison's theater of the absurd.

He loved doing what he called "the big takeout" and would craft "editorial essays" about some large topic—the advent of the Hippies; the growth of Left-wing Catholicism; the new phenomenon of Women's Liberation—and then turn staff writers loose on it, just as *Time*, his bête noire and summum bonum, did. He would use the memos they produced to write the piece himself (although the byline was always "by the editors"), dragging into the office after a long day's journey into a night of booze and typing with copy as impenetrable as Linear B, marked by cross outs and redirected paragraphs, along with loose inserts marked A, B, C, etc. (reaching N in one piece), and taped emendations enlarging pages to eleven-by-sixteen—a journalistic performance art utterly lost in an anodyne era of infinite drafts perfected by word processor.

By 1968, *Ramparts* had over 300,000 subscribers. Warren, of course, always claimed 450,000, but, whatever the true figure, it was an astounding accomplishment for a publication forcing "the System" to listen to what the New Left thought about it. But the more readers we acquired, the deeper the red ink in which we swam. The payroll was padded by hangers-on from the movement who used the magazine as support while they pursued their real vocation of throwing rocks at cops. Expenses were based on whim rather than budget. Easily bored by success, Warren always acted with impulsive financial unilateralism. (At one point, when the magazine was beginning to stabilize, he decided catastrophically to take it bi-weekly for a couple of months and then

just as capriciously returned it to the status quo ante.)

Fundraising was never-ending, with supporters lustily wooed and then left unrequited once the donation was made. Martin Peretz was an enthusiastic backer until *Ramparts* ran a piece on the Six-Day War that served as a birth announcement of the Left's future execration of Israel. A Jimmy Stewartesque Kansas history professor named Frederick Mitchell who couldn't say no to Warren would eventually drop most of his near-million dollar patrimony in spasms of somewhat involuntary contributions to *Ramparts*. When the cupboard was getting bare, Warren kept the magazine going by selling its considerable tax loss to people looking for a quick deduction.

By 1969 the magazine was mired in a crisis even he couldn't charm or connive his way out of. (It was also true, although we didn't see it at the time, that "the Sixties," *Ramparts*'s raison d'être, was beginning its long, self-destructive descent into political dada and histrionic fantasies of revolutionary violence.) His idea was to blithely declare bankruptcy that would wipe the slate clear and immediately begin a Siamese twin publication to be called *Barricades*. The rest of us didn't buy it, believing that losing the name was losing everything. Not willing to sit around and talk with us about the boring details of cutting expenses and restructuring, Warren left.

It was never the same for *Ramparts*, although its body took the next five years to realize that its head was missing. Carried down by the shipwreck of the decade it had chosen to symbolize, the magazine became increasingly dour and sectarian, engaging in journalistic parodies of its former brio.

Nor was it ever the same for Warren himself. Soon after leaving *Ramparts*, he and his new friend, the former *New York Times* man Sidney Zion, found munificent backing for a publication called *Scanlan's Monthly*, allegedly named after an Irish pig farmer. Warren managed to get a classic piece from Hunter Thompson on the Kentucky Derby, fear and loathing avant la lettre, but not much more than that. (Jann Wenner, who began *Rolling Stone* in his kitchen while working as a copy editor at *Ramparts* and who modeled himself on Warren, quickly grabbed up Thompson and the two of them went hand in hand to gonzo journalism.) *Scanlan's* ended after less than a year with an acrimonious break up between Hinckle and Zion.

In his long half-life, Warren wrote a memoir called *Making Lemonade*. He got Francis Ford Coppola to hire him to edit *City* magazine in the mid-Seventies. (It seemed like a marriage made in heaven, but Warren could spend money faster than even Coppola could make it, and *City* soon disappeared.) He did some heavy-breathing conspiracy paperbacks on Castro, the CIA, etc. with the former FBI agent Bill Turner. He took on editing jobs for obscure publications and wrote a column for a San Francisco startup newspaper no one ever read. Always on the lookout for a renaissance, he never escaped the large shadow of the man he had once been.

I saw him last in the late 1980s at Elaine's where my friend David Horowitz and I had gone one afternoon in an homage to old times while we were publicizing our anti-Sixties book *Destructive Generation*. Warren was there in a corner drinking with Emile de Antonio. We had a nasty argument with the leftist film documentarian about the Sandinistas with Warren happily observing. Then we got up to go. "Why are you leaving?" he asked. "The bar isn't closed, is it?"

Fitzgerald's pronouncement about second acts, cited only to gain credibility for tales of self-regeneration these days, actually holds true for Warren Hinckle. But it almost doesn't matter because the first act was filled with such glorious hugger mugger that it lasted a lifetime.

The genius of the place
by Nicola Shulman

By general consensus, the English are good at two things: writing and gardening. This year, and thanks to the double-your-money principle that allows us to celebrate birth- and deathdays equally and in succession, England's most famous writer, William Shakespeare (1564?–1616), and her most famous gardener, Lancelot "Capability" Brown (1716–1783), are enjoying centennial festivities.

You wouldn't always think to compare them. Forced, though, into juxtaposition by this accident of dates, some common characteristics emerge. Both were men from modest backgrounds, professionals in a medium where aristocratic practice had set the standard. Each arrived upon an artistic milieu which still looked to Italy and the classical world for validation and ideas and built on its foundations a model of vernacular self-sufficiency. Both are biographically elusive: documentation for Brown is of course more abundant than for the almost-invisible Shakespeare, yet curiously sparse for a celebrity in the age of letters. Unlike Humphry Repton, his chief successor in the landscape movement, Brown left no treatises or even letters to explain his aesthetic principles; his biographers have had to manage on a few reported scraps. Furthermore, because the effect of Brown's achievement has been to retrain our collective native eye to read his art as simple "nature," and see nature in terms of his art, his work has melted into England's landscape as Shakespeare into its language.

The hundred years from 1616 were convulsive ones for England and essential background to an understanding of the English Landscape Movement—that is, the horticultural phenomenon that caused literally thousands of naturalistic, wooded parklands to appear across the country. There was a civil war, a regicide, and a Commonwealth, followed by a restoration of the Stuart kings in the person of the faintly Catholic-scented Charles II, returned from exile in France. In 1688 the Stuart monarchy ended suddenly with the deposition of Charles's heir and brother, the defiantly Catholic James II, in favor of James's Dutch son-in-law, William. This nearly bloodless coup, styled the "Glorious Revolution," was the work of a group of powerful liberal-minded politicians known as Whigs. It brought about a severe contraction of the powers of the throne, the confirmation of the role of parliament, and the emergence of an unchallenged political clique, the Whig Ascendancy. The great Whig magnates were now the princes of the earth. For the next two generations, they viewed themselves—with some justification—as the architects of the Protestant constitutional monarchy, the safeguards of private property, the drivers of Britain's success in trade and arms, and the champions of personal liberties.

Of all the art forms to arise from these developments, none cast a more faithful reflection than gardening—or so it was made to seem by the Vasari of the garden, Horace Walpole, shaping its first history, "The History of the Modern Taste in Gardening," from the Whiggish eminences of the later eighteenth cen-

tury. According to this attractive narrative, the seventeenth-century formal garden—a geometric confection of terraces, clipped trees, avenues, mazes, and fountains based on the French models of Le Nôtre—was an expression of imported French despotism that deformed and enslaved nature, just as an absolute monarchy enslaved men. This abomination was then "swept away," as the British had swept their autocratic monarchy away in the Glorious Revolution, and replaced with a new, natural, and essentially national garden style of soft slopes, sinuous water, and meandering paths, obedient only to Pope's famous law: "consult the genius of the place in all." The new style of gardening became an emblem of British political liberties.

The reality was not as tidy as Walpole's busy clippers have made it. Taste in gardening, like other domestic arts, follows the waxing of status. In his own country William III had been one of the great makers of formal gardens; hence his reign ushered in no natural garden style. It was only after the Protestant German princeling George I was safely on the throne that Whig lords turned their gardens into iconographic manifestos for Whiggish virtues, crammed with temples of liberty or friendship, and busts of republican Roman senators. Nor, on the practical side, did gardens "leap the fence," as Walpole put it, all at once, and drown their avenues and five-point stars in miles of sweeping woods and waters. The geometric layout relaxed in tentative increments, with irregular features like winding paths and wiggly lakes contained at first in the old rectilinear framework, so that the early "naturalistic" designs that seemed so various and serpentine to their owners look to us more like formal gardens reflected in faintly rippling waters.

Matters were further complicated by the fact that the ideals of nature informing these first gardens was "nature" as it appears in the landscape paintings of Claude Lorrain (1600?–1682) and Nicolas Poussin (1594–1665). Gardening in the eighteenth century was, for the first and last time, a young man's game as well as a rich one's. Rich young men returning from that prototypical gap year adventure, the Grand Tour, had seen these pictures (and bought them: it's thought Claude's entire oeuvre passed through British ownership at one point), and also enough in the way of rotundae, grottoes, obelisks, Doric arches, Sibylline temples, and the rest of it, to set up a greener, wetter, and more Britannic version in their own grounds. The resulting semi-natural gardens—sometimes called "rococo"—appealed above all to the sentiment and intellect. They piloted you through an organized course of unexpected "views" in which associations—painterly and poetical, political and philosophical, ancient and modern—were blended like essences in stoppered vials. As you walked the circuit and met the views, you lifted the stopper and you felt.

As Timothy Mowl has shown in his seminal book on the Landscape Movement, *Gentlemen and Players*, the great gardens of the era immediately preceding Brown were the creations of inspired men and women—such as Lord Burlington at Chiswick, Alexander Pope at Twickenham, the Earl of Carlisle at Castle Howard, Prince Frederick and Princess Augusta at Kew—working alone or on a spectrum of collaboration with the garden professionals of the times. Of these, none was more fêted than Lord Cobham, "the father of English landscape gardening," whose gardens at Stowe were the acknowledged horticultural glory of England. Cobham had been one of Marlborough's generals and knew how to get the best out of men. Himself a gardening genius, he had serially engaged the most brilliant "improvers," and in the early 1730s he called in William Kent (1685–1748), "the sole beginner of the present National taste in gardening," as Joseph Spence observed, to remodel it in the new style, coaxing the elegant parterres into soft, green, temple-haunted slopes. A more surprising appointment was that of a young, inexperienced Northumbrian called Lancelot Brown, brought in to work under Kent's direction. Before Brown was twenty-six, Cobham had promoted him to Stowe's head gardener.

Why? As far as anyone knows, Brown, who was the son of a North Country farmer, had only had one job before, as the gardener for

a local squire. How he learned the skills of land-engineering, drainage, water-courses, grass management, tree-transplantation, and plantsmanship that commended him to his future clients has long been a matter of conjecture. What we do know is that Cobham thought highly enough of him to lend him out as a garden advisor to friends and relatives while still in his employ, and that from the moment in 1751 when he set up as a freelance designer at Hammersmith, near London, Brown had more business than he could reasonably attend to.

Brown, then, was not an inventor, but a consolidator, translator, and popularizer of an existing style. By 1739 it was already being joked in the press that "you will hardly meet with anybody who, after the first compliments, does not inform you that he is in Mortar and moving of earth . . . a Serpentine River and a Wood are become the absolute Necessities of Life, without which a gentleman of the smallest fortune thinks he makes no figure in the country." Brown came late enough to the party to select the bits that worked for him. The elements of style that are forever associated with his name could be seen as a very refined scale model of his native Northumberland, with its broad, smooth uplands and curving woodlands. It was a simplification of what had gone before, often on a huge scale. There were sloping lawns that ran from the very walls of the house, into an enormous green, grazed park that appeared of a piece with the lawn thanks to the invisible drop in levels called a "ha-ha." Trees in drift-like plantations draped the flanks of these parks, or fringed their far horizons in perimeter belts, and punctuated the rolling monotony of grass in "clumps" that led the eye here and there. In the middle distance there would ideally be water—either achieved from scratch, "digged right downe into the ground by labour of man," as at Petworth, or by diverting an existing source, as with the Glyme at Blenheim or at Audley End in Essex, where Brown engaged to widen the river Cam where it flowed below the house. He preferred water to read as a winding river, not a lake. Anything impeding the flow of the scene, such as a kitchen garden, or an inconveniently proximate village, was removed and rebuilt at a distance from the house.

These were landscapes for fun as well as beauty. Brown always gave his clients something to do: water for boating and angling and fireworks, pic-nic pavilions, pheasant-shooting drives, circuits of different sizes for each stage of the eighteenth-century park triathlon of walking, riding, and carriage-driving. His rolling technique for smoothing the turf of carriage drives opened the landscape to women, both as passengers and drivers. Groups of merrymakers could gallop around Brown's parks on one of his elevated perimeter rides, where the screen of trees would open now and then to allow a glimpse across the whole landed estate, and even beyond. Reining in at one of these spots, these happy folk would find their gaze directed, via "eyecatcher" ornamental buildings or strategic tree-planting, to encompass the arc of a far-off hill, with the effect of drawing this remote feature of the countryside under the aesthetic jurisdiction of the scene's most conspicuous eyecatcher, the owner's house, displayed for preference in three-quarter profile. We can see this proprietorial effect at Petworth Park, where Brown's carriage drive cradles the shallow, distant brow of the South Downs range in the hollow of its camber. Seconds later, the house comes into view to confirm the impression of command.

The instinct driving this was quite different from that of, say, Henry Hoare's mid-century rococo masterpiece at Stourhead, where the natural contours of the valley give shelter and a frame to an arcadian dreamscape. Here, the intention is to "extend the seat" as Thomas Whately approved in his *Observations on Modern Gardening* (1770)—that is, to extend the appearance of ownership as far as possible, even if it meant planting up the public road with "seat-advertising" avenues. Of all the eighteenth-century improvers, Brown was the most consistently responsive to Joseph Addison's much-quoted proposal in *The Spectator* of June 25, 1712: "Why may not a whole Estate be thrown into a kind of garden by frequent plantations, that may turn as much to the Profit,

as the pleasure of the owner? . . a man might make a pretty landskip of his own Possessions."

To what extent Brown's designs conformed to the principle of domestic economy behind this suggestion is still a matter for debate. Some historians think the whole point of the Brownian park was quite the reverse of this—to impress the owner's wealth upon his neighbors by displaying the redundancy of farmland he could afford to take out of productive use, and that, paradoxically, the landscape experiment under Brown became more ruinous than the march of clipped hollies and *broderie* parterres it replaced. Others, like the comprehensive Brown scholar John Phibbs, believe the Brownian park was a productive unit in itself. This argument sees the "improved" park as a showcase for domestic versions of actual eighteenth-century improvements—in road-making, water-engineering, building, stock-breeding, and agriculture—that were making Britain the richest country in the world.

In this version, the park was a spectacle of economic self-sufficiency that, once set going, would perpetuate its own delights. So, ornamental sheep and cattle manured the fields and kept turf cropped for riding on. Belts of trees gave cover for game. Immensities of grass pastured the horses. Horses drew that eighteenth-century Lamborghini, the terrifyingly high-set open-top park phaeton, designed for viewing panorama at speed, over the soft grass rides. In either case, we see that Brown's influence turned the landed estate into a gallery for admiring itself. It is no coincidence that the Brownian years produced an object called the Claude glass, sometimes called the "Gray" glass after the picturesque poet Thomas Gray, who never set forth without it. This was a black concave pocket mirror which, when held up to the view behind you, would reduce the scene to the formal elements of a painterly composition: foreground, middle ground, background. The designed landscape that began by imitating Claudes and Poussins was now becoming an ideal model in itself that painters might aspire to copy—and, indeed, a commodifiable work of art in its own right. A parkland tourist of the 1790s declared, "My black mirror presented me with many beautiful landscapes in this Park, that a Claude might not have disdained to copy." Gray himself saw expensive paintings wherever he looked: "I got to the Parsonage," he wrote from a trip to Wales, "& saw in my glass a picture, that if I could transmit to you, & fix in all the softness of its living colors, would fairly sell for a thousand pounds."

Brown sold his commodity up and down the land to a client roll as long as the credits on a major modern feature film. In 1764, his appointment as Royal Gardener at Hampton Court put the King at the top of his visiting list, then there were the six prime ministers, some eighty-odd senior aristocrats, and under them any number of lesser persons, all of whom were delighted to welcome Brown, carrying the spores of greatness on the soles of his boots. Brown's clients made up the *gratin* of society: men and women of *ton* whose obligations in life now suddenly included the possession of "taste"—but who feared they may not have it. Brown did. "I should be glad to make whatever improvements the Scene is capable of under the direction of a Genius whose taste is so superiour [*sic*] and unrivalled," wrote one emollient Devonshire landowner in a bid for Brown's ever more unprocurable services.

Brown had increasingly to plan his visits in geographical clusters. You could easily wait a year for a first consultation—always paid in person, for a day or so, during which Brown would both walk and ride about the grounds. The next stage was to commission a full survey, followed by a plan, a contract, and a check-up at yearly intervals. With Brown you got a smart operation: he would send you one of his trained foremen and as much in the way of manpower as you needed to supplement your own labor. Often, clients would use their own men: lake-digging and tree-lifting was winter work and assorted well with the demands of the agricultural year. If they didn't, Brown contracted teams of builders, master carpenters, surveyors, laborers, everything for your landscaping needs: hence his ability to process a number of great projects at once—and work the contract fees to his advantage. The year 1768 found thirty foremen on his books

and £32,000 of credit in his bank account (for context, his foremen's salaries averaged £400 per annum). If pavilions were in order, or a new house, sited to fit with the plan, he could supply those too, having taken his son-in law, the architect Henry Holland, into the firm.

Nobody could be this successful without inciting censure. In actuality, Brown attracted remarkably little of it. His dominance of the métier was so accepted that the row for which he is best known—the so-called "Picturesque controversy," taking him to task for "insipidity" and failing to follow the principles of painting—actually occurred after his death, with poor Humphry Repton taking the flak in his absence.

In his lifetime, criticism was of two sorts and, inevitably, this being England, they were both concerned with class. The first—that he was a sort of ignorant peasant "emerged from the melon ground," as a rival designer, Sir William Chambers nastily insinuated—must have been of little concern to a man whose clients commemorated his visits in poetry and who acted as an intermediary between King George III and the elder Pitt when they fell out over the war in America.

The other critique deprecated the loss of individualism resulting from Brown's formulaic approach. "The rage for laying out grounds makes every nobleman and gentleman a copier of their neighbour, till every fine place in England is, comparatively at least, alike," complained Mrs. Lybbe Powis to her diary in 1776.

The target of her censure here is not, we note, the professional improver but the sheeplike "noblemen and gentlemen" who have put their precious birthright in hock to the purchase of a fashionable brand. But this is perhaps to miscategorize Brown's effects. What he supplied, in this age when the first mass-produced goods were coming onto the market, was above all a bespoke service—akin to the magic that took place when my Lord's tailor consulted the genius of my Lord's waistline. He never imposed a uniform; he flattered the raw material of the client's landed possessions, enhanced its charms, disguised its weaknesses, and made its awkward points cohere into a graceful whole. "[Mr. Brown] has raised such landscapes to the Eye" wrote an enraptured Jemima, Marchioness Grey after his first visit, "not visionary *for they were all there but his Touch has brought them out* [italics mine]."

It is for that, not for any quality of his own, that he was called "Capability": it was the complimentary word he used to describe an estate's potential. "Why, my Lord, the place has its capabilities," he declared to Lord Coventry of Croome Park, his estate in Worcestershire. A brilliant sales device, especially in view of the fact that Croome was an undrained bog, utterly despaired of after a first, failed attempt at the new gardening. But Brown's genius with water succeeded even here to bleed the marshland, secure the serpentine "river" or lake, and loop a slender, be-templed ribbon of path among it, making the park appear more undulant and indeed extensive than it is. Croome now belongs to the National Trust. Thanks to a tercentenary restoration scheme, you can stand by the lake there, as I did last month, and let your gaze be wafted from the distant brow of Bredon Hill, past the rotunda on the perimeter ride, down to the park, over the Chinese bridge and up, on one resistless visual current, to the eyecatching porta-potty at the steps of the house Brown built. "A model for every internal and domestic convenience," as Coventry described it.

The English Landscape Movement lasted roughly a hundred years (1710–1810). As we've seen, Walpole's "History of the Modern Taste in Gardening," (published in 1782 but written earlier) gave the movement a direction, culminating in the unimprovable taste of his own day—"We have discovered the point of perfection. We have given the true model of gardening to the world," etc. But it also exposed the inherent contradictions which would bring about its end. As one of nature's flâneurs, Walpole had no doubt that for all this talk of "elegant simplicity," the main point of the landscape park was to show off to your smart friends. In the rapidly urbanizing eighteenth century, that aim was increasingly at odds with the other requirement at the heart of the Brownian landscape: the extensive lands to make it on. As he beadily observes,

> The greater the scene [i.e. the extent] the more distant it is probably from the Capital; in the neighbourhood of which land is too dear to admit considerable extent of property. Men tire of expence [*sic*] that is obvious to few spectators.

This turned out to be prescient. Victorian gardening contracted towards the house, shortening the focus with Italianate terraces, flower beds, balustrades, and evergreen screens: a style achievable in a suburban garden. Two world wars returned Brownian parks to fenced field systems for growing food. In the 1940s, they seemed to face certain extinction. At this point, the architectural historian Dorothy Stroud, actuated by the same sense of nostalgic emergency that led Waugh to write *Brideshead Revisited*, embarked on her pioneering biography of Brown (1950), a work upon which much future scholarship and many opinions have been raised.

The torrents of adulation descending upon Brown this year make it easy to think all opinion has been favorable. Not quite. The second, improved edition of Stroud's book had barely appeared when London's Victoria and Albert Museum put on a landmark Exhibition—"The Garden: A Celebration of One Thousand Years of British Gardening" (1979)—which pointedly ignored the Brownian landscape as an anti-garden "aberration." More recently, the historian Tim Richardson thinks his work "meaningless," while Professor Tim Mowl, inverting the snobbery of Brown's own generation, finds him too small for his boots. "Obliging to the last," and smacking of the lackey, he betrayed the contemplative humanism of his teachers at Stowe to become a "purveyor of a heartless, even philistine, topographical elegance to a sporting aristocracy." As I am writing this, the eminent naturalist Richard Mabey has come out against in *The New Statesman*.

On the credit side, Brown's champions continue to find infinite variety, contradiction, innovation, and surprise in his work: "[landscapes] so widely varied in technique and character that it is hard to believe that they could spring from the same hand," as John Phibbs puts it. Famous for banishing villages from the purview, Brown is found to have enclosed them in parkland. Famous for austere and indigenous plantings, he turns out to have packed them with American novelties and scented, beautiful, flowering shrubs. Famous for laying out "without rule and line," he is found to deploy a secret underlying geometry, exact to the last degree.

Our final thoughts might go to those who find themselves with the task of looking after a Brownian inheritance. A while ago, the incumbent of one of England's most studied landscapes told me he'd found some drawings by Brown, rolled up at the back of an old chest of drawers.

"What did you do with them?" I asked.

"I put them back in the drawer," he said. "And I shut it."

Romancing the Romanovs
by Gary Saul Morson

Peter the Great shaving noblemen's beards, Catherine the Great's stable of lovers, saintly Nicholas and Alexandra shot, stabbed, and dissolved in acid: no dynasty since the Caesars has attracted so much prurient interest or accumulated such delicious mythologizing. Pushkin, Potemkin, Rasputin: how many stories about them are true? Did Anastasia really escape the Bolshevik assassins? What about Catherine the Great and that horse?

In narrating the history of the Romanovs, from the boy Michael's reluctant crowning in 1613 to the boy Alexis's bloody demise in 1918, Simon Sebag Montefiore has no shortage of material.[1] Using imperial correspondence never available before, he gives us a portrait of royalty's intimate life ranging from the pathological to the uplifting. Moment by moment, mortal danger, obsessive sex, and worries about children compete for a ruler's attention. One tsar is blown to bits by a terrorist bomb, another tortures his son and heir to death, a third is overthrown by his son in a coup d'état, and a fourth is murdered by his wife. Pretenders—a false Simon, a false Peter, two false Dmitris—vie for the throne and meet gruesome deaths. Impalement through the rear end recurs. As one wit observed, it was either Rex or rectum. Of course, the only reason failed claimants were illegitimate is that those who succeeded were called tsars.

Consider Russia's greatest tsar, Peter I. The common people regarded him as the antichrist and suspected he had hooves and a tail. Growing up, Peter hung out in the "German quarter," the place assigned as a residence to foreign experts so they wouldn't corrupt Russians with their Lutheran mores. There the royal youth drank, whored, learned Western ways of thinking, and started picking up low-born and foreign retainers. When he came to power, he organized them into his "All-Mad All-Jesting All-Drunken Synod," which conducted elaborate parodies of church rituals. He made his old tutor "Patriarch Bacchus" and prescribed strict anti-ceremonies, invariably involving drunkenness, debauchery, and desecration. The mock-patriarch was attended by Archdeacons Thrust-the-Prick, Go-to-the-Prick, and Fuck-off. All this continued throughout his long reign (effectively 1689–1725). When the Synod wasn't carousing, it ran the government.

When the young tsar decided he wanted to see the West, the Foreign Office announced that it would send "great ambassadors" to neighboring nations. It did not mention that Peter himself would go along incognito as the ordinary "Peter Mikhailov," but it was impossible for anyone to miss a tsar who was six feet nine inches tall. And so Peter could get to know the ladies, whose whale-bone corsets he took for "devilish hard bones," sample the dwarfs, and pick up manual trades. Fascinated by all things nautical, Peter loved the Netherlands—legend holds he

1 *The Romanovs, 1613–1918*, by Simon Sebag Montefiore; Knopf, 816 pages, $35.

once considered making Dutch the Russian national language—where he enrolled as "shipwright Mikhailov" in the Zaandam shipyard. As Montefiore remarks, "Holland formed his tastes, sartorial, architectural, and necrophilic."

In England, he rented the house of the famous diarist John Evelyn, which the Drunken Synod utterly destroyed, using paintings for target practice, furniture for firewood, and curtains for toilet paper. Evelyn never could get compensation from the British government.

When Peter died, he left the throne to his queen, who became Catherine I. When he picked her up, she was Martha Scavronskaya, a nineteen-year-old daughter of a Lithuanian peasant and the widow of a Swedish soldier. Captured by the Russians, she was marched into camp naked but for a blanket and passed step by step up the ranks until she serviced Peter's favorite, Prince Menshikov, who had once been a pie salesman and who now surrendered her to Peter. She was not the sort of monarch envisaged by Peter's father, the pious Tsar Alexis.

As any student of Russia from Peter to Stalin knows, Russian modernization, for all its embrace of Western technology, somehow missed something essential about being civilized. When Peter's ex-mistress Mary Hamilton, standing on the scaffold, spied the tsar, she expected to be pardoned at the last minute. Peter instead let the execution proceed, picked up the beautiful severed head, and took advantage of what we would call "a teachable moment." Addressing the crowd, he delivered what Montefiore calls an anatomy lesson, "pointing out the sliced vertebrae, open windpipe and dripping arteries, before kissing the bloody lips and dropping the head." Then he had the head embalmed and placed in his Cabinet of Curiosities. But Catherine, who understood Peter extremely well, kept her head, both literally and figuratively, and, true to his memory, resumed the royal debauchery even before official mourning for him was over.

Several women ruled Russia during the eighteenth century. Prussia's Frederick the Great, a gay misogynist, referred to "the rule of cunt." "In feminine government," he cracked, "the cunt has more influence than a firm policy guided by reason." (Actually, Russia's male rulers displayed no more rationality.)

There was Empress Anna, who arranged hair-pulling fights among crippled crones (they had to draw blood) and regarded dwarf tossing as a lot of fun. Empress Elizabeth took advantage of absolute power to become a fashion despot, prescribing in detail what everyone would wear. When she died there were fifteen thousand dresses in her wardrobe, not to mention several thousand pairs of shoes. Both empresses had endless lovers.

Montefiore does not mention the absurd folklore that Catherine the Great died while having a stallion lowered onto her, but her actual erotic history was salacious enough. She made her former lovers rich and often kept them around, Frederick noting that Prince Orlov now seemed to perform all duties "except fucking." She had a friend, Countess Bruce, who gave prospective royal lovers a test run. "Every monarch," Montefiore oddly observes, "needs a confidant for such matters who combines the loyalty of a friend, the tact of a diplomat, and the earthiness of a pimp." Every monarch? Maybe this is the moral standard Montefiore is using when he claims that "far from being the nymphomaniac of legend, she [Catherine] was an obsessional serial monogamist," only to tell us a few pages later that in addition to her long-term lover Potemkin she always had a succession of younger ones, which doesn't sound like monogamy to me. One young lover "was resentful that her real relationship was with Potemkin." "Real" is a relative term.

Montefiore has assembled a wonderful collection of anecdotes in chronological order, but his book lacks anything resembling a thesis. And yet one can find a few patterns with interesting implications.

I was reading Montefiore's book alongside a highly influential essay written in the last days of the Soviet Union by the celebrated mathematician and social thinker Igor Shafarevich. Shafarevich, who was a member

of both the Soviet Academy of Sciences and the American Academy of Arts and Sciences, apparently coined the term "Russophobia," which has become the standard explanation for any criticism of Russia, from Ivan the Terrible to Lenin, Stalin, and Putin. Since there is no merit to such criticism, Shafarevich argues, it must derive from an irrational hatred of everything Russian. For example, western scholars and traitorous Westernized Russian dissidents claim that Russia tends to embrace absolute, totally unchecked authority, but, Shafarevich explains, "the term 'samoderzhavets' (autocrat) did not signify the ruler's right to arbitrary actions and unaccountability, but merely expressed the idea that he was the Sovereign and owed tribute" to no other ruler.

Now consider Montefiore's account of how Empress Anna humiliated Prince Mikhail Golitsyn. (The Golitsyns were among the three or four most prominent families in Russian history.) First she made him abandon his wife and serve as her cupbearer for kvass (a lightly fermented drink), renaming him Prince Kvassky. Next she gave him the role of dressing up as a hen and sitting on a straw-basket nest for hours clucking in front of the court. "After mass on Sundays, Golitsyn and the other [designated] fools sat in rows cackling and clucking in chicken outfits." It gets worse.

Anna had Golitsyn marry an ugly Kalmyck woman whom she named "Pork 'n' Onions" in a ceremony she choreographed. The empress and her cavalcade rode to the Winter Palace in carriages drawn by dogs, reindeer, swine, and camels, followed by Golitsyn and his bride in a cage atop an elephant. They were led to the frozen Neva river, where they found a thirty-foot-high ice palace complete with a cannon firing real shells. Inside was their bridal chamber, a bed with mattress and pillows all carved of ice where, guarded by soldiers, they spent their wedding night.

If that is not arbitrary power, what would be? By definition, law does not allow for inventive punishments, but Shafarevich, like so many figures in the history of Russian thought, does not seem to grasp the difference between law and power. Stories like this recur in Montefiore's chronicle. There was no limit whatsoever on tsarist authority, although frequent coups and pretenders left rulers on their guard. Madame de Staël famously described the Russian form of government as absolutism limited by strangulation.

Were the later Romanovs even Russian? For that matter, were they really Romanovs? In the seventeenth century, when marriage to a Muscovite ruler was not an attractive prospect for a European ruling family, tsars selected their wives in local bride shows. But after Peter, Germany became whatever is the female equivalent to a stud farm. The most famous such bride was Sophia Fredericke Auguste von Anhalt-Zerbst-Dornburg, who, upon marrying the future Peter III, changed her name to Catherine and, after doing in her husband, occupied the throne. Although Paul I was supposedly the son of Catherine the Great and Peter III, Peter memorably observed, "God knows where my wife gets her pregnancies." It is more than likely that subsequent "Romanovs" were not descendants of the earlier ones. And even if Peter III was Paul's father, he was himself the son of Peter the Great's daughter and a German prince, so his surname was really not Romanov but Holstein-Gottorp.

By his second wife Paul had nine children, eight of whom, including Alexander I and Nicholas I, married Germans and one a Dutchman. Nicholas's six children in turn also married Germans, and to the end of the reign it was, like the mythological turtles holding up the world, Germans (or Danes) all the way down. Nor was this heritage without its effect on policy. Both Peter III and Paul idolized Frederick the Great. Paul had his retinue don Prussian uniforms and follow Prussian discipline, and when he assumed the throne let his idol escape from certain military defeat.

Today historians favor explanations that stress social or economic factors while disparaging narratives focusing on the personality of a ruler. After all, if something so chancy can matter, then how can we ever hope to achieve a social science? But the fact is that personalities

do play an irreducible role, and Montefiore's chronicle provides endless examples.

Both the domestic and foreign policy of Alexander I reflected his increasing tendency to mysticism. He was taken in by the charlatan Baroness de Krudener, who claimed in Biblical gobbledygook to have heard directly from God that Napoleon's fall would be followed by the rule of an angelic monarch heralding the Second Coming. At the Congress of Vienna, the British Foreign Secretary Castlereagh, reacting to Alexander's insistence on applying Christian principles to international relations, observed that "the emperor's mind is not quite sound" and that, upon one occasion, "it was not without difficulty we went through the interview with becoming gravity." The resulting treaty, he said, was "a piece of sublime mysticism and nonsense." (This is the same Castlereagh for whom Byron wrote a famous epitaph: "Posterity will ne'er survey/ A Nobler grave than this./ Here lie the bones of Castlereagh:/ Stop, traveler, and piss.")

Montefiore's picture of the Congress of Vienna differs from the one in my European history textbook: "In perhaps the most self-indulgent international junket of all history, a congress of two emperors, five kings, 209 reigning princes, about 20,000 officials from marshals and ministers to clerks and spies, and just about every gold-digger, mountebank, and prostitute in Europe, maybe 100,000 in all, bargained, blackmailed, and fornicated their way through banquets and balls, to reshape a continent after twenty years of war." Alexander's piety did not prevent him from saying to one Countess at a ball: "Your husband seems to have left you. It would be a great pleasure to occupy his place for a while"—to which she replied, "Does Your Majesty take me for a province?" And yet it was this conference, not the high-minded Versailles a century later, that produced a lasting peace. At least when compared to idealism, debauchery has its advantages.

Would the dynasty have fallen if Nicholas II had not been such a narrow-minded twit? In response to a suggestion that young Nicholas chair the trans-Siberian railway committee, his father Alexander III responded: surely you see "he is an absolute child. His opinions are absolutely childish. How could he preside over such a committee?" Nicholas played hide-and-seek into his twenties. Alexandra had, if anything, still less sense. The infamous Rasputin was only the last mystical swindler to dominate them, influence the appointment of ministers, and advise on policy. Before him was one Monsieur Philippe, a hierophant who had not even finished high school but whom Nicholas made a licensed doctor and court physician. He specialized in the power of psychic fluids and astral forces to heal sickness and cure female sterility. When Nicholas was preparing to meet the Kaiser, Alexandra advised him not to worry because "our Dear Friend [Monsieur Philippe] will be near you and help you answering . . . questions."

Philippe advised an aggressive policy in the Far East, which coincided with the influence of another adventurer, Bezobrazov (the name means Ugly), who persuaded the tsar to help finance a paramilitary brigade. And so, the tsar's chief minister Sergei Witte rued, "Russia had two contradictory foreign policies, the imperial and the Bezobrazovian." The result of such governance was disastrous defeat in the Russo-Japanese war, which sparked a revolution that in 1905 almost toppled the throne.

To save their determinist theory of history, Marxists have argued that the singular incompetence of the last tsar was what a doomed regime would have to produce, but the rest of the royal family was appalled by Philippe's successor Rasputin. One after another, they told Nicholas and Alexandra to change their ways or see the dynasty fall. In response, Alexandra called them Jews and traitors. Yet it was not some Jew or liberal, but Grand Duke Dmitri Pavlovich, along with Prince Felix Yusupov, who arranged to kill Rasputin.

Yusopov, an extremely wealthy bisexual transvestite who had studied at Oxford, was not exactly used to this sort of thing. Pretending to entertain the holy man, Yusupov fed him cakes and wine doused with cyanide, which, to his amazement, seemed to

have no effect at all. At last he shot Rasputin in the chest. Shaking the body to make sure it was dead, he saw it stir, open one "greenish and snake-like" eye, foam at the mouth, spring up and seize him, ripping off an epaulette. Yusupov has described the sheer terror he experienced: "This devil, who was dying of poison, who had a bullet in his heart, must have been raised from the dead by the powers of evil. There was something appalling in his diabolical refusal to die." Another conspirator, a founder of the thuggish Black Hundreds, Vladimir Purishkevich, shot Rasputin again, but again he didn't die! At last someone with more professionalism, possibly the British agent Oswald Raynor, shot him in the head from such close range that the hair was singed. Trotsky referred to the whole operation as "carried out in the manner of a scenario designed for people of bad taste."

But losing their favorite didn't improve Nicholas's and Alexandra's judgment. Told that the army was unreliable and that he needed to regain the confidence of the people, the tsar replied: "Isn't it rather for the people to regain *my* confidence?" Days, even hours, before Nicholas was forced to abdicate, he and Alexandra were insisting that the supposed danger was all an exaggeration. If Nicholas had listened to his two most talented ministers, Witte and Stolypin, or if he had more closely resembled his equally conservative but much more competent father Alexander III, the result might have been different.

However arbitrary its punishments, Russia had far fewer police than other European powers. Nikita Khrushchev recalled that he saw his first gendarme when he was twenty-four years old. Montefiore correctly observes that tsarist repression was mild compared to its Soviet successor. Between 1905 and 1910 terrorists killed as many as sixteen thousand officials. In Anna Geifman's amazing book on Russian revolutionary terrorism, *Thou Shalt Kill*, we read of a small-town reporter who asks his editor if they should run the biography of the newly appointed police chief, only to be told, no, just save it for the obituary.[2] And yet only three thousand terrorists were hanged. Many more were sent to Siberia, mostly in conditions so lenient that Stalin managed to escape a total of eight times, on foot, by train, and by reindeer.

One can only be amazed by the utter incompetence of tsarist police. The terrorists who stalked and killed Alexander II had come close several times, but security remained so lax that although the main entrance to the Palace was guarded, the tradesman's door in the back was not. Over a period of months, a terrorist carpenter managed to smuggle in a little bit of nitroglycerine every day, until he had accumulated three hundred pounds. When people detected an odor, the tsar's security police dismissed it as a gas leak. Even though a revolutionary had already been found carrying a map of the Winter Palace with the dining room plainly marked, the terrorists managed to blow up the dining room, killing twelve people and wounding sixty-nine others. One head of the secret police was so absent-minded he had to consult his business card to remember his name.

Incompetent tsars, especially the last, were an object lesson to their successors. No one had to teach Lenin that half-hearted tyranny doesn't work, and Stalin made sure no one escaped from his Gulag. In a weird kind of succession, Nicholas II's chef, one Spiridon Putin, became the grandfather of Russia's "new tsar," as his entourage often calls today's ruler. Vladimir Putin knows his history. He faults predecessors not for tyranny, repression, or even misjudgment, but for unpardonable weakness. As Montefiore recounts the story, Putin once asked his courtiers "who were Russia's greatest traitors?" and then answered the question himself: "The greatest criminals in our history were those weaklings who threw power on the floor—Nicholas II and Mikhail Gorbachev—who allowed power to be picked up by hysterics and madmen. I would never abdicate." It doesn't look like he will.

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2 *Thou Shalt Kill: Revolutionary Terrorism in Russia, 1894–1917*, by Anna Geifman; Princeton University Press, 388 pages, $45.

New poems
by Karl Kirchwey

Roman fountain

for Rosanna Warren

A girl yawns like a cat beside the fountain,
an old Pope's muscle in the gouts and spatter,
love-muscle in the plashing and the glitter.

Girl and fountain do not love each other.
Both are beautiful and both are vain.
She loves the water for her reflection.

A black cat stretches indolent in the sun
that gloves it lithely as if in silver
against the scarred volutes of travertine

on an old church. The young priest at the corner
stands in a quandary in his soutane,
caught in the glowing throat of afternoon,

clasped to her breast by Rome the giant mother
as is the pleb near the Gemonian Stair,
at his feet lute-shaped seeds of the sail pine,

beads of sweat like jewels in his black hair,
and the young man dressed in a wedding gown
and track shoes who, past flowering oleander,

unsteadily waltzes a mannequin,
busty and nude, down a runway of beer
while his friends shout *O carità Romana!*

Each private soul, carried to full and over-
full, falls at last to its disintegration
beyond the rolled edge of a starry crown

with little subsiding noises of passion,
applause that fades in a descending patter,
as evening comes and once more sacks the town.

Grand Canal

for Gregory Dowling

Once I saw Black Angus in a pasture upstate
move like this, or on men's shoulders a coffin,
jostling slightly, angular and deliberate,
unimpeded through the bitter green:

a gondola, warping through the salt emerald
and S-curve of the Grand Canal
obscure in its purpose, its draft lopsided,
moving by contraries, its carved oarlock a bole

for baleful owls to nest in, sex and death
surefooted amid the gentle slap and swelling,
behind a mask half-constraint, half-release, with
a button sewn on, past the lace and gilding,

to take in the mouth and so prevent speech,
pill of oblivion and the river to cross
—for these commuters on their zigzag reach
who feel the ferry's trembling reverse,

the furious churning, the hawser deftly tossed
around a bollard, boom of steel on steel
and snapping taut, making a puff of hemp dust
that gradually sifts down on the gunwale,

that sags, then shudders, expressing water.
The green widens; the ferry is away.
I scoop some up in my palm to remember,
custodian of love's catastrophe.

Letter from Beijing

Stomachs full of qi

by Arthur Waldron

A renowned soloist in ancient Chinese music died suddenly last winter. I hustled to Beijing as fast as I could for the funeral and cremation at which many distinguished figures appeared, above all from the arts. After the brief service, shooed from the small memorial chamber, a group of us adjourned to a private place. Our beloved friend had fulfilled much of her destiny, through performances, recordings, teaching, and so forth. But China remained to preoccupy us even in the midst of loss.

I was approached by someone I had never met but who knew of me. He was a true genius—I do not use the word lightly—and a brain-truster for the central government. Dispensing with all preliminaries, he directly posed to me the question: "What do we do? We all know that the system does not work, that we are caught in a *sihutong* (dead end). But we don't know what first step to take. If we place our foot incorrectly, we could begin a disaster, violence and civil war."

These were not sentiments, nor was his a question, one would ever hear in a gathering of American China specialists. We assume that China will simply continue on track indefinitely.

My response was as upbeat as I could make it: "Think of Taiwan, long a dictatorship. On July 15, 1987, martial law had been lifted by Chiang Ching-kuo, the son and successor of Chiang Kai-shek."

Ching-kuo also installed a native Taiwanese as his vice president: Lee Teng-hui was not a refugee from China like the Chiangs and most of their government; he had a Ph.D from Cornell, and was the only member of Chiang's inner circle who consistently voted for democracy in secret party conclaves.

I continued: "This year we will see a watershed election: Taiwan will elect a new president and a new party will take control; the dictatorship will be well and fully dead and forgotten. A new generation will have come of age. The island will emerge as a prosperous and fully democratic country—thirty-nine years later."

"Beautiful!" said my new friend. "Beautiful. Chiang Ching-kuo was the most important Chinese political figure of the last century. But we don't have thirty-nine years."

That statement surprised me. In Washington, evolutionary change in China is a matter of faith. "So how long do you reckon you have?" His answer stunned me.

"Maybe two years." Before it blows up.

This was a man who knew China far better than any American. He worked at the center. He was on a first-name basis with scores of the highest officials. He read secrets every day. He knew so much he was not allowed to leave China. His job, however, was not to run things but to think. I was shocked.

His words are rarely far from my thoughts. They capture perhaps the most important lesson of my grief-stricken but exhilarating days: "China viewed from the inside is very different than China viewed from the outside." From the outside, China is a great rising power of immense military strength, bullying her neighbors from India to Japan to Indonesia, thumbing her nose at international tribunals (as in the recent World

Court decision about the South China Sea), and taking no note of the United States, which she is convinced is terminally decadent and soon to slide from world power, making way—for her.

Inside, however, China is a different county, as I learned dramatically the morning of the funeral. I was staying on the West side of town, the Party side, far from the U.S. Embassy and the dozens of deluxe hotels. Mine was fine, though: simple and well-run, with mine the only white face in a dozen stories.

On the morning of the funeral I gulped down a few bowls of the oh-so-local millet *congee* (*congee* is a Tamil word) that is as good a breakfast as can be imagined, then ran out to meet my colleagues.

They were all hungry. So we walked to a run-down square not far away where a tiny kitchen passed hot stuffed buns, boiled in oil, from a wooden window no longer quite square in a collapsing building. In the line ahead of me were a dozen people, maybe more, silent and calm, waiting for their morning meal of scalding hot cabbage and mystery meat. They were motionless as they stood, drab, glum, calm, resigned.

Then one of my friends left the line for a moment, as is permitted by Chinese street usage. This was too much for a not young, slatternly woman behind her, face sloppily rouged, wrapped in a decaying coat probably picked up on the street. She exploded. Fixing my friend with her eyes, she poured out loud and obscene abuse in the gutter dialect. I understood perhaps 40 percent. My friend pivoted, and fixing her eyes too, like a tiger, overwhelmed with a torrent of abuse as rough and cruel and profane as can be imagined.

Then something astonishing happened. The whole previously passive line waiting for breakfast exploded as well, as if a cue had been given. They loosened into a crowd, they shouted, they cursed, they struck one another. It was stunningly violent and beyond unexpected. In a minute and a half it was over. They were back quietly in line; hot sandwiches were again passed through the window. The explosion had left not a trace.

"Arthur," my friends shouted at me, with a mixture of joy and astonishment, "You have seen it. You have seen *the real thing*. You have *seen what China is really all about*." Under the surface lies pressurized anger—stomachs full of *qi*, as a common saying puts it.

This was the most important happening on this, perhaps my fortieth, trip to China. For the first time ever, I saw its true nature as I never had before: in person, forced on me unexpectedly, face to face. My friends were almost ecstatic: their judgment was that I had the good fortune to have seen, for the first time, *the real China*. Their faces almost beamed, with a deep sense of accomplishment. They had been able to show me. Now at least one foreigner knew what they knew every day. We sat down and ate our buns. Hot. Oily. Stick-to-the-ribs.

My mind kept returning to that line of hungry people. They were none of them very tall and all about the same height, the first thing I noticed. They stood absolutely still, their eyes not moving.

Each of them, I reflected, was always a little hungry. Each one was (at this season) always a little cold. Each one was usually a little damp and unwashed enough to be uncomfortable. Each one was always a little sleep-deprived. Each one hated his job which held out not the hint of a future. All trudged daily to keep themselves and their families together, families that were most likely not cozy nests of affection, but pressured, overwhelmed, just staying alive. Few had ever seen a doctor or a dentist. *Inside they were mad as hell*, but, with the Chinese fortitude remarked on by generations of travelers, they rarely gave hint—unless they exploded.

The anger was all under the social floor. That morning, by chance, a few floorboards had been taken up, and I had learned more in two minutes than in years in classrooms and even travel (though I was there for the demonstrations on June 4, 1989).

Which brings me to the second important thing I learned on this brief, utterly intense visit: the rockets, the military parades, the mighty fleet, and the string of nobodies whom I saw boil over in rage *are closely related*—indeed two sides of the same problem.

China's leaders are richer than royalty. They have siphoned people's wealth from China to the Cayman Islands. A rising class of well-

to-do Chinese, some of whose money has been honestly made, but not much, is now sending its children, almost without exception, to the West, to prep school or college; to buy a multimillion-dollar house in Mercer County, New Jersey, where Princeton is located (before them, the Nationalists favored Long Island); to get the Green Card that is the first item needed for the long journey to citizenship. They have decided the future is dangerous. They are systematically relocating. The only question is how many will get to the airport?

Most Chinese, even in the impressive coastal cities, are still poor—too poor to buy an air ticket to anywhere. And this is not to mention the hundreds of millions in the rural wasteland of which the center takes no note. They lead lives of quiet deprivation (unlike urbanites, they have no medical care, no education).

Returning from his first visit back to America since he abruptly left Columbia in 1950, passing through a middle-class neighborhood called Shatin, in Hong Kong, where trees rustle among impossibly tall blocks of flats, while at ground level everything from school books—lots of them—to fruit is for sale, an elderly Chinese professor friend smiled with amazement. "When we used to talk about communism back before the War (1937–45) *this was all we meant*. A decent life for ordinary people." He was mesmerized and thrilled to see his vision realized—in what was then a British colony.

The People's Republic of China has never managed to call such a place into being, in spite of immense expenditures—on official buildings, prestige projects, upscale villa colonies with pools and social clubs and armed guards, useless factories, flawed infrastructure, and, above all, weapons of mass destruction—while the former colonial masters, the often arrogant Brits, had succeeded—even for the millions of refugees who flooded in, when the Chinese opened the border fences during the great famine (38 million starved) of the late 1950s. They had done this, moreover, with the resources of overcrowded, water-short Hong Kong, *without a penny from London*. Why the mainland Chinese cannot do better is a mystery.

But the present government has not. From the start they heard complaints about torture, imprisonment, shootings. Then society became chaotic with the Cultural Revolution that cost perhaps two million more. The propaganda cloud castles soon dissipated. What people knew was the daily grind and growing oppression, while the discredited and distrusted Party was increasingly glorified. Who was to blame for this great failure and disappointment?

Hopes soared after the reconciliation with America. The decade following, the 1980s, was the most optimistic, liberal, and happy I have ever known in China. But it came at a cost to the Party.

Slowly the leadership began to understand that the tactical opening to the United States, made by the People's Liberation Army and approved by Mao Zedong, had done more than secure an American military counterweight against the Soviet Union. It had opened a channel through which ideas seeped in, ideas that eroded the very philosophical foundations of communism, and out of which seeped students. Foreign business arrived: China's Party became entangled by rules and laws and courts over which she had no power. Wealth came but autarchy and the ability to compel ebbed away.

The Party decided that rapprochement with the United States had been a mistake, for the single reason that it undermined the power of that Party, once an ideological group but now more like an oligarchy or gang of thieves, innocent of ideals beyond gain for themselves.

That process of the neutralization of a relationship that began in the 1970s will be slow and difficult, but it has been decided, and we can watch it under way. Why else fill government newspapers with ludicrous anti-American screeds? Why celebrate the Korean War anniversary *according to a previously discarded account* that had admitted the North Koreans started it? Why if not to stoke anti-Americanism? Why threaten American allies militarily? Perhaps because China resents America for being, in their eyes, the "top country" and wants to cut us down to size. The Chinese leaders care not a whit about Indonesia or India (serious mistakes) but are obsessed by what they imagine as the supreme status, which, by occupying it, we deny to Beijing.

Hence the wave of repression that has swept over society in the last decade, almost unprecedented in its deliberateness and cruelty. Hence the construction of a hypertrophied military, which could only be used fully for global suicide. Hence the bullying of the Philippines.

This is the last lesson I learned on this visit. The two sides fit. The army exists not to protect the country, but to impress or, if necessary, to kill one of those simple people waiting for breakfast. The endless rhetoric and puffery in the international arena has nothing to do with law; it is about Party prestige. The distortion of income distribution in society is so that party members will become rich, and so perhaps stay bought.

Fifty years ago Communist propaganda was all about helping the truly wretched peasants, lifting up the poor, educating, healing, and clothing the vast impoverished mass.

Nothing I saw on this trip had anything to do with improving the lives of ordinary people, such as clearing the truly poisonous air pollution that now blankets swathes of the country, reconstructing rural areas, etc. The hospital where my friend died quite literally lived on bribes: it was a business designed to relieve customers of their assets.

Work for the public good was once the mantra of the Communist Party, widely believed at home and abroad. No longer does the Party even pretend to be devoted to the interests of the poor and marginal. They have in fact oppressed and impoverished the peasants more than any previous regime. How? By taking away their land, their only asset. In China, the police simply chase the peasants away from the land they owned in their formerly isolated village, and then the Party sells the land to the developer, so that all the money and benefits accrue to the ruling elite and not to the families that have been subsistence farmers there for perhaps five hundred years.

Now, as ever, it turns out there are two Chinas, both of which I have seen. Millions of Chinese, overwhelmingly Party members and urban dwellers, have living standards and ways of life not so different from those of their cousins in Taiwan (which now has a per capita GDP of $46,000 versus Britain's $41,000). To be sure, they do lack freedom and democracy, and, perhaps most importantly, simple security from arbitrary arrest or expropriation.

Coastal cities like Shanghai are full of imported cars, rich people that enjoy clubs and restaurants, and glittering skylines of the most modern, and in some cases beautiful, skyscrapers. Such places, however, are unusual and a bit misleading: Shanghai is full of poor people, too. As for the countryside, where many Chinese live—indeed where they are legally required to live under the household registration system that decides where you may settle—hundreds of millions of people still follow the earthbound life peasants have known for millennia: with no proper education, transport, medical care, and so forth, such as many urban dwellers enjoy. Many have moved illegally into cities, where they do hard labor such as construction, and are denied any of the entitlements that come with urban residency.

Over the course of almost seventy years in power, the People's Republic of China has reversed its priorities. At the start, the Party had a purpose: it proclaimed its task was to save the Chinese people, to lift them up to a better life. That task, in theory, was the guide to everything else. Now the Party *is* the purpose: it has become an oligarchy, many of whose leading members are children of the founding generation of Communists. They feel no sense whatsoever of social mission to the Chinese people, whose lives are so different from theirs. Now the role of the Chinese people has become to support and save and *be ruled by the party*: ruled in whatever way the Party chooses, for the old moral compass of bettering the lives of all Chinese has long since been tossed away. Strengthening and enriching the party are now the sole and overriding goals.

Maintaining Party rule, whatever that means, is the true purpose of all actions, however unrelated they may seem. The Party is the *primum mobile* of China. Whatever happens, it cannot be threatened or sacrificed, even if the price is poverty or war. For one who remembers both the honest dedication of many communists and the fairy tales carefully vetted Westerners retailed (no tourist visas existed until 1980), it is a chilling transformation, and a worrying one, and one that is slowly breaking the spirit of one of the world's greatest civilizations.

Reflections

A Victorian brace

by Dominic Green

One evening in March 1869, Henry James visited William and Jane Morris in their rooms over Morris's London shop. It was, James told his sister Alice, a "long, rich sort of visit, with a strong peculiar flavor of its own"—and not one that he wished to repeat. The peculiar flavor came from the long, strong body of Jane Morris.

"Oh, *ma chère*, such a wife! *Je n'en reviens pas*—she haunts me still." James saw the muse of the age as a ghost, shadowed in the morbid eclipse of art.

> A figure cut out of a missal—out of one of Rossetti's or Hunt's pictures—to say this gives but a faint idea of her, because when such an image puts on flesh and blood, it is an apparition of fearful and wonderful intensity. It's hard to say whether she's a grand synthesis of all the Pre-Raphaelite pictures ever made—or they a "keen analysis" of her—whether she's an original or a copy. Imagine a tall, lean woman in a long dress of some dead purple stuff, guiltless of hoops (or of anything else I should say) with a mass of crisp black hair heaped into great wavy projections on each of her temples, a thin pale face, a pair of strange sad, deep dark Swinburnian eyes, with great thick black oblique brows, joined in the middle and tucking themselves away under her hair, a mouth like the "Oriana" in our illustrated Tennyson, a long neck, without any collar, and in lieu thereof some dozen strings of outlandish beads—in fine complete. On the wall was a large, nearly full-length portrait of her by Rossetti, so strange and unreal that if you hadn't seen her, you'd pronounce it a distempered vision, but in fact an extremely good likeness.

After dinner, William Morris read a poem about Bellerophon from his new collection, *The Earthly Paradise*. Jane Morris, suffering from toothache, lay on the sofa, her handkerchief to her face. It was, James wrote, "a scene very quaint and remote from our actual life." Everything was stylized and deliberate, but in the wrong kind of way. The poet declaimed one of his "flowing antique numbers" amid the "picturesque bric-a-brac" of an apartment where every article of furniture was "literally a 'specimen' of something or other," including his most precious possession, "this dark silent medieval woman with her medieval toothache."

Possession was the title of A. S. Byatt's fifth and most popular novel. In that tricky modern detective story, the evidential materials were Victorian love and art, the detectives a pair of literary scholars. The machinery of the plot turned upon a trove of old letters that, revealing a historical romance between two poets, created a modern romance between the detectives. The nonfiction *Peacock & Vine* shares in *Possession*'s hunt for the secrets of love and art in the age of loosened corsets and high aesthetics.[1] This time, though, the correspondence is not epistolary, but imagistic. Byatt's pairing of William Morris

1 *Peacock & Vine: On William Morris and Mariano Fortuny*, by A. S. Byatt; Knopf, 192 pages, $26.95.

and Mariano Fortuny arises in nineteenth-century fashion. On holiday in Venice, and "drunk on aquamarine light," Byatt experiences a Symbolist *correspondance*.

> Every time I closed my eyes—which I increasingly did deliberately—I saw a very English green, a much more yellow green, composed of the light glittering on shaved lawns, and the dense green light in English woods, light vanishing into gnarled tree trunks, flickering on shadows on the layers of summer leaves.

The author of *Possession* knows her Victorians. William Morris loves moody Jane Burden, but Janey loves Dante Gabriel Rossetti, but doomed Dante loves to death his late wife, Lizzie Siddal. Byatt knows "almost nothing" about Fortuny, other than that he is "the only living artist named by Proust in *À la recherche du temps perdu*." She does know that her novels begin with the "sudden realization" that "two things I have been thinking about separately are part of the same thought, the same work." In the light of Venice, so clear as to be dreamlike, she uses Fortuny to "reimagine" the familiar Morris. Returning to the soft, somnolent light of London, she uses Morris to "understand" the unfamiliar Fortuny.

The schematic couplings multiply, turning matched figures into twinned characters. Morris (1834–1896) and Fortuny (1871–1949) are both "men of genius and extraordinary energy" who merge life and art. Both "studied the forms of the past" and "changed the visual world around them." Both searched out old patterns and experimented with ancient dyes, to create variations on the "false antique." In Morris's fabrics, the continuous Gothic line unfurls with the rigor of a Fibonacci sequence. In Fortuny's dresses, an ideal form, the robe of ancient statuary, is "translated" onto the body of a modern woman.

Yet Morris and Fortuny are also "opposites," socially and aesthetically. Morris is "an English bourgeois" whose father made a fortune in tin mining. Fortuny, whose father descends from a line of Catalan painters and whose mother is from a Parisian family of artists and critics, is from "an elegant aristocratic world." Morris's "imaginative roots" are in the northern Dark Ages, but he loathes Wagner as "anti-artistic." He translates the Icelandic sagas, brutal tales from the end of the earth, with men in suits of armor. When he leaves Janey and children for a tour of Iceland, Rossetti moves into Kelmscott Manor.

Fortuny's imaginative roots are in the pagan Mediterranean, though he also suffers from a pronounced Wagnerism of the imagination. Inspired by the findings and theories of Sir Arthur Evans, he creates the Knossos scarf. Inspired by his wife, he creates the Delphos gown, a gorgeous Grecian sheath of hand-pleated silk. The liberated heir to Jane Morris's hoopless, guiltless tea dress, it is designed to be worn with nothing underneath.

"I was musing on the two worlds, Venetian and English," Byatt writes, "seen through the images of the women who inhabited them." Two kinds of love among the artists, fifty years and a world apart. William Morris is the Pygmalion who, making a muse from the daughter of a stable hand and a laundress, praises her thick hair as "dead," as if its locks were forged from "some strange metal, thread by thread." He insists that the beautiful must also be useful, but his most beautiful possession is useful only to the men who look at her. When Rossetti takes Jane as his muse, William controls her pedestal.

Jane's embroidery skills are less those of an artist than of a damsel waiting for her fatal rescuer. Tennyson's Lady of Shalott "leaneth on a velvet bed" and declares herself "sick of shadows." She sees her Lancelot, and leaves her tower, only to drown. Rossetti cannot rescue her. He is drowning in his own peculiar flavor, whisky and chloral hydrate. He cannot mount a horse; a large hydrocele on one of his testicles makes it painful to sit. He can only draw Jane, and when he does, he sees the ghost of his dead wife. No wonder Jane has a toothache.

In the Palazzo Pesaro degli Orfei, Henriette Negrin Fortuny is Mariano's equal. She may do the cooking and the dishes, but she also gets her hands dirty in the workshop. She is Mariano's partner in the "dyeing and stenciling and printing of new silk, velvet and cotton fabrics." It is Henriette who conceives of

the Delphos, and who manages relations with Fortuny's clients so that Mariano can concentrate on his research and experiments. Mariano's drawings and photographs of Henriette at work are tender and intimate. "He isn't particularly painting desire," Byatt admits, "he is painting both love and liking." A Wagnerian without a *Liebestod*, Fortuny has created "domestic calm and happiness in a glittering cavern."

Henry James, in his preface to the New York Edition of "The Jolly Corner" (1908), writes that a ghost story presents "the strange and sinister embroidered on the very type of the normal and easy." Byatt sees a similar "uneasiness" in Rossetti's portraits of Jane Morris. They are reproductions of an obsession, "brooding, dangerous, sexually greedy." Impaired by loss, addiction, and an intimate swelling, Rossetti cannot touch his object of desire.

Morris's friends, Byatt writes, saw him as greedy in other ways. Rossetti and Burne-Jones both cartooned Morris, a thrower of tantrums and cutlery, as a baby. In Burne-Jones's "Morris attending his wife who lays upon a couch," Morris is a disheveled tubby bumbler, tiptoeing up to peer at the neck of a furious Amazon. In "William Morris in a bath tub," the bearded baby is wedged tightly into a barrel-like tub, so that his genitalia disappear under the fat folds of his thighs. Morris does not look like a lover.

Henry James corroborates the image of William Morris as "short, burly, corpulent, very careless and unfinished in his dress." Yet James interprets this as manly vitality and balanced appetite. "He's a most perfect example, in short, of a delicate sensitive genius and taste, saved by a perfectly healthy body and temper." Morris is strong and direct, "perfectly unaffected and business-like." He speaks "wonderfully to the point," with "clear good sense" and "very good judgment." James sees Jane Morris as weak and indirect, affected and evasive. Her maiden name was Jane Burden. She is a dead weight.

Fortuny, Byatt writes, "seems to have been a man who liked women, who was interested in them." The run-on elides the possibility that liking and interest can be distinct. Jane Morris interested Henry James, but he did not like her. She fascinated William Morris, but admitted later that she had never loved him. The artist is intrigued by the muse's surfaces, her potential to reflect other people and other states. The muse trades mortal originality for apotheosis as a copy. Morris turned the stable hand's daughter into a lady. Rossetti turned her into a goddess.

Silent in pain, Jane's motives are stifled by the fabric that covers her face. "Attempts have been made, mostly by women writers, to give her a separate identity, to make as much as possible of her skilled embroidery," Byatt notes. "But she remains alien, until in old age her hair is white and her expression resigned rather than desperate." Jane Morris was a "stunner" in men's eyes, not a creator of stunning objects. Her raging unhappiness makes her more interesting than Henriette Fortuny.

James, a connoisseur of the grim peculiar, hones his keen analysis on Jane's most expressive feature. Is she, he wonders, "an original or a copy"? Rossetti's portraits pluck and shape Jane's eyebrows, and polish her skin. She becomes pale and perfect; a depilated, distant copy. Morris, Byatt says, liked the calfskin vellum with which he bound his books to have "a brownish cast and even a few hairs." His *La Belle Iseult* (1858) shows Jane's plumage in its original finery, if only to identify her with faithless Iseult.

"I cannot paint you, but I love you," Morris wrote on the back of his portrait of Iseult. But Jane was already in love with Rossetti. When she married Morris, she exchanged her love for Rossetti for a domestic copy.

In 1867, Henry James, reviewing Morris's "The Life and Death of Jason" in the *North American Review*, praised Morris as a writer "quite guiltless of any wanton lingering along the margin of the subject matter." In *Peacock & Vine*, Byatt's business is to linger on the margin of a subject matter that is not filled in.

A motif arises on the inside of Byatt's eyelids. She researches the biographical facts, and

assembles a tense frame of opposed themes: London and Venice, north and south, men and women, pagan and Christian, sex and art. In the later chapters, Byatt ruminates on Morris and Fortuny's use of vegetable dyes and patterns, and their common taste in pomegranates and paired birds. These are the seedings of an unwritten novel.

Jane Morris is a study in frustration, hers and other people's. It may be apposite that a reflection about her unclear personality and unfulfilled life should remain a hypothesis, but *Peacock & Vine* is often frustrating and solipsistic. "I should like to know," Byatt muses, "if Fortuny, when designing a gown, or a cope, or a velvet cape, thought of the meaning of the images, or just of their traditional and satisfactory beauty." So should we.

Byatt uses the adjective "interesting" as relentlessly as Rossetti hit the chloral, but without telling us why. Morris's "Bird" fabric, Peter Collier's book *Proust and Venice*, Fortuny's Wagnerian paintings are all "interesting." The Morris Museum at Walthamstow, is both "very interesting" and "extremely interesting." It is as if Byatt is notating the margin for future purposes; as if she is unwilling to stifle the flight of imagination by pinning the butterfly. Similarly, her ordering impulse to align her pairs of characters and themes conflicts with the disordering impulse to loosen the schematic bonds and set loose a many-hued fiction.

For the same reasons, *Peacock & Vine* is frequently a joy to consider, if not to read. Byatt, who enjoys "agreeable puzzles and pleasures," invites the reader to become the detective in a game of aesthetic *Cluedo*. Mr. Rossetti, in the library, with a bottle of chloral; Mr. Morris, in the bedroom, with a frustrated wife; Mrs. Morris, in the garden, without any underwear. The setting is patterned after the tormented forms of Morris's "brilliant, complex, and simple" fabrics: "Everything is balanced and orderly; everything is running riot; everything is an English garden."

Is the peacock William Morris, the prideful male with what Henry James calls "a very loud voice and a nervous restless manner"? Then the vine must be Jane Morris, the sinuous captive clinging to the wall of Kelmscott Manor, turning in upon herself as she grows. Every garden has its serpent. Is it the lover, played first by Dante Gabriel Rossetti, who was old enough to be Janey's father, and then by Wilfrid Scawen Blunt who, as Janey's lover in the 1880s, was young enough to be her son? Is it, as Henry James implies, desire itself? Or is James, like the governess in Edmund Wilson's reading of *The Turn of the Screw*, an unreliable narrator, conjuring ghostly characters from other people's private lives?

In the best detective fiction, the ambivalent clue is crucial, and the correct reading emerges at the climax. In Byatt's novella *Morpha Eugenia* (1992), the sexual darkness at the heart of a Victorian home comes to light during a Scrabble-like game, when the governess alters "insect" to "incest." *Peacock & Vine* resembles the cruder detective fiction. Byatt withholds the clues; presumably, they are to be woven into the fabric of a fiction. Still, the line of their development is detectable. They are displaced from the hairy confusions of domesticity to the depilated realm of art—canalized, as Pierre Janet would say, from life to art, and from London to Venice, the city of peculiar odors.

Two weeks after dining with the Morrises, Henry James had an "extremely pleasant" dinner at John Ruskin's house in south London. James cracked the case of Ruskin as "a very simple matter." He was "weakness, pure and simple," unmanly in manner, and fugitive of mind.

> He has the beauties of his defects; but to see him only confirms the impression given by his writing; that he has been scared back by the grim face of reality into the world of unreason and illusion, and that he wanders there without a compass and a guide—or any light save the fitful flashes of his beautiful genius.

In the 1850s, Morris experienced Ruskin as "a sort of revelation." In 1892, one of the Kelmscott Press's first productions was a chapter from *The Stones of Venice*, "The Nature of Gothic," bound in vellum. Seven years later, Proust also experienced Ruskin as

a revelation. He set about translating Ruskin's *The Bible of Amiens* and *Sesame and Lilies*, and construed his first visit to Venice as a Ruskinian pilgrimage.

Proust first planned to visit Venice in the summer of 1899, to get away from the Dreyfus Affair and indulge in Ruskin. Proust hoped to meet a friend, the painter Federico "Coco" de Madrazo y Garreta, at Venice. But "Coco," who happened to be Henriette Fortuny's nephew, had left Venice for Rome. Marcel waited until the following spring, and went with his mother instead. As their train crossed Lombardy, she read to him the opening paragraphs of *Stones of Venice*.

Ruskin characterizes Venice as a captive woman, a Lady of Shalott fated to the waters.

> Well might it seem that such a city had owed her existence rather to the rod of the enchanter, than to the fear of the fugitive; that the waters which encircled her had been chosen for the mirror of her state, rather than the shelter of her nakedness; and that all which in nature was wild or merciless—Time and Decay, as well as the waves and tempests—had been won to adorn her instead of to destroy.

In *The Captive*, the fifth volume of *À la recherche du temps perdu*, Proust's narrator asks Oriane de Guermantes about a Fortuny gown "with such a curious smell, dark, fluffy, speckled, streaked with gold like a butterfly's wing." The duchess looks more beautiful than she smells. The peculiar flavor of her adornment, Byatt writes, arises from the "Chinese crystallised egg-white used as a fixative by Fortuny." Did Proust inhale the aroma of Fortuny's domestic factory, as James had inhaled that of William Morris?

In his preface to *Sesame and Lilies*, Proust misreads Morris's insistence that a home should contain only what is useful and beautiful. Proust attributes to Morris the belief that the useful should be visible—"*non pas dissimulée, mais apparente*"—even down to exposed joints and nails. But high aestheticism is about invisibilities—in the spiritual perfection that is evoked, in the physicality that is hidden by fabric and its pleats. Undressing Albertine, Proust's narrator refers to the male groin as "marred as though by an iron clamp left sticking in a statue that has been taken down from its niche."

The pleated style hides as it adorns. Proust never admitted his homosexuality in print. When his narrator asks Oriane de Guermantes about her butterfly gown, he has switched "hurriedly to the subject of clothes" because the conversation has "taken a wrong turning" into the Dreyfus Affair. The surface motifs camouflage the deeper pattern in the carpet.

By framing the era of Morris and Ruskin in that of Fortuny and Proust, Byatt traces the aesthetic ideal chronologically, from the Nazarenes and Pre-Raphaelites to the international commerce of the "Liberty style" and Art Nouveau. The same framework is also a psychological narrowing; the higher the note, the tighter the string is wound. The aesthete is always male, so much so that "male aesthete" is a tautology. Like Ruskin on his wedding night, or Nietzsche when he finds that the hotel to which he has been led is a brothel, he flees from woman in the raw, hirsute and fragrant. In Proust's cycle, *The Captive* is followed by *The Fugitive*.

Byatt has laid out the tracks of the nineteenth-century cult of beauty. Its terminus is an image of barren but perfect falsity. When physicality is wholly displaced into aesthetics, the sensual fugitive becomes the narcissistic captive: death in Venice. William Morris designs "Strawberry Thief," but Mann's Aschenbach is the "strawberry thief" incarnate. He steals looks at the forbidden fruit of Tadzio, whose blond beauty, as Henry James wrote of Morris's "Un-*Earthly Paradise*," is "more Anglo-Saxon than Latin." Aschenbach is poisoned by strawberries tainted with cholera. Jane Morris's lips remind Henry James of a Tennyson heroine and the kiss of death. Aschenbach's moustache is dyed, his face powdered. Jane Morris's eyebrows appear and disappear. The domestic ache is reflected in the green mirror of the waters as an aesthetic postcard.

"When I went to Venice," Proust wrote to Geneviève Straus, "I found that my dream had become—quite incredibly—my address!"

In his 1881 lecture "Some Hints on Pattern Designing," Morris said that the execution of ornamental patterns depends on "beauty, imagination, and order." The last of these "invents certain beautiful and natural forms, which will remind not only of nature but also of much that lies beyond that part."

Peacock & Vine usually tells more than it shows. But in discussing paired birds, Byatt shows as she tells. In 1916, Byatt relates, Proust wrote to his friend Maria Hahn to ask if Fortuny had ever decorated his gowns with "those pairs of birds, drinking from a vase for example, which appear so frequently in St. Mark's on Byzantine capitals."

Ruskin had copied braces of carved peacocks at Venice. Morris had reprinted Ruskin's account of their "forms beautiful and mixed together" in *The Nature of Gothic*. In *The Captive*, Proust's narrator gives Albertine a gown adorned with "mating birds," symbols of death and resurrection. When he embraces her, it is as if he is embracing Venice. She recoils, with "the sort of instinctive and baleful obstinacy of animals that feel the hand of death." Jane Morris did not. She formed a mating pair, and bred in captivity.

Morris's first attempt to depict birds on tapestry was also his first attempt at embroidery. This was in 1857, the year in which he met Jane Burden, and in which she modeled as Iseult. The image that accompanies Byatt's account of Morris's development in this domestic art, however, is from an 1878 design, "Peacock & Dragon."

A pair of phoenixes is almost occluded in a web of branches. The image is cropped so that a vegetal gargoyle is at the center. Its head is an open flower, its face distorted by a mad laugh that reveals a mouth stuffed with eyeballs or eggs. Its legs resemble two phalluses; splayed, they force apart the pair of phoenixes. The genital region is as dark as Jane Morris's brow. The dragons lunge downwards around the monster's head, guarding the fecund horror, the pattern in nature's carpet.

As Henry James recognized, William Morris had a peculiar genius for getting "to the point" in a "business-like" way. Jane Burden had held Rossetti and Morris, the peacocks, in a dance of division. In 1874, Morris had expelled the cuckoo from his nest. He cut out Rossetti from Morris & Co., and forced him from Kelmscott. By 1878, the year that Morris created "Peacock & Dragon," Rossetti was a crippled, half-mad recluse.

In "Peacock & Dragon," Morris turned rivalry and violence, arousal and horror, into something useful and beautiful, like cushions and wallpaper. He placed his succubus in the shrubbery of a suburban villa. Copyrighting her image, he presided over her reproduction—and not just when Jane bore him two daughters. In 1884, three years after Rossetti's death, Jane took a lover, the Rossetti-obsessed Wilfrid Scawen Blunt. Morris, who had endured Jane's original affair, easily tolerated its copy.

At the end of *Peacock & Vine*, we reach the beginning of a novel, perhaps called *Peacock & Dragon*. The weave of life and art, light and water in Venice leads back to the triad of Jane Burden, William Morris, and Dante Gabriel Rossetti, and to the silent muse with the aching teeth. *Peacock & Vine* is "interesting"—and not just in the way of unfinished work. It fascinates in the way of work barely begun. In conception, all artworks attain ideal form, as barren and perfect as a shaved lawn.

Reconsiderations

The letters of Lowell & Bishop

by Richard Tillinghast

It seemed unlikely on the face of it that two big books of letters, each of which could serve as a doorstop, would be so absorbing. But I recently found that re-reading *The Letters of Robert Lowell* and *Words in Air: The Complete Correspondence Between Elizabeth Bishop and Robert Lowell* issued me into a world as vivid as that of a novel—more vivid, really, because the world evoked in these letters is peopled with real men and women, against a backdrop of the times during which the letter-writers were active. The letters became an alternative reality I was eager to escape into, leaving behind what came to seem the paler reality of the world in which I actually live.

Their correspondence indirectly tells the life stories of both poets, and this is a good thing, since we lack a definitive biography of either. Each of these two personalities was of such complexity, encompassing such contradictions, that an unusually gifted biographer would be required, someone who could take it all on board, and so far such a person has not appeared in either case. *Elizabeth Bishop: Life and the Memory of It* by Brett C. Millier (2009) is not a bad book, but it is less helpful than it might be. For starters, Millier taxes Bishop for not being as "political" as her biographer would like her to have been on gender issues—and explicitly political was exactly what the skeptical Bishop never was and never wanted to be. Ian Hamilton's 1983 Random House biography of Lowell is well researched but gives a radically distorted view of the man. Paul Mariani's 1994 book on Lowell, *Lost Pilgrim*, is more sympathetic but remains dependent on Hamilton's research. A corrective to Hamilton's book will probably never be written now that most first-hand sources of information about Lowell and most of his old friends and acquaintances are no longer around. I like the oral biography *Elizabeth Bishop and Her Art* that Lloyd Schwartz and Sybil Estess put out about thirty years ago, when memories were fresh.

Elizabeth Bishop and Robert Lowell each regarded the other as a best friend, but the circumstances of their lives meant they more often communicated through letters than face to face. Lowell's attraction to Bishop was something different from what he probably had in mind when he wrote in "Waking Early Sunday Morning" that "All life's grandeur/ is something with a girl in summer." There was usually a love affair associated with his manic episodes, a glorious infatuation that lasted only as long as the high did. In the late Forties, though, Lowell was on the brink of proposing to Bishop: "I assumed," he wrote her almost ten years later, "that [it] would be just a matter of time before I proposed and I half believed that you would accept." The moment came and went, the proposal was never made. Still, Lowell wrote, "Asking you is *the* might have been for me." All of Bishop's important relationships and emotional attachments were with women anyway. But the two poets were soul-mates. And while marriage between them would have been a disaster, the friendship was a lifesaver, a source of

nourishment and inspiration in both these difficult lives.

Bishop was a traveler who lived for long periods outside the United States. Part of her motivation was that her small trust fund went much further in a place like Brazil than in the United States. Beyond that, she was a restless soul, someone attuned to visual, cultural detail and local color, the kind of vivid authenticity and genuineness she found lacking in mainstream American life except in out-of-the-way places like Key West, Maine, and Nova Scotia, less culturally homogeneous than most of North America. "I suppose I am just a born worrier, and that when the personal worries of adolescence and the years after it have more or less disappeared I promptly have to start worrying about the decline of nations," she wrote Lowell. "But I really can't *bear* much of American life these days—surely no country has ever been so filthy rich and so hideously uncomfortable at the same time."

"We are poor passing facts," Lowell would write in his last book, "warned by that to give/ each figure in the photograph/ his living name." So, he concludes, "why not say what happened?" By contrast, Bishop preferred to disguise her forays into self-revelation. In one of her letters she says, "I simply hate talking about myself, more & more, the older I get—I'm afraid it is not very interesting." About poets in the movement known by the unfortunate and misleading label of Confessional Poetry, Bishop commented tersely, "You wish they'd keep some of these things to themselves."

In contrast to the broken glass, spilt gin, nervous breakdowns, affairs and divorces to be found in the work of poets like Anne Sexton and even in some of Lowell's own, Bishop's self-examination, at least in her poems, is gentler, more circumspect. She had an acute sense of humor, and a persona that seemed to share many of her own personal qualities sometimes figures as a slightly comic and appealing character in her work.

The work of both these writers is inherently dramatic, often filled with memorable characters, like the catalogue of Lowell's fellow conscientious objectors in "Memories of West Street and Lepke," such as Abramowitz, "a jaundice-yellow ('it's really tan')/ and fly-weight pacifist,/ so vegetarian,/ he wore rope shoes and preferred fallen fruit." There is Miss Breen from Bishop's "Arrival at Santos"—"Miss Breen is about seventy,/ a retired police lieutenant, six feet tall,/ with beautiful bright blue eyes and a kind expression"; Manuelzinho, "with that wistful/ face, like a child's fistful/ of bluets or white violets,/ improvident as the dawn . . . ." (Only Bishop would have had the ear to rhyme "wistful" and "fistful.") And of course Gregorio Valdes, the "primitive" painter Bishop collected and wrote about with admiration: "There are some people we envy not because they are rich or handsome or successful, although they may be all of these, but because everything they do is of a piece, so that even if they wanted to they could not be or do otherwise."

This inveterate traveler's greatest exploration of her own wanderlust is found in her 1965 collection, *Questions of Travel*, my favorite of her books. The collection is notable, as its title suggests, for questions rather than answers. "Oh tourist," writes Bishop, addressing a version of herself in "Arrival at Santos" who finds herself (blissfully heedless of the "pathetic fallacy") disappointed by the "impractically shaped and—who knows?—self-pitying" appearance of the Brazilian town where her freighter docks:

> is this how this country is going to answer you
> and your immodest demands for a different
> world,
> and a better life, and complete comprehension
> of both at last, and immediately,
> after eighteen days of suspension?
> Finish your breakfast."

Bishop developed the knack of creating emblems for the self that allowed her to write veiled autobiography. There are many such emblems in Bishop's work. Here is "The Sandpiper," whose baffled search for meaning mirrors the poet's own:

> The world is a mist. And then the world is
> minute and vast and clear. The tide
> is higher or lower. He couldn't tell you which.
> His beak is focussed; he is preoccupied,

> Looking for something, something, something.
> Poor bird, he is obsessed!

The title poem, "Questions of Travel," begins in the voice of someone not unlike the spoiled, hard-to-please tourist from "Arrival at Santos," prompting a similar internal dialogue between two voices belonging to the same person: "There are too many waterfalls here; the crowded streams/ hurry too rapidly down to the sea . . . ." Was it worth it to come all the way to this exotic place? The other voice, less hasty, less rash, takes a calmer, more considered approach, answering one question with another: "Think of the long trip home./ Should we have stayed at home and thought of here?"

"I started out," she writes soon after settling in Brazil, "intending to go all over the continent but I seem to have become a Brazilian home-body, and I get just as excited now over a jeep trip to buy kerosene in the next village as I did in November at the thought of my trip around the Horn." And as she settles in, she starts to notice and write, brilliantly, about the complex relationship between the arts, religion, and colonialism in Brazil. If the questioning traveler had indeed "stayed at home," she would have missed not just experiences but understanding:

> —Yes, a pity not to have pondered,
> blurr'dly and inconclusively,
> on what connection can exist for centuries
> between the crudest wooden footwear
> and, careful and finicky,
> the whittled fantasies of wooden cages.

Her dramatic monologue "Manuelzinho" is one of the funniest poems I know, and at the same time a searching critique, not excluding pathos, of the master-servant relationship. Anyone who has experienced a way of life that includes servants will recognize the half-affectionate, half-exasperated tone that seems reserved for people who like to talk among themselves about "the help," in this case a "half squatter, half tenant (no rent)—/ a sort of inheritance . . . the world's worst gardener since Cain."

Lowell was a more situated poet. Early on he identified himself as a Bostonian, a New Englander, and this identity is crucial from his early work in *Lord Weary's Castle* all the way through his 1959 masterpiece, *Life Studies*, and its follow-up volume, *For the Union Dead* (1964). There is even room in this picture for his madness. He liked to quote the old saying that a true Bostonian has "a share in the Athenaeum, a lot at Mount Auburn [cemetery] and an uncle in McLean's." (McLean's was the old-line private sanatorium where Lowell would put up from time to time.) When he moved to New York in the early Sixties, he in turn somehow managed to absorb the spirit of literary and political New York, and during the turbulent late Sixties and early Seventies, he assumed the role of spokesman for the intellectual Left. At the same time Lowell was ambivalent about that role, because in some ways he remained a rock-ribbed New England conservative.

Lowell dedicated one of his best-known poems, "Skunk Hour," to Bishop. The two animals—the skunk, never a welcome visitor, and the armadillo, biologically outmoded, also a nuisance—are emblematic of everything marginalized and unliked. "Skunk Hour" does not shy away from "confessional" detail: "My mind's not right. . . . I hear/ my ill-spirit sob in each blood cell,/ as if my hand were at its throat . . . ." But what catches one by surprise is how Lowell, adopting one of Bishop's favorite stances, backs off from these first-person "confessions," instead making the despised skunk a self-image for people like himself, rejected by society because of his difference but still defiant: "She jabs her wedge-head in a cup/ of sour cream, drops her ostrich tail,/ and will not scare" in the same way that Bishop's armadillo is an emblem of defiance against life's unfairness: *"a weak mailed fist/ clenched ignorant against the sky!"*

The clash between Bishop's sense of privacy and personal dignity and Lowell's "why not say what happened" philosophy led to their most serious rift. Their arguments about Lowell's decision to include partially fictionalized letters from his second wife, Elizabeth Hardwick, in *The Dolphin* and *For Lizzie and Harriet* are

substantive, particularly on Bishop's part. Lowell's defense of what he has done comes across in retrospect as rather lame—even heartless and uncomprehending when he writes to Hardwick: "I fear I may owe you an apology for versing one of your letters into my poems on you in *Notebook*. When Lamb blew up at Coleridge for calling him 'Frolicsome Lamb,' Coleridge said it was necessary for the balance of his composition. I won't say that, but what could be as real as your own words, and then there's only a picture that does you honor." Hardwick must have blown up when she read that.

Horrified by what Lowell was doing, Bishop quotes Hardy to him: "What should certainly be protested against, in cases where there is no authorization, is the mixing of fact and fiction in unknown proportions. Infinite mischief would lie in that." She goes on to say, "One can use one's life as material—one does, anyway—but these letters—aren't you violating a trust? IF you were given permission—IF you hadn't changed them . . . etc. But *art just isn't worth that much*." Consider how far Bishop is here from Faulkner's well-known claim that "the writer's only responsibility is to his art. . . . Everything goes by the board: honor, pride, decency, security, happiness, all, to get the book written. If a writer has to rob his mother, he will not hesitate; the 'Ode on a Grecian Urn' is worth any number of old ladies." Lowell is staking out a position close to Faulkner's; Bishop's stance is dramatically different. *"Art just isn't worth that much."*

Beyond this debate, it is enjoyable to see these two powerful writers simply as people, Lowell mentioning televised sports in the same breath as his voluminous reading: "Except for football games, I've become a pure creature of books." He was a prodigious reader, a tireless learner, and he often lists the books he's been reading. In 1948 he is on a Robert Louis Stevenson kick: "I've read *Black Arrow*, *Weir of Hermiston*, *The Master of Ballantrae*. . . . Saw *Black Arrow* as a movie too—it's a cumbersome pot-boiler at best, but redone with the plot of a western thriller it is, is—words fail me." Bishop apologizes jokingly for a spot on a letter she has just written: "I'm sorry—I seem to have got some of a very old & liquefied jelly-bean on this."

In between his manic highs and the doldrums of his lows, Lowell loved routine, and often praises a pleasant quotidian dullness: "We're back in Maine, awfully tennis-playingish and beachy. [Richard] Eberhart's boat still lands, heavy with strangers and heartiness. . . . I sit typing, surrounded by chintz and Cousin Harriet's somber 19th century oils of Alpine valleys. The sun comes in the window." You can see here the poet of *Lord Weary's Castle* and *Life Studies* on his home turf, cosseted by antiques and other not always agreeable reminders of the past. And we can see Lowell's history-haunted mind at work on the parallels he sees between the Roman Empire and contemporary one-percent America, in this case the summer-place coast of Maine: "All the great lawns, birch and elm groves, frail expensive wharves, new Swedish racing craft at the moorings, here and there a private plane; you felt you were seeing the great Roman villas described by Horace and Juvenal . . . ."

For all their animadversions against American culture, it is fun to see that these poets were American enough to get excited about cars. Here is Bishop on the sports car her friend Tom Wanning was thinking of buying: "Tom is considering buying an English car, a *Jaguar*—he says it's 'moss-green,' has four forward speeds, and what particularly gets him, I think, is a very elaborate tool-chest, like a Jewel box, with the tools embedded in little wells of green billiard cloth." More car talk from Lowell in Iowa City, where he was teaching: "We've just bought a seventeen year old Packard that an old professor looked after like a baby, or rather far better. I've just gotten my driver's license, and discover unexpectedly that I am slow and reliable. We go for pleasure drives along the unscenic Iowa river, and are almost senile with joy and fatuousness."

Lowell knew everybody who was anybody in the literary world. Personal sketches of other writers abound. Here is Theodore Roethke: "mammoth yet elfinlike, hairless, red-faced, beginning the day with a shot of bourbon, speechless except for shrewd grunted asides—

behind him nervous breakdowns, before him—what?"

The Beats, who had visited Lowell in Boston in the late Fifties, did not impress Elizabeth Bishop: "Oh dear, your 'Beat' guests do sound awful. I have read some of the poetry and find it hopeless—and yet I sympathize with them. The trouble is mostly ignorance, don't you think—and lack of education, as well as talent. (I guess that takes care of *them*!)"

Mary McCarthy, who summered in Castine, Maine, as Lowell did, and who was married for a time to Edmund Wilson, who in turn was once romantically involved with the poet Edna St. Vincent Millay, provides an endless source of innocent merriment: "I sound like notes for a Mary McCarthy novel. Have you read her last [*A Charmed Life*] in which Mary (divorced and remarried) is seduced by Wilson (divorced and remarried) after a Wellfleet reading of Racine's *Berenice*? In the last chapter Mary driving to Boston for an abortion is run into and killed by a red-headed Millay-like Cape poet driving on the wrong side of the road."

Lowell and Bishop both enjoyed stays at Yaddo, the artists' retreat in Saratoga Springs, and in 1949 he writes Bishop about a young fiction writer from Georgia who was staying at Yaddo: "There's a little Catholic girl named Flannery O'Connor here now . . . a real writer, I think, one of the best to be when she is a little older. Very moral (in your sense) and witty—whom I'm sure you'd like."

Ready for this one from 1958? "I must write you about Eliot and his new bride next letter. They danced so dashingly at a Charles River boatclub brawl that he was called 'Elbows Eliot.'"

I think that Lowell's calling O'Connor "very moral (in your sense)" is a way of addressing Bishop's deeply scrupulous nature. "I do hope and pray you are feeling yourself again," she writes Lowell after one of his breakdowns. "(Not that I pray very much, but I mean by that just intensity of hoping . . . .)" Lowell famously wrote, in "Eye and Tooth": "I am tired, everyone's tired of my turmoil." It's true that his suffering was more dramatic and more public than Bishop's private angst, but hers was no less intense. "I think you said a while ago," she wrote him in 1948, "that I'd 'laugh you to scorn' over some conversation you & I had had about how to protect oneself against solitude & ennui—but indeed I wouldn't. That's just the kind of 'suffering' I'm most at home with and helpless about, I'm afraid, and what with two days of fog and alarmingly low tides I've really got it bad & think I'll write you a note before I go out & eat some mackerel."

I've always been intrigued by Bishop's use of the word "disaster" in her great sestina, "One Art." She uses it as one of the recurring rhyme words the form demands. Bishop sees the losses built into our lives as an occasion for art, "the art of losing," something to "master," though of course in the end, as the poem suggests, who is really capable of doing that? "The art of losing," she memorably asserts—and the tone suggests someone is trying to convince herself of a proposition she can't quite believe—"isn't hard to master;/ so many things seem filled with the intent/ to be lost that their loss is no disaster." In 1955, a couple of decades before "One Art" was written, we find Bishop mentioning "disaster" in a letter: "I am extremely happy here, although I can't quite get used to being 'happy,' but one remnant of my old morbidity is that I keep fearing that the few people I'm fond of may be in automobile accidents, or suffer some sort of catastrophe . . . The word for even a small accident here is 'desastre.'"

I find I have mostly quoted from the Lowell-Bishop volume of letters, because in writing to his friend he seems to come most alive, but *The Letters of Robert Lowell,* too, contains gems, such as this *apologia* for the writer's life Lowell wrote to Frank Bidart two years before he died: "It's miraculous . . . how often writing takes the ache away, takes time away. You start in the morning, and look to see the windows darkening. . . . I think the ambition of art, the feeding on one's soul, memory, mind etc. gives a mixture of glory and exhaustion. I think in the end, there is no end, the thread frays rather than is cut . . . . No perfected end, but a lot of meat and drink along the way."

Manners & morals

Fetters & freedom

by Emily Esfahani Smith

Every year, thousands of people travel, as I did recently, to the Abbey of Our Lady of Gethsemani, a monastery set in the rolling hills of Kentucky, to immerse themselves in a world wholly at odds with modern life. The visitors are not all Christians, nor even religiously inclined, but many come and stay for days hoping to adopt, if only for a brief stretch of time, the contemplative way of life that has attracted monks to monasteries for thousands of years—a life defined by silence, constraint, and meditation.

The monks at Gethsemani belong to the Order of Cistercians of the Strict Observance, a monastic community known for the rigor of its contemplative way of life. Trappists, as they are called, remain silent, speaking only when necessary. They fast regularly and are constantly engaged in prayer and meditation, whether in church where they pray the seven offices of the Liturgy of the Hours each day, or in their cells reading scripture, or in the fields where they work.

In 1941, a man much like today's pilgrims traveled to Gethsemani for a silent retreat. He was twenty-six years old and was working as an English teacher at the time. Several months after his retreat, he quit his job, returned to Gethsemani, and spent most of the remainder of his life there as a monk. When he first arrived at Gethsemani as a young man in 1941, he was an unknown seeker. He planned to remain anonymous, cloistered in the monastery for the duration of his life. But by the time he died in 1968, Thomas Merton had become one of the most influential Christian apologists and spiritual writers of the twentieth century.

Like most people, Merton led a life stretched between the competing demands of the sacred and the profane. In his autobiography, *The Seven Storey Mountain*, Merton tells the story of his path to monasticism. True freedom, he realized during that journey, paradoxically requires restraint and discipline; the monastic life, rather than the dispersions of modern life, was his avenue to this goal.

Born in 1915, Merton grew up in France, England, and the United States. His mother died when he was a boy, and his father when he was a teenager. Suddenly on his own, Merton was free to live his life as he chose. After his father's death, his "rebellion began," writes Paul Elie in *The Life You Save May Be Your Own*; he was now "independent, accountable to nobody but himself." Or, as Merton put it, "I became the complete twentieth-century man."

Though Merton was baptized in the Church of England and attended Catholic and Anglican schools, he grew up to be religiously agnostic. In high school, he defiantly refused to recite the Apostles' Creed during chapel and found faith instead in "pamphlets and newspapers." He fancied himself an intellectual and acted like it. In college, he dabbled in Communism, became a pacifist, wrote for literary publications, flirted with a lot of women, drank a lot of alcohol, and read a lot of D. H. Lawrence.

But his freewheeling lifestyle failed to bring him fulfillment. "If what most people take for granted were really true—if all you needed to be happy was to grab everything and see everything and investigate every experience and then talk about it," he wrote, "I should have been a very happy person, a spiritual millionaire, from the cradle even until now." What he was, though, was a shallow young man with an inner life that was a mess of raging appetites and desires.

His life, he came to believe, reflected the chaos of the times. "Free by nature, in the image of God," he wrote, "I was nevertheless the prisoner of my own violence and my own selfishness, in the image of the world into which I was born. That world was the picture of Hell, full of men like myself, loving God, and yet hating him; born to love him, living instead in fear of hopeless self-contradictory hungers."

During these formative years, Merton felt the pull of a countervailing force to his libertinism. When he was eighteen, he traveled by himself to Rome, where he was most moved not by the ruins of the classical world, but by the holy sites of Christendom. Church art, in particular, stirred him with its "spiritual vitality" and service to "higher ends." These works began to effect a spiritual conversion in him. When he returned to his room in the evenings after wandering from church to church, he put away his modern literature and began reading the gospels. "Soon, I was no longer visiting them merely for the art," he said of the churches: "There was something else that attracted me: a kind of interior peace."

One night in his room, Merton had a transcendent experience. He felt the presence of his father and "was overwhelmed with a sudden and profound insight into the misery and corruption of my own soul." He prayed to God to help free him from "the thousand terrible things that held my will in their slavery."

The trip to Rome turned into a pilgrimage. The newly humbled Merton began now to pray at the churches he visited rather than merely admire their art. And, one day, as he was exploring the quiet grounds of a monastery in the holy city, a fanciful thought struck him: he wanted to become a Trappist monk.

It would be several years before Merton would "shake the iron tyranny of moral corruption that held my whole nature in fetters." After a dissolute year at Cambridge—where it seems that he fathered an illegitimate child—Merton transferred to Columbia in New York to complete his college and graduate education. At Columbia, his religious curiosity blossomed thanks, in part, to the mentorship of professors like Mark Van Doren and the guidance of friends like the poet Robert Lax. One day, he stumbled on a book of Catholic theology, *The Spirit of Medieval Philosophy* by Étienne Gilson, and its depiction of God as Being appealed to him.

But it was reading about the life of the poet Gerard Manley Hopkins—who converted to Catholicism as a student at Oxford and later became a priest—that pushed Merton over the edge and inspired him to convert. Merton received baptism as a Catholic in 1938 and decided he wanted to become a priest, as Hopkins had. The following year, he sought advice from Daniel Walsh, his former teacher at Columbia. Walsh, a professor of philosophy, told Merton about the different religious orders within Catholicism. He also mentioned a Trappist monastery in Kentucky that he once visited on a retreat. This was the first time Merton heard of Gethsemani.

About two years after their conversation, Merton visited the monastery during Easter week 1941. The experience made a profound impression on him. The "whole place," he wrote, "was as quiet as midnight and lost in the all-absorbing silence and solitude of the fields. Behind the monastery was a dark curtain of woods, and over to the west was a wooded valley, and beyond that a rampart of wooded hills, a barrier and a defence against the world."

Merton spent several days at the monastery in silence, prayed the Liturgy of the Hours with the brothers each day, and read theology. It was awe-inspiring. "The silence," he wrote, "the solemnity, the dignity of these Masses and of the church, and the overpowering atmosphere of prayers so fervent that they were almost tangible choked me with love and reverence that robbed me of the power to breathe. I could only get the air in gasps." The monks, he saw,

turned themselves toward God at every waking moment of the day. "You have nothing to do" at the monastery, he wrote, "but lament your separation from Him, and pray to Him." This, to the young Merton, was "paradise."

One day during the retreat, he noticed a postulant dressed in secular clothes praying among the monks. Several days later, Merton saw the same man now dressed in white habits, practically indistinguishable from the other monks. This man had, in a way, died: "The waters had closed over his head," Merton wrote, "and he was submerged in the community. He was lost. The world would hear of him no more. He had drowned to our society and become a Cistercian." Unlike in the modern world, Merton realized, where excellence is defined by standing out and attracting attention, in the monastic world excellence is defined by one's obscurity. The more a person's individuality has been destroyed, the closer he is to the higher reality that he seeks. Merton concluded that he, too, wanted to die in this manner.

The morning Merton left the monastery, he felt "like a man that had come down from the rare atmosphere of a very high mountain." The world at the foot of that mountain—the ordinary world—now seemed to him "insipid and slightly insane." Compared to the purity and simplicity of monastic life, it was strange for him to see "people walking around as if they had something important to do, running after busses, reading the newspapers, lighting cigarettes. How futile their haste and anxiety seemed."

The modern world, he realized, was not for him. In December of 1941, several months after his retreat, he returned to Gethsemani—and this time stayed for good. There, he led a monotonous life. Each day consisted of the same routines: He chanted the Divine Offices in the monastery's church with his brothers, prayed in solitude at various points in the day, and worked on the monastery's grounds scrubbing floors, chopping wood, and engaging in other tasks. He lived in an austere cell; ate plain meals; and within several weeks of joining the abbey, landed in the infirmary after catching the flu.

When Walsh first described monastic life at Gethsemani to him, Merton emphatically declared that he was unsuited to its asceticism. But now, thrust into that life headlong, he was the happiest he had been in many years. The rituals of monastic life, though they seem oppressive, helped liberate him from his "false self," allowing him to grow closer to God. "I was enclosed," Merton wrote, "in the four walls of my new freedom."

As a monk at Gethsemani, Merton used that freedom to write about the importance of contemplation in books like *New Seeds of Contemplation*. Echoing Aristotle, Merton called contemplation "the highest expression of man's intellectual and spiritual life," the "sudden gift of awareness." He defined contemplation as an awareness of the divine. Its province extended beyond the practice of religious ritual to saturate the course of everyday life.

Thomas Merton was a paradoxical character. He was a garrulous apostle of silence but thrived among words. *The Seven Storey Mountain* was a bestseller and several of his many books enjoyed a wide readership. He professed a mystic extinction of individuality but became a celebrity. A charismatic advocate of selflessness, his absorption in the monastic community stood alongside his conviction that contemplation was not the preserve of monks and mystics alone: everyone, he taught, needs contemplation to satisfy his spiritual yearnings. He was a Catholic monk who became increasingly drawn to the tenets of Zen Buddhism. He extolled solitude but met his end at fifty-three in Bangkok, Thailand, at an interfaith conference when he was electrocuted by a fan.

In *Four Quartets* T. S. Eliot wrote of being "Distracted from distraction by distraction." It's a line that must have resonated with Thomas Merton, whose spiritual itinerary took him from that hurly-burly to Eliot's "still point of the turning world" and at least part way back. Merton's celebrity has faded in recent years but his articulate serenity persists, a quiet, cooling oasis of spiritual possibility.

Theater

Empire states of mind

by Kyle Smith

When a tyro assistant conductor, aged just twenty-five, filled in for the ailing Bruno Walter at a Carnegie Hall performance of the New York Philharmonic in 1943, the concert was so captivating to a public that listened on nationwide radio that *The New York Times* praised it on its front page. The newly-arrived star conductor's father, weeping backstage with equal parts pride and disbelief, was heard to remark of his progeny, "How was I supposed to know that he was Leonard Bernstein?"

Or so claims Bernstein himself, as played by Hershey Felder in the multi-faceted one-man play with music *Maestro* (at 59E59 Theaters through Oct. 16). Felder wrote the play, which enables him to segue from one character and accent to another as he retells the life of Bernstein with evident love and fascination, both of which are easy to share. It's pleasing to think of the leonine, imperious New York monument as an uncertain young sprout growing up in Lawrence, Massachusetts with a devout father who was given a piano by a crazy sister and parked it in the hallway where the boy "got curious [and] went over to touch a note." After a year of lessons, Leonard's piano teacher declared she could no longer help him: he was better than she was. But Leonard's father, a Russian immigrant, believed music would take the boy farther from God and the Talmud. "My son is not going to be a klezmer!" the older man exclaimed. At the very least, he reasoned, Leonard should be a rabbi. It wasn't until young Leonard dazzled onlookers at his bar mitzvah that his father began grudgingly to support the boy's talent. Leonard's talent also began supporting itself: he started charging neighborhood kids a dollar a lesson.

The play, which is preceded by clips of the actual Bernstein in his years as a television presenter explaining the craft, is alternately biographical and technical, with intriguing asides on the details of conducting and music, of tempo and key. Felder, a button-eyed forty-eight-year-old with a grand thatch of feathered gray hair, exudes midcentury style in a charcoal jacket and black mock turtleneck, subtly changing his intonations from the rabbinical to the regionless, ethnically untraceable diction that itself is a nostalgic reminder of how Americans, even those from working class or impoverished backgrounds, strove to speak correctly as recently as the 1960s. Today Bernstein's successors at Harvard, from which he graduated in 1939, no doubt strive to infuse their speech with the regrettable and unlettered idioms of hip-hop. Perhaps students even receive bonus points on papers for making grammatical errors that perform the service of reminding us all that rules are an oppressive tool of the privileged.

So respectful of the norms of his time was Bernstein that, though he can't stop speaking of his love for such mentors as the conductors Serge Koussevitsky and Artur Rodziński, he married the actress Felicia Cohn Montealegre, with whom he had three children. Felder brooks no doubt that Bernstein was gay and ached for the companionship of young men, for one of whom he left his wife, only to return to her a

year later when she discovered she had terminal cancer. It's to his credit that Felder doesn't turn Bernstein's sexual conflict into an indictment of American mores; if anything, Felder's portrayal limns a restive quality in his subject that wouldn't likely be quelled even today. For Felder, Bernstein was (like many another celebrated man) bedeviled by the public's misperception of him, which registers in two ways that make Bernstein frustrated and angry. One is the magazine article and book produced by an (unidentified by name) "two-bit journalist" who attended a perfectly innocent party Felicia hosted for the Black Panthers at the Bernsteins' Upper East Side home. Bernstein notes that the writer hadn't even been invited to the party, and that he, the conductor, wasn't home for most of it, having been working that evening, and anyway the Black Panther cause was a righteous one. Doesn't everyone know this was a group dedicated to fighting police brutality? Felder delivers this claim insistently, as an applause line calculated to play on liberal New Yorkers' affinity for today's Black Lives Matter movement, but it met with dead silence at the performance I attended. The audience, mostly of people sixty and up, was old enough to know better than to confuse, as Bernstein did, the inflammatory with the irenic. Tom Wolfe, now eighty-five, the author of that caustic, hilarious, and daring diagnosis of the psycho-political ills of the Mercedes Marxist class "Radical Chic," should take a bow: twenty-six years after Bernstein died, the conductor is still fulminating about Wolfe's alleged unfairness, which Felder finds permanently diminished Bernstein in the public eye.

The other source of disquiet that fuels the latter stages of the play (which is performed on a single spare set, with a piano, a couple of chairs, and a dropcloth that functions as a screen behind) is that Bernstein became, and remains, best known not for his classical compositions including three symphonies, but for the Broadway ballads, notably "Somewhere" and "Maria," he created in 1957 with his young lyricist Stephen Sondheim. Felder plays portions of these songs from *West Side Story* for us, to enchanting effect. Even from beyond the grave, in Felder's view, Bernstein urges us to respect his complex work, but we know—as does Felder—that the reason we still revere the composer is the beautiful simplicity of these two deathless melodies.

A comparably titanic New York figure receives equally tuneful representation in the musical *Fiorello!* (at the East 13th Street Theater through Oct. 7). The lyricist Sheldon Harnick and the composer Jerry Bock, who went on to write *She Loves Me* and *Fiddler on the Roof*, secured the 1959 Pulitzer Prize for the biographical show about New York's Mayor Fiorello H. LaGuardia (1934–45), the man best remembered for reading comic strips over the radio airwaves during a strike by newspaper delivery men and for bequeathing his name to a time-destruction empire in northern Queens from which planes are wont to take off five hours after their scheduled departure times. At the time of the play's writing, LaGuardia was perhaps as beloved of New Yorkers as Franklin Roosevelt; he was renowned for having cleared Tammany Hall corruption out of City Hall under the aegis of the Republican party, though he was very much an FDR progressive.

It's an amiable, low-budget production from the Berkshire Theatre Group in which the Manhattan landscape is represented by five-foot-high cardboard cutouts of skyscrapers and a chandelier serves to transport us into posh interiors. Bock and Harnick's jaunty tunes and playful lyrics bring many a smile in, for instance, "Little Tin Box." Asked how a humble public servant can afford a Rolls-Royce, one scallywag replies,

> You're implyin' I'm a crook and I say no, sir!
> There is nothin' in my past I care to hide.
> I been takin' empty bottles to the grocer
> And each nickel that I got was put aside.

Toward the close of Act I, when the reformist LaGuardia, having been sent to Congress in 1916 for his support of labor issues, instead becomes an ardent proponent of entering the war, Bock and Harnick present a superlative ballad, "Til Tomorrow," and follow that up with a patriotic tub-thumper, "Home Again," as LaGuardia returns from Europe in triumph with the rank of major, having served himself as

a bomber pilot. Act II announces a leap forward in time with the addition to the stage of a cutout of the Empire State Building (completed in 1931) as LaGuardia plots to succeed the remarkably corrupt Jimmy Walker as mayor, first in the company of his doomed wife Thea (who in reality had died back in 1921), then by the side of his secretary-turned-second-wife, Marie.

Rebecca Brudner, as Thea, and Katie Birenboim, as Marie, are wonderful singers who expertly deliver both comedy and pathos. The latter actress, early in the show, capitalizes fully on the fine opportunity presented by the comic number "Marie's Law," in which, having initially been jilted for a date by the then-single LaGuardia, she enumerates the ways she wishes gentlemen would spare the feelings of ladies. The song is in essence a sequel to, or a gloss on, "Adelaide's Lament" from Frank Loesser's *Guys and Dolls* (1950).

Bright and frolicsome as the show is, though, it never quite escapes the shadow of its superior forebear: the dapper Runyanesque rogues, this time manipulating the levers of power rather than shooting craps in garages, come across in Jerome Weidman and George Abbott's book as thinly written types who exist solely to contrast with the beneficent and enlightened LaGuardia, himself even more cringe-inducing in his lack of texture. Perhaps a genuinely charismatic actor could bring us along on this hagiographic journey, but Austin Scott Lombardi is not he. Lombardi, who is as slender as LaGuardia was round, lacks any hint of 1930s raffishness but instead carries a highly contemporary air of smug, grim, humorless, callow, entitled superiority. He brings to mind the former Treasury Secretary Timothy Geithner and Tommy Carcetti, the shifty Baltimore mayor in the HBO series *The Wire* who was in turn based in part on the onetime Baltimore Mayor (later Maryland governor) Martin O'Malley. By the end of the evening, LaGuardia hasn't yet even begun his first term as mayor, suggesting considerable question-begging on the part of the writers who simply assume we share their bedazzlement with their subject. *Fiorello!* is a rarity in that it was a considerable success in its day but has never been revived on Broadway. Producers might well share my suspicion that the audience simply isn't given enough reason to care about the show's putative hero.

The popular off-Broadway production of Jane Austen's first novel *Sense & Sensibility* (at the Gym at Judson through Nov. 20) opens with the actors merrily shimmying and grooving onstage in contemporary dress, then peeling off layers to reveal their 1790s-era empire waist dresses and tailcoats. I tend instinctively to chafe at such efforts to impress upon us a notion that centuries-old works must strenuously be made "fun." Austen is amusing enough in her own right and doesn't require adapters to lend her supplementary zaniness.

But a deal of zaniness is exactly what we're in for; Kate Hamill's adaptation and Eric Tucker's direction are aimed at making this a capital-F Fun Evening. What Hamill and Tucker lack in subtlety they make up for in sheer velocity; people and things virtually ricochet around this basement space as the actors change costumes and characters, trundle the scenery in and out at speed, and generally create a clamor, particularly in the frantic first act. Your correspondent, sitting innocently in the front row, was nearly maimed by a flying pillow during a scene change. A close neighbor found his (ample) lap being sat upon at length by the wench of the piece.

It all seems like an untoward amount of hubbub to be applied to Austen, who was so delectable in her droll asides, her quiet skewerings. The self-consciously "irreverent" (a word that should automatically raise suspicion) style isn't necessary as we revisit the tale of the suddenly impecunious Dashwood sisters, cautious Elinor (Kelley Curran) and flighty Marianne (Hamill herself). Upon the death of their father, their estate is to pass into the hands of their older half-brother John (John Russell), leaving them gazing into a future of much-reduced circumstances that will require them to leave their comfortable country home and move into a cottage unless they land suitable husbands. The charming, wealthy Willoughby (also played by Russell) figures to be Marianne's savior, while Elinor's only seeming hope is a match with the awkward, diffident Edward

Ferrars (Jason O'Connell), the brother of their brother's wife Fanny (Laura Baranik). Fanny, however, forbids Edward from courting Elinor, whom she believes to be motivated by the pursuit of Edward's income.

Praise be to Austen for making income so critical; for her ladies, love is always contingent on money, and had Austen lived longer than forty-one years, she might well have given us a novel called *Emotions and Emoluments* or *The Pecuniary and the Pulchritudinous*. Marrying a peasant and living in a hut isn't in the cards for her protagonists. This kind of gimlet-eyed realism, refreshingly devoid of hypocrisy, is much more to my liking than the device in Hollywood's many Austen-inflected romcoms in which the plucky and virtuous gals marry out of innocent love and—surprise, surprise!—get rewarded with handsome quantities of property as well. The women of Austen, like the women of the world, may sometimes affect boredom on the subject of money, but when it comes to their own suitors' finances they become as focused on the bottom line as a twenty-year veteran of Ernst & Young. After Marianne dismisses the idea that wealth or fame (Austen's word for the latter was "grandeur") has anything to do with happiness, the wiser Elinor gently corrects her: "Wealth has much to do with it."

Though the plot is manipulative and mechanical, such perceptive moments and the gentle grace of Curran's lovely and restrained performance mark the evening's high points. Hamill, however, doesn't register a pulse in the part of Marianne and should have shown more self-awareness than to give herself the role, played with such winsome girlishness by Kate Winslet in the 1995 film version directed by Ang Lee. Supporting cast members are energetic, almost relentlessly so. Their pluckiness can be appealing: one actor portrays both a man walking his dog and, at the same time, the (large, mouthy) beast himself; another actor, playfully pawing the floor of the basement where the play is staged, makes for a serviceable horse. An actress playing two roles at once conducts an argument with herself from either side of the space, merrily zipping across the stage in a chair with casters on its legs when changing roles. Yet I found myself appreciating much of this only dutifully: My, what a lot of effort these frisky young theater types put into the show! My interior state was akin to the feeling I might have at a certain school's vehemently multicultural, terrifyingly non-denominational "winter" pageant in between my own child's gratifying and faultless appearances. Ideally, your evening at the theater should conclude with you leaving the building reborn, or at least re-energized. From *Sense & Sensibility* I walked away vaguely exhausted on the actors' behalf.

Art

Alma Thomas at the Studio Museum

by Karen Wilkin

One of the most arresting works in "America Is Hard to See," the inaugural exhibition of selections from the permanent collection at the Whitney Museum of Art's new Renzo Piano building, was a large red canvas covered with repetitive, staccato brushmarks. The picture was striking for its freshness and visual pulse. Notes of clear blue flickered at unpredictable intervals against the disjunctive, vividly colored field, as if escaping from beneath, while glimpses of an apparently continuous darker hue, underlying the glowing, mosaic-like expanse of red, made the web of rhythmic strokes seem to float, contradicting the obvious fact of their being records of the placement of pigment on a flat surface. The painting, fairly straightforward at first acquaintance, was made increasingly complex by the tension between the exuberant play of color, which seemed completely intuitive, and the disciplined facture, which suggested a slow, deliberate process of construction—one stroke of a certain size and then another and then another. The longer one looked, the more unpredictable the picture became. Those vertical rows of apparently regular, repeated brushmarks revealed themselves as slightly off-kilter, and slightly irregular, creating a compelling visual instability. Surrounded by more familiar works by often celebrated makers of abstract art, this forthright, forceful canvas more than held its own. The work was, of course, *Mars Dust* (1972), by the distinguished African-American abstract painter Alma Thomas (1891–1978), a canvas acquired by the Whitney the year that it was painted, when the exhibition "Alma W. Thomas" was seen there—the first solo show ever accorded by the museum to an African-American woman.

Since that important New York exhibit and the Washington, D.C. showing the same year of "Alma W. Thomas: Retrospective Exhibition" at the Corcoran Gallery of Art, Thomas has been the subject of other major shows—retrospectives organized by the National Museum of American Art, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, D.C., in 1981, and by the Fort Wayne Museum of Art, Indiana, in 1998, the latter an ambitious effort that also traveled to museums in Florida, New Jersey, Washington, D.C., and Thomas's native Georgia. But since 1998, although Thomas's reputation has steadily grown—in 2014, her 1966 canvas *Resurrection* became the first work by an African-American woman to enter the White House art collection—she has been seen mainly in surveys of African-American artists and/or women painters, with an occasional surprise, such as the Whitney's opening installation; for New Yorkers, the best representation of Thomas's work has been in regular solo and group shows at Michael Rosenfeld Gallery. Happily, starting this past summer on July 14 and continuing through October 30, we have been able to learn much more about this remarkable artist, thanks to "Alma Thomas" at The Studio Museum in Harlem.[1]

1 "Alma Thomas" opened at The Studio Museum in Harlem, New York, on July 14 and remains on view through October 30, 2016.

Organized by Lauren Hayes, the Associate Curator of the Studio Museum's Permanent Collection, and Ian Berry, the director of the Frances Young Tang Teaching Museum and Art Gallery at Skidmore College, where the exhibition was seen earlier this year, the show, while fairly comprehensive, is not a complete overview. It concentrates on Thomas's mature work, assembling about sixty canvases, watercolors, and intimate watercolor and gouache studies, made between 1959 and 1976—that is, the exhibition begins with the painter's whole-hearted commitment to abstraction and follows her evolution during the years of her most significant achievement. Divided into sections titled "Move to Abstraction," "Earth," "Space," and "Mosaic" (some of these are the artist's own terms for her series), the show is organized thematically rather than strictly chronologically, since Thomas apparently worked at the same time on different types of paintings that, in the end, related to different series. The Whitney's wonderful *Mars Dust* isn't included, alas, although there is a delectable, small, untitled watercolor, dated *ca*. 1960s, that suggests a starting point for the painting. In compensation, as well, for the absence of *Mars Dust*, there are some equally good major canvases on view, while the entire selection provides an informative overview of Thomas's history during her most inventive, productive years.

Thomas was both precocious and a late bloomer. Born in Columbus, Georgia, and raised in Washington, D.C., where her parents moved to escape the Jim Crow South and to ensure that their children would have opportunities for higher education, Thomas fulfilled her family's aspirations at Howard University, becoming its first graduate in fine arts. (One of her professors recognized her talent when she took his course in costume design and steered her towards art classes.) Thomas's unprecedented degree from Howard was followed by a master's degree in arts education from Columbia University. For thirty-five years, Thomas taught art to young people in the D.C. school system, painting only intermittently. But she took part in African-American "artists' salons" in Washington in the 1940s, and helped organize one of the city's first commercial galleries to show the work of African-American artists. What is perhaps more important to her evolution and the development of her ambition for her art, Thomas also regularly attended studio classes at American University over an extended period, receiving an MFA in 1960. Finally, after retiring from teaching in that same year, she was able to devote herself full-time to painting.

"Move to Abstraction," the first section of the exhibition at the Studio Museum, demonstrates that Thomas was already experimenting with abstract paintings when she retired from teaching. Yet the selection includes a freely allusive but completely recognizable canvas, *March on Washington*, as well as a slightly looser study for the finished painting (both *ca*. 1964, The Columbus Museum, Georgia). Both the study and the finished work are composed with an upper register of overlapping geometric placards, seen above a marching crowd indicated by vertical strokes and dots. It seems that Thomas was so engaged by the Civil Rights Movement that she was willing, atypically, to address overtly political subject matter—something she avoided, on principle, in her later work, preferring, she often said, to counter the world's horror and unrest with reminders of beauty. In *March on Washington*, the schematic touches that conjure up the figures could be interpreted as anticipating her mature detached brushmarks, but tempting as it is to see the painting as transitional between reference and abstraction, it proves to have been predated by works such as the fully abstract *Yellow and Blue* (1959, Michael Rosenfeld Gallery). While, in some ways, *Yellow and Blue* is a type of nature-inspired abstraction common in the 1950s, the picture nevertheless points directly to how Thomas's work would develop over the next few years. Constructed with broadly brushed, more or less rectangular shapes of various sizes, the painting, as the title suggests, is essentially a conversation between a sweep of golden yellow and a stack of small, overlapping blue rectangles that seem to hover against

the yellow, opposed by a few notes of blue-green and punctuated by swipes of black. A red ground thrusts everything forward. The saturated near-primary hues, the ragged geometry of the shapes, the frontality, and the sense that just about every gesture in the picture's creation was an assertive, vertical stroke, can all be read, with the luxury of hindsight, as prefiguring Thomas's later all-over fabrics of full-throttle, often primary hues, "woven" out of rhythmic, repeated, detached vertical brushmarks.

The paintings in the section headed "Earth," which mainly date from the late 1960s, could be described this way. We discover Thomas in her "signature" mode, ringing changes on columns of red, blue, yellow, and orange brushmarks, and tempering her full-bore palette with threads of pinks, greens, and lighter blues that disrupt the rhythm of the sequential touches in beneficial ways. Thomas's titles, such as *Breeze Rustling Through Fall Flowers* (1968, The Phillips Collection, Washington, D.C.) or *Tulips, Jonquils, and Crocuses* (1969, National Museum of Women in the Arts), remind us that she often spoke of her paintings as being responses to her garden or Washington parks, when a riot of spring bloom appeared. When we know this, the columns of dabs of paint, interrupted by narrow strips of white ground, become evocative of brilliant light seen through foliage or clusters of blossoms, the vertical "bars" suggestions of window mullions or curtains, without ever reverting to literal imagery. Yet while Thomas's "Earth" paintings may have their genesis in blooming trees and flower beds, or in a holly tree visible from her window, they are never disguised representations, but rather about formal relationships that encapsulate their maker's enthusiasms.

Thomas was not alone in finding sources for radical abstraction in nature. The brilliant Canadian colorist Jack Bush (1909–1977) frequently turned to his garden as a starting point for abstract paintings; "garden gouaches," executed in spring—explosive, intensely colored shapes against neutral grounds, explicitly titled *Forsythia* or *Falling Blossoms*—became the basis for radiant geometric abstractions. Bush's thin, luminous orchestrations of unpredictable hues, however, allied him with painters such as Kenneth Noland, Morris Louis, and Gene Davis—known as the Washington Color School, because of their early residence in the city—with whom he frequently exhibited. Although Thomas knew their work and found their example liberating, she never shared their interest in disembodied, thinly applied color; the physicality of her own approach set her apart. (By her own account, she responded more to Wassily Kandinsky and Henri Matisse, especially the cut outs.)

Some of Thomas's most accomplished paintings at the Studio Museum, painted in the 1970s, have "garden titles," like the "Earth" paintings, yet are grouped under the rubric "Mosaics," a series dramatically airier in structure and more limited in color, often constructed with a single hue superimposed on a variegated ground. In one of the best, *Hydrangeas Spring Song* (1976, Philadelphia Museum of Art), once-orderly blue strokes have broken loose from their columns, shattering into free-floating lines, blocks, and arcs, to drift in irregular swaths—think Paul Klee's late glyphs fused with Jackson Pollock's all-overness, although Matisse's expansive cut-outs are said to have stimulated these works. In other, tighter iterations, the component strokes are like pieces of shattered tile, sometimes disposed in circular nodes, at intervals, sometimes scattered, like terrazzo. Most poetic, perhaps, are more densely "woven" expanses—like *Mars Dust*—such as the sugary *Cherry Blossom Symphony* (1973, Collection of Halley K. Harrisburg and Michael Rosenfeld), in which a web of delicate pink strokes allows glimpses of blue and green between touches, or *Arboretum Presents White Dogwood* (1972, Smithsonian American Art Museum), in which silvery white has been dragged over shifting blues and greens; in these flickering paintings, the upper layer of marks becomes interchangeable with what lies beneath, rather than imposed, and the whole seems diaphanous, weightless, and atmospheric.

The paintings grouped as "Space," dated 1969 through 1972, were apparently inspired by reports of space travel, which Thomas followed primarily on the radio, sketching in response to what she heard, uninfluenced by the images broadcast on television. Apart from their titles, which include *A Glimpse of Mars* (1969, Private Collection, New York) and *Starry Night and the Astronauts* (1972, Art Institute of Chicago), the "Space" paintings are indistinguishable from other works made at the same time. Some are constructed with vertical rows of strokes, in clear colors, a few are unusually explicit suggestions of spaceships and (very atypically) a splash-down into the ocean, while one small, deep blue, nocturnal canvas is as loose and expansive as *Mars Dust*—which obviously belongs to the "Space" paintings. One of the most fascinating things about the "Space" paintings is that they were made by a woman who was twelve when the Wright Brothers made their first successful flight.

At the heart of the installation is a large selection of Thomas's vibrant watercolors and acrylics on paper, plus a few drawings, all undated but believed to have been made between 1960 and 1978; the great majority come from the Columbus Museum, Georgia, gifts from Thomas's sister. Many experiment with compositions and ways of using color developed further on canvas; others point to directions considered and abandoned. Some suggest that Thomas might have been looking at works by Clyfford Still or Barnett Newman and testing their implications, while some have the audacity of Arthur Dove's abstractions. Collectively, the works on paper provide an intimate portrait of Thomas and an informative context for the exhibition's canvases. There's also a comprehensive catalogue to be published soon, with a larger selection of works than is exhibited, essays by scholars of African-American art, including the curators, collected interviews with Thomas, and reviews of her shows.

The catalogue of the well-intentioned, but problematic exhibition "Women of Abstract Expressionism," organized by the Denver Art Museum, includes brief biographies and images of works by forty-two artists, among them Alma Thomas. (Only twelve are in the actual exhibition.) Thomas is represented by an unexceptional painting that has little to do with her mature work and even less to do with Abstract Expressionism. Far from celebrating Thomas, the inclusion implies that she was ignored, omitted from the male-dominated Abstract-Expressionist canon. Far from it. As "Alma Thomas" at the Studio Museum in Harlem demonstrates, she was not a marginalized Abstract Expressionist manqué, but a fearless and successful adventurer who followed an individual path. The exhibition sets the record straight by presenting Thomas as, I suspect, she would have wanted to be seen, represented by the achieved paintings that she was probably proudest of.

Detroit chronicle

by James Panero

Detroit is a city of art. Strange to say, but it's true. While much has left this impoverished, often heartbreaking metropolis, what remains, surprisingly, is a rich art history, which is today right on the surface. With origins that run deep and predate the automobile, Detroit's artistic roots flower over the city streets left empty by the cars that have, by and large, driven away. And they deserve attention, which is why I visited with the family on a late-summer road-trip, ten hours from New York, twelve by way of Niagara Falls—a rewarding and remarkable artistic pilgrimage.

It was a close call for Detroit to reach its current and still parlous state of the arts. Most of us had little idea of the Motor City's artistic legacy until it was almost too late. After decades of decline, the bankruptcies of General Motors and Chrysler in 2009 hastened Detroit's own insolvency, which in 2013 led to the largest municipal collapse in American history. Detroit was $18–20 billion in debt. As an emergency manager looked to liquidate assets, creditors made headlines as they closed in on the city's remaining jewel: the collection of the Detroit Institute of Arts, one of the country's great encyclopedic museums.

For most museums in the United States, even those on municipal land such as New York's Metropolitan Museum, permanent collections are secured by private institutions maintained in the public trust. For the Detroit Institute, or DIA as it is known, founded by the newspaper magnate James Scripps and incorporated as the Detroit Museum of Arts in 1888, the one-time wealth of Detroit encouraged its trustees to transfer ownership to the city in 1919.

The faith that those museum administrators once placed in the future of their city says much about the wild extremes Detroit has experienced over the last century. From a population of nearly 2 million in 1950, when it was arguably the richest city per capita in the country and the Silicon Valley of the Machine Age, today Detroit retains under 700,000 residents, experiencing a 25 percent decline in just the last decade as entire neighborhoods have been abandoned as ghost towns. A history of violence, Jim Crow, corruption, race riots, white flight, failed redevelopment, and monorails-to-nowhere has long accompanied these seismic shifts. Today much of the city seems more passively desolate than actively menacing, with weedy, empty streets and an abundance of graffiti-scarred architecture, some remaining from its Gilded Age. But such images of what have become known as Detroit's "ruin porn" only tell one side of the story. The arts give a broader picture of the full, continuing life of the city, and they may play an increasing role in its future.

This is not to say that the arts will "save Detroit," as some have suggested. The sociologist Richard Florida, who wrote *The Rise of the Creative Class* in 2001, has staked much on this messianic and largely unproven claim for rustbelt renewal. Instead, cities work best when the planners get out of the way of artists rather than attempting to use them as tools of gentrification. Basing your urban future on jet-setting bohemians coming to town for a

Matthew Barney film shoot is no way to keep the lights on and the water running, or, more to the point, strengthen the local cultural fabric.

In his scabrous 2012 book, *Detroit City Is the Place to Be*, Mark Binelli was onto something when he wrote that "any potential Detroit arts renaissance remains in its earliest phase of development, more about insane real estate opportunities and the romantic vision of a crumbling heartland Berlin—basically, vicarious wish fulfillment by coastal arts types living in long-gentrified cities—than an overarching homegrown aesthetic." Various reports of the founders of the Williamsburg, Brooklyn arts space Galapagos relocating to Detroit to develop (or flip) unused factory space have only fueled such creative-class speculation.

But Detroit *did* end up saving the art, starting with grassroots initiatives like the Heidelberg Project, founded in 1986 by the artist Tyree Guyton and his grandfather as a surreal outdoor installation over reclaimed buildings in the city's McDougall-Hunt neighborhood. The rescuing of DIA was a similar story of renewal that starts with the art itself. In 2014 Detroit's latter-day Monuments Men won a decisive battle for cultural reconstruction by fighting to reach what was called a "grand bargain" to save the museum. With a collection valued at $8.4 billion, and 2,800 objects worth between $454 and $867 million claimed by the city—including a self-portrait by Van Gogh estimated at $150 million—DIA successfully scrambled to raise hundred of millions of dollars from a combination of private, state, and corporate donors to pay off the creditors. In return, the art stayed on the walls, the museum returned to its pre-1919 status as a private, non-profit institution, and the people of the state demonstrated the value they place in Detroit's art history.

DIA is today in better shape than its Detroit surroundings, which isn't saying much, but those expecting to find a museum that is partially finished (like the Brooklyn Museum) or partially closed (like today's Met) will be surprised at its institutional polish. DIA's rise out of Detroit's ashes has stoked its institutional enthusiasm as one of the best half-dozen museums in the country. A visit here alone is worth the trip.

Starting in the 1920s, DIA's museum director Wilhelm Valentiner, following the German model, was the first to arrange his collection by nation and chronology, rather than type. He also greatly increased DIA's collection of modern art and was responsible for its single most well-known, and controversial, installation: Diego Rivera's *Detroit Industry*.

Personally, politically, dietetically, Rivera was a repellent individual, but you can see why capitalists from Rockefeller to Ford became enamored of the unrepentant Marxist. Painted over twenty-seven panels, floor to ceiling, from 1932 to 1933 in the museum's light-filled central court, *Detroit Industry* captures the one-time dynamism of the city in a swirling, hallucinatory tableau. This "iconized Marxist fantasia of working-class solidarity and collective toil," as Binelli describes it, unites the workers of the north, the farmers of the south, and the raw materials of the Americas in one interconnected utopian vision. The didacticism of the spectacle is saved by its strangeness, as Rivera worked in imagery of the Aztec goddess Coatlicue, Frida Kahlo's miscarriage, and the kidnapped Lindbergh baby—pagan currents flowing in the chthonic depths beneath Detroit's River Rouge. (The dense iconography is today supplemented by an excellent multimedia guide on DIA's website, which is also available on touch screens in the gallery.)

A sense for the subterranean runs throughout the artists of Detroit, especially those responding to its decades of decline. The late artist Mike Kelley, who was born in 1954 in a working-class suburb of Detroit, was a patron saint of the post-apocalyptic city even after he relocated west, exhuming the afterbirth of its marriage of man and machine. Much of this was on display in Kelley's arresting PS1 retrospective in 2014. A member of the alt-rock band Destroy All Monsters, Kelley connected Detroit art and music, a scene which gave rise not only to Motown Records but also to the punk aesthetic of MC5 and The Stooges, and later techno—music, in various ways, all connected with the internal combustion engine and the sounds of the assembly line. In 2014, an exhibition called "Another Look at Detroit (Parts 1 and 2)" at New York's Marianne Boesky and Marlborough Chelsea, arguably the best gallery shows of the

year, made explicit these cultural connections by gathering some hundred objects by seventy artists from over two centuries of Detroit cultural history. This magisterial "tone poem" was the work of the art consultant and Detroit native Todd Levin—whom I must also thank for suggesting I try the world's best pancakes at a Detroit motel diner called Clique.

Just down Woodward Avenue from DIA is the Museum of Contemporary Art Detroit. Mainly a Kunsthalle for contemporary shows, the museum's big surprise can be found behind the parking lot. What looks like a modest prefab ranch house oddly positioned on an urban block is Mike Kelley's *Mobile Homestead*. An uncanny reconstruction of his childhood home, the building now hosts rotating installations and a street-legal, detachable entryway that has already gone cross country. According to Kelley's posthumous wishes (he committed suicide in 2012), the house is built with two private subterranean levels: a windowless duplicate floorplan beneath the ground level and, below that, a series of tunnels and ladders to connect the doorless rooms. A post-war dream atop a post-apocalyptic nightmare, the building serves as a chilling artist memorial.

A Detroit-area cultural institution very much in contrast with all this is Cranbrook, a school and cultural complex nestled in the sylvan and still- wealthy suburb of Bloomfield Hills. Founded in the 1920s, this institution may be best known today as the prep school where Mitt Romney bullied his classmates. But the Cranbrook Academy of Art also represents the prewar ideals of Detroit design given fascinating form in a pristine Arts and Crafts and Art Deco campus created by Eliel Saarinen. The Eameses both came from here, and Eliel's son Eero went on to adapt the styles of Cranbrook for the jet age.

My trip to the Cranbrook Art Museum largely left me wanting more, as the campus's extensive permanent collection is now sequestered in a new "Collections Wing" that is only open for one hour a week while the museum is given over to special and not-so-special exhibitions. Through October 9, the museum's new director has imported his exhibition from the Walker Art Museum on "Hippie Modernism," which makes a few interesting connections between Sixties utopianism and the dawn of the Information Age but mostly smells of patchouli and BO. It also has nothing to do with the school. Fortunately my visit was redeemed by a smaller, more technical exhibition downstairs on Pewabic Pottery, the ceramics studio and school founded in Detroit in 1903. I also took a detailed tour of the impeccable Saarinen House and Garden. As a total work of art, Cranbrook serves to remind us that Detroit, at its height, was a city of design that made flying sculptures and not just modes of auto-mobility.

Back in Detroit, the contemporary gallery scene is small but sophisticated and growing, with several venues that have recently moved to the city. Wasserman Projects is a Chelsea-style space a block from the city's extensive Eastern Market that over the summer was showing a group exhibition, including a whimsically enlarged notepad doodle by Michael Scoggins and a delicate collage of "oil, latex, gold leaf, string, soap, pencil" by Ed Fraga. Downtown, David Klein Gallery casts a wide and intelligent eye over the alternative scene by bringing together painters such as Brooke Moyse, Gary Peterson, and Mark Sengbusch. Over the summer, Galerie Camille, another smart venue just north in Midtown, brought together the artists Jeff Bourgeau and Matt Eaton in an elegant exhibition of Colorfield painting with a twist. As much an exhibition of process as of product, Eaton's layered compositions of acrylic and spray paint contrasted with Bourgeau's pixelated computer printouts of painterly forms.

My last stop proved to be a highlight: the opening of "It Runs Deep" at a gallery called Baby Grand in a burned-over corner of the city's Southwest. This group show of Detroit-area artists, including Amber Locke, Alivia Zivich, Audra Wolowiec, Daniel Sperry, Kylie Lockewood, Margo Wolowiec, Nikolas Pence, Romain Blanquart, and Scott Reeder, was perfectly installed in the front rooms of an Arts and Crafts home that the owner of the gallery has named for its piano and illuminated only with natural light. The sensitivity of the works, from Wolowiec's sound installation to Reeder's abstraction, speaks to the personal, the underground, and the hidden spirit of the arts in Detroit—which now, after a thaw, is beginning to grow into the light of day.

Music

Salzburg chronicle

by Jay Nordlinger

Richard Strauss was a founder of the Salzburg Festival, along with Hugo von Hofmannsthal, Max Reinhardt, and some others. He gets plenty of play at the festival, Strauss does. But then, he gets plenty of play everywhere—and should.

One morning, a concert of the Vienna Philharmonic Orchestra began with Strauss's suite *Der Bürger als Edelmann*, which we know in English as *Le Bourgeois gentilhomme*. (That's a funny sentence, isn't it?) This score is nimble, goofy, charming, and Viennesey. The VPO should be to the manner born. And they played it fairly well, although I would have appreciated even more Vienneseyness. The music was a little dry. Conducting was Riccardo Muti, the veteran Italian. He was a neat manager of the suite, and he navigated Strauss's tricky rhythms with ease.

The suite has an extensive part for solo violin, which was assigned to the concertmaster, Rainer Küchl. He joined the VPO as a concertmaster when he was twenty years old. Forty-five years later, he is retiring.

After intermission, Muti led the VPO in a Bruckner symphony, though one rarely played: the Second. Bruckner's symphonies are often thought of as "cathedrals in sound," and the VPO knows how to construct a Brucknerian cathedral. It did not take me long to forget the orchestra, and Muti, and think entirely of Bruckner. Or music. The second movement, the Adagio, was warmly hymn-like. It reflected appreciation, and also longing. The rocking at the end was utterly even. In the Scherzo, Muti was tight but not choking. He had a superb sense of timing, including rests.

As for the Finale, I think it is almost entirely without musical merit. I think it is unworthy of Bruckner. But I would not throw the baby out with the bathwater—I would not throw out the Second on account of its finale. And I may even be wrong about *it*.

That night, another Bruckner symphony was played, in a sense: a group of chamber musicians performed the composer's String Quintet in F, which is like a smaller-scale symphony. A smaller-scale *Bruckner* symphony, I should stress. The musicians were members of the Vienna Philharmonic. Sitting in the first violin's chair, and exerting quiet leadership, was another concertmaster, Volkhard Steude. He was excellent, as was the group at large. They played with understanding, commitment, beauty, and unity. I think Bruckner would have been grateful for their performance.

After intermission, these five were joined by another player—a cellist, for Schoenberg's *Verklärte Nacht* (*Transfigured Night*). Their playing was almost indecent. I mean, they played with tremendous passion, even sensuality. I thought of a contemporary phrase: "TMI," meaning "too much information." The audience cheered for these six as for Callas after *Tosca*.

Then the group made a mistake, in my opinion: they played an encore, and an exceptionally long encore. Unless my memory is playing tricks on me, it was the Prelude to *Tristan und Isolde* (Wagner). In my view, an encore, especially one of this length, was unnecessary. The players had already given the audience a full and very satisfying meal. To add

insult to injury, they did not play the encore very well. It seemed under-rehearsed. I was interested to note that, when I left the hall, I had the Schoenberg in my head.

Two footnotes, if I may: One of the cellists in this concert was Edison Pashko, born in Albania in 1973. (This was the teeth of the Hoxha dictatorship.) I'm fond of his name. Maybe his parents appreciated electricity? Also, the entire group—excluding a female violinist—was in white tie. This was a marked contrast with today's standard black pajamas.

The next night was very much a black-pajama evening. Again, it was a chamber concert, and it was one with a musicological point to make: the relationship between Schumann and Kurtág (György Kurtág, the Hungarian composer born in 1926). Included in the program were two recent works, related to the evening's theme, or point.

There were three players: Mark Simpson, clarinet; Antoine Tamestit, viola; and Pierre-Laurent Aimard, piano. Aimard was part of Pierre Boulez's outfit in Paris, way back. According to his official bio, he is "widely acclaimed as a key figure in the music of our time and as a uniquely significant interpreter of piano repertoire from every age." Regardless, he is a good and smart musician. So is Tamestit. Indeed, he is one of the world's outstanding instrumentalists. So is Simpson, an Englishman born in 1988. He is not only a clarinetist but a composer. And it was with his music that the evening began.

He wrote *Hommage à Kurtág*, for the three instruments assembled. The work is in four movements, and Simpson makes each part fit. That is, he weaves clarinet, viola, and piano lines expertly. The music is by turns bluesy, impish, rhapsodic, outré, haunting, desperate, mysterious, and nervous. Very, very nervous. As I keep saying, the current period in music ought to be known as the Age of Anxiety.

The second half of the concert began with the other recent work on the program: *Hommage à Gy. K.*, which pays tribute to Kurtág's *Hommage à R. Sch*. The recent work is by Marco Stroppa, an Italian born in 1959. He too once worked in Boulez's shop. Throughout his seven movements, he has the clarinetist and violist occupy different positions on the stage. (The pianist is pretty much stuck.) He also has the clarinetist switch instruments—to bass clarinet. His music is full of squiggles, slides, flutters, and plucks. It is no doubt brainy. I must ask—pardon my rudeness—Do these composers write for one another, or do they intend to appeal to a general audience?

In any event, there were two Japanese children in the audience that night—and they were the soul of patience. Also, the three players, whatever they played, always exhibited technical skill and musical affinity.

Onstage the next night was a Strauss opera: *Die Liebe der Danae*, or *The Love of Danae*, or *Danae's Love*. It is not very often performed. And it is utterly Straussian. What do I mean by that, given that Strauss had distinct periods, like Picasso and Stravinsky? Well, through all his periods, he was still Strauss: sinuous and sensuous. The third and final act of *Danae* is especially prized. And the entire opera owes everything—certainly a lot—to Wagner. Of course, that is true of much music post-Wagner.

Salzburg's production was by Alvis Hermanis, the Latvian director. I deplored his *Trovatore* (Verdi). His *Danae*, however, proved wonderful: an Oriental, or quasi-Oriental, spectacle. It was somewhat psychedelic, to use a word from the Sixties. It had an elephant (fake) and a donkey (real). (So, both Republicans and Democrats were covered.) Dancers were wrapped entirely in gold. Naturally, I thought of an American group from the Eighties: the Solid Gold Dancers.

Also, there were burkas—which have been popping up in Salzburg productions. A local lady told me, "It used to be that everything was Nazis. Now everything is burkas."

The tenor in *Danae*, portraying Midas (hence the gold), was Gerhard Siegel. He was rugged. The bass-baritone, portraying Jupiter, was Tomasz Konieczny, who was smooth, gleaming, and untiring. But enough of the men. Strauss was drunk on the soprano voice, and his Danae is a soprano, and he would have loved Krassimira Stoyanova, the great Bulgarian. She was radiant, warm, and good. That is, she radiated goodness. And she sang with complete freedom.

Honestly, Stoyanova as Danae was a peak operatic experience for me.

Arcadi Volodos, the Russian pianist, played a recital. Before it began, I had a bone to pick with him, mentally—a bone I had picked before. It went something like this: "Arcadi, you are one of the great virtuosos of the world. You can do things, technically, that few others can. Yet you insist on playing programs composed entirely of inward, poetic music—the kind that elderly Germans have long been renowned for playing. It's like you're saying, 'I'm more than a Russian virtuoso, you know!' We know. You have amply proven that. You can afford to take your fingers out for a walk once in a while. No one would hold it against you. Would it kill you to play a Rachmaninoff prelude? How about an inward one?"

Volodos began this latest recital with a relatively light work, Schumann's *Papillons*. (And, to be sure, this piece requires some technique. Every piece does, in a sense.) He stumbled out of the gate—that is, he missed a note. He committed a clinker. Even Homer nods. Horowitz used to stumble out of the gate, too. People chalked it up to nerves. Volodos played *Papillons* well, of course. He showed his beautiful singing tone. He also demonstrated how to pedal, certainly in this work. Yet the music was a little heavy, for my taste. A little big. Somewhat deficient in humor, a little self-serious.

He continued with three Brahms pieces: the Intermezzos, Op. 117. These pieces are very personal. Personal to the listener, I mean. We all have a way we think they ought to go. We all have an ideal conception of them, in our own heads. Volodos plays them essentially the way I think they ought to go. He comes as close as anyone—which, obviously, is gratifying (to this listener).

After intermission, Volodos played one work, a late Schubert sonata, as is his wont. This one was the Sonata in A, D. 959. I found myself slightly resentful: How many times does a recital-goer have to hear this work? Can we give it a rest maybe? As we should give the even more exposed B-flat a rest?

Any resentment melted away shortly after Volodos started playing. The first movement was beautifully judged. I forgot Volodos—forgot interpretation—and listened only to Schubert. In fact, I want to say there *was* no interpretation. It was just Schubert. The next movement, the Andantino, was perfectly calibrated. And calibration is the name of the game in this movement.

The Scherzo requires no little technique—which, of course, Volodos has. This allows him to concentrate solely on the music. It allows his audience to do the same. As for the closing Rondo, it had more character than ever—but Schubert's character, the music's character, not a performer's. All through this sonata, Volodos gave us an example of pure music-making.

And I forgave him, mentally: "Arcadi, you can play this kind of program whenever you want. Never mind the virtuosic stuff."

He played almost a "second recital," as we used to say—offering a slew of encores. The first was his regular Schubert encore: the odd, clockwork Minuet in C-sharp minor, D. 600. It was exemplary, as usual. Then he played—lo and behold—a Rachmaninoff piece: his arrangement of a song, "Melody," from Op. 21. His third encore was a little Impressionistic piece by Mompou, a composer Volodos favors and champions: *Jeunes filles au jardin*. It was lacy, delicate, and beguiling. Then he really took his fingers out for a walk—with his own, souped-up version of an old favorite, *Malagueña*, by the Cuban composer Lecuona. The piece was dazzling, thrilling, while never departing from musical taste.

Volodos bade farewell with another of his favorite encores: Bach's Sicilienne in D minor, after Vivaldi. It was like a benediction—sublime. And Volodos didn't try to *do* anything to it. He was practically matter-of-fact. He just let it do its simple, stunning work.

Above, I said that hearing Stoyanova in *Die Liebe der Danae* was a peak experience for me. This recital was another. I have been hearing pianists in recital since Horowitz and Gilels. I promise you, I have never heard a better one.

The next night, a native of Salzburg—Mozart—was on the stage, in the form of *Don Giovanni*. There are two men at the top, so to speak: Giovanni and his valet, Leporello. On this night, they were Ildebrando D'Arcangelo and Luca Pisaroni. They worked well together and singly. D'Arcangelo was a smoldering,

volatile Giovanni, strutting around in his sleeveless shirt, showing off his physique. He was all danger and testosterone. No wonder women were falling for him, including women who should know better. Pisaroni is one of the most likable performers in opera, and he was an ultra-likable Leporello. He deployed the common touch, while singing uncommonly (uncommonly well). You could hardly take your eyes or ears off him.

D'Arcangelo and Pisaroni are both natives—native Italians, that is—and there is a lot of talking in this opera, especially between those two characters. Quick, slangy talking, a patter. It was a treat to hear the two leads do it. A native facility makes a difference.

Incidentally, I met a newcomer to *Don Giovanni*, a college student from England, at intermission. She was leaving. She was repulsed by the story, "as a modern feminist." I told her that the Don would be sent down to hell. She was still leaving. One can understand.

On the following night, a foreign orchestra, from Cleveland, took the stage. They were conducted by an Austrian, their music director, Franz Welser-Möst. Joining them was a star soloist, Anja Harteros, the great German soprano. She would sing Strauss's *Four Last Songs*. I figured this would be a highlight—if not *the* highlight—of the festival. It was fine. Did the songs work their magic? Did they achieve their transcendence? I would say not. I found the whole affair rather earthbound. At least one friend—a musician himself—disagreed with me, strongly. Concert life can be curious.

The next morning, Mariss Jansons stood in front of the Vienna Philharmonic. The first piece on their program was a Mozart piano concerto, that in E flat, K. 482. Mozart is a noble soul. So is Jansons. Mozart has a streak of mirth. Jansons can summon it too. He and this concerto were a good match (with the VPO doing its part too, of course). The soloist was Emanuel Ax, who played intelligently—often beautifully, too. He demonstrated smooth phrase after smooth phrase. If he occasionally lacked charisma, he never did anything ungainly or unmusical.

Earlier in this chronicle, I mentioned a long, and overlong, encore. For his part, Ax played a famous waltz by Chopin, that in A minor. It's a little long for an encore, after a concerto, I think. It has several sections. And Ax hurried the piece, just slightly. Did he have a sense that it was an imperfect choice?

After intermission, Jansons conducted Bruckner's Symphony No. 6. Talk about noble soul and noble soul. Moreover, the VPO poured forth its grateful sound, with the brass loud, loud, without blaring. (How do they do that?) I have reservations about the Sixth, but since I have already criticized the Second, I am laying off the Sixth. To spend an hour bathed by Bruckner, Jansons, and the VPO is to spend a fortunate hour indeed. And you were not only bathed but uplifted.

That night, an American musical took the stage: Leonard Bernstein's *West Side Story*. Cecilia Bartoli was Maria. The conceit of the production was this: Maria is now twenty years older than she was when Tony was shot dead, and she is remembering everything that happened. So Bartoli stood around, looking pensive, anxious, etc., while a young actress played Maria. Bartoli did the singing for Maria, whenever required. The Tony both acted and sang. In my view, the conceit was unnecessary. Bartoli would have made a believable Maria, certainly for people beyond the first rows. And may I remind you that Cio-Cio-San, in *Madama Butterfly*, is supposed to be fifteen? Often she is portrayed by a battle axe. The score requires it.

In Maria's music, Bartoli tended to be breathy, and she was miked—like everyone else in this show. Also, she took some unwise liberties, warping the music. "Somewhere," for example, should be relatively straight—it sells itself. But Bartoli's sincerity and heart? They always win the day. Tony was Norman Reinhardt, an American tenor, and he filled the bill. That splendid aria "Maria" was beautiful and suitably wide-eyed, or giddy. A solid technique undergirded it. It was well-nigh Polenzani-esque. Gustavo Dudamel, conducting his Simón Bolívar orchestra from Venezuela, was idiomatic, sensitive, and exciting. He conducted the hell out of the score. Bernstein would have been pleased.

I don't know how much of his classical music will last. But *West Side Story*? It should live forever, an American masterpiece, and a masterpiece, period.

The media

After the fact

by James Bowman

"What journalism is about is to attack everybody," said the late Warren Hinckle, the sometime editor of *Ramparts*, according to his obituary in *The New York Times* this past August. (See Peter Collier's feature earlier in this issue.) "First you decide what's wrong, then you go out to find the facts to support that view, and then you generate enough controversy to attract attention." Though the article, by William Grimes, seems to associate this attitude with what it calls "the no-holds-barred reporting style known as gonzo journalism," it could also describe the approach to the news implicitly advocated on the paper's front page a couple of weeks earlier by Jim Rutenberg:

> If you're a working journalist and you believe that Donald J. Trump is a demagogue playing to the nation's worst racist and nationalistic tendencies, that he cozies up to anti-American dictators, and that he would be dangerous with control of the United States nuclear codes, how the heck are you supposed to cover him? Because if you believe all of those things, you have to throw out the textbook American journalism has been using for the better part of the past half- century, if not longer, and approach it in a way you've never approached anything in your career. If you view a Trump presidency as something that's potentially dangerous, then your reporting is going to reflect that. You would move closer than you've ever been to being oppositional. That's uncomfortable and uncharted territory for every mainstream, non-opinion journalist I've ever known, and by normal standards, untenable. But the question that everyone is grappling with is: Do normal standards apply? And if they don't, what should take their place?

The difference between Mr. Hinckle and Mr. Rutenberg is that the former knew what he was doing while the latter treats his advocacy of one political party or tendency as if it were a higher form of "objectivity"—to use a word that appears in the headline but not the body of his article. For sheer irony-blindness—which Mr. Rutenberg obviously shares with his editors—it would be hard to beat this, though Paul Farhi in *The Washington Post* came close when he wrote to express his shock on discovering that there were people on TV, even (if you can believe it) CNN, who were passing themselves off as pundits but could be more accurately described as propagandists for one candidate or—well, mostly only one candidate. Guess which one. True, he did acknowledge that CNN "also employs a number of identifiable advocates for Democrat Hillary Clinton. . . . But veteran pundits say that not all TV commentators are created equal and that there are nuances in pundit partisanship." Just so: "nuances" that tend to favor the view that there is a big difference between Trump-supporting pundits and those who support, say, Hillary Clinton. Naturally, the latter are to be considered "independent," the former not.

Both the *Times* and the *Post* must now assume that any readers of those papers with a different view of media "independence" or

"normal standards" will long since have been purged, leaving a rump of true progressive believers who are likely to take the same view of their own and others' impartiality and objectivity—and of the Trump menace which now threatens it—that Messrs. Rutenberg and Farhi do. The progressive ideology which alone can make such absurdities plausible is now taken for granted. So it is by most of those highbrow pundits who have lately introduced a new media talking point in the ongoing anatomization of Mr. Trump as the dangerous political and social phenomenon they take him to be. This is the idea of the "post-truth" (or, sometimes, "post-fact") political culture, a media meme which appears to have grown out of numerous comparisons drawn, especially in the British media but later by Donald Trump himself, between his campaign and the "Brexit" referendum in June which produced a shock result in favor of British withdrawal from the European Union.

For example, Catherine Bennett of *The Guardian* proved a British equivalent of Jim Rutenberg when she wrote of how "the BBC's fixation on 'balance' skews the truth." Though she came to the subject more than two months too late to save Britain's E.U. Remainders, she thought it worth protesting just the same since, like Mr. Rutenberg too, she found it natural to assume that impartiality could be at odds with "the truth" only when it tended to favor those who disagreed with her.

> As with climate change, implicit in extreme BBC impartiality is a distinctly un-BBC-like, post-truth proposal that, since all opinions merit equal coverage, the public might as well give up on evidence-based argument. So much was plainly stated by *Today*'s Nick Robinson when he assured voters [in the E.U. referendum] who were, in huge numbers, seeking information from the BBC that the debate was all "claims and counterclaims," "guesswork." "No journalist," he declared, "no pundit, no expert can resolve these questions for you."

The idea! What are journalists and pundits (like Ms. Bennett, for instance) for if not to resolve these questions for you, and others like you, who must be either willing dupes or hopelessly unable to make up your own minds? Like Jim Rutenberg again, she is incapable of self-irony and never for a moment doubts the absolute authority of her own "claims and counterclaims" to be accepted as truth. At least she purports to base her claims on their being allegedly "evidence-based." Mr. Rutenberg and *The New York Times* simply assume the journalist's moral authority to decide what is truth and what is not.

Catherine Bennett's use of the expression "extreme impartiality" took me back more than forty years to a speech by her late fellow-countryman Harold Wilson, then Prime Minister, to the Labour Party conference in 1975 in which he characterized Labour's intramural strife (which, after a period of quiescence under the leadership of Tony Blair, has lately broken out again under that of Jeremy Corbyn). "This party," said Wilson "needs to protect itself against the activities of small groups of inflexible political persuasion, extreme so-called left and in a few cases extreme so-called moderates, having in common only their arrogant dogmatism." There, the words "so-called" saved him from the absurdity of "extreme moderates," but he was still relying on the rhetorical poison of "extremism" used absolutely and without reference to any continuum (except for that of his own distaste) on which the offending opinion might be supposed to stand at the extreme end. "Extreme impartiality" is a similar formulation and meant to taint the very idea of impartiality as something that journalism might aspire to—as an alternative to her own calls to advocacy.

Ironically, such calls themselves depend on the "post-truth" political culture they inveigh against. Another and somewhat more thoughtful Briton, one William Davies of Goldsmiths (formerly Goldsmiths' College, formerly Goldsmiths' Technical and Recreative Institute) of the University of London, took to the op-ed page of the *Times* a couple of weeks after Jim Rutenberg appeared on the front one to announce that "we have entered an age of post-truth politics." Although his prime exhibits in evidence for this conten-

tion were, like Ms. Bennett's, Donald Trump and the Brexit campaign, he seemed to think there was more to this post-truth era than the implausible successes of people he didn't like. "We are in the middle of a transition," he wrote,

> from a society of facts to a society of data. During this interim, confusion abounds surrounding the exact status of knowledge and numbers in public life, exacerbating the sense that truth itself is being abandoned. . . . The promise of facts is to settle arguments between warring perspectives and simplify the issues at stake. . . . The promise of data, by contrast, is to sense shifts in public sentiment. By analyzing Twitter using algorithms, for example, it is possible to get virtually real-time updates on how a given politician is perceived. This is what's known as "sentiment analysis."

"It is possible," wrote Mr. Davies, "to live in a world of data but no facts"—which certainly seems to describe the world we have been living in for some months now. But I think it would be more accurate and even more factual to say that it is *necessary*, when you live in a world of data, to say goodbye to facts. By a sort of Gresham's Law of information, data drives out facts by devaluing them to its own level. "How can we still be speaking of 'facts,'" Mr. Davies asks, "when they no longer provide us with a reality that we all agree on?" The answer is that we can't. Reality as such has itself disappeared, along with the facts, in the sea of data that promises infinite adaptability to our own, partisan purposes and whatever realities, plural, may suit them best.

The media, of course, find it convenient to go on using words like "facts" and "truth" and "reality" just as if their meanings were unchanged—as, indeed, we would expect such meanings to be. So do the political candidates and their media apologists who accuse each other of "lies"—or, more fashionably, being "post-truth" or out of touch with that reality that we are now all of us out of touch with, thanks to the work of the media's purveyors of new and better realities. It is this multiplication of nonce realities and not an anachronistic and misplaced journalistic conscience about balance and impartiality which leads to headlines like: "Clinton, Trump exchange racially charged accusations" or "Trump, Clinton declare each other unfit to serve as commander in chief." It wouldn't take a whole lot of self-awareness applied to their own moral irreproachability, their own intimacy with the truth, for reporters and editors to see the absurdity in reporting as news that the candidates are insulting each other—and with no hint that the news itself, as it is now understood, has encouraged and even required such disgraceful behavior in order for the media to take notice of the candidates at all.

In an otherwise typically partisan piece in *Granta*, Peter Pomerantsev seems at least dimly aware that there is more involved in what he calls our "'post-fact' or 'post-truth' world" than just the supposed mendacity of Mr. Trump or the Brexiteers.

> This equaling out of truth and falsehood is both informed by and takes advantage of an all-permeating late postmodernism and relativism, which has trickled down over the past thirty years from academia to the media and then everywhere else. This school of thought has taken Nietzsche's maxim, there are no facts, only interpretations, to mean that every version of events is just another narrative, where lies can be excused as "an alternative point of view" or "an opinion," because "it's all relative" and "everyone has their own truth" (and on the internet they really do).

Yet in the end it doesn't appear to have trickled down quite so far as to reach Mr. Pomerantsev himself but only to those he happens to disagree with, who also happen to be the usual suspects in the left's rogues' gallery.

> "The twenty-first century is not characterized by the search for new- ness" wrote the late Russian-American philologist Svetlana Boym, "but by the proliferation of nostalgias . . . nostalgic nationalists and nostalgic cosmopolitans, nostalgic environmentalists and nostalgic metrophiliacs (city lovers) exchange pixel fire in the blogosphere."

> Thus Putin's internet-troll armies sell dreams of a restored Russian Empire and Soviet Union; Trump tweets to "Make America Great Again"; Brexiteers yearn for a lost England on Facebook; while ISIS's viral snuff movies glorify a mythic Caliphate. "Restorative nostalgia," argued Boym, strives to rebuild the lost homeland with "paranoiac determination," thinks of itself as "truth and tradition," obsesses over grand symbols and "relinquish[es] critical thinking for emotional bonding. . . . In extreme cases it can create a phantom homeland, for the sake of which one is ready to die or kill. Unreflective nostalgia can breed monsters."

Does she then suppose that the actual homelands for the sake of which actual people have actually died and killed within living memory are also the "phantom" creations of mere nostalgia? Those of us of a conservative bent have long since learned to recognize in the raising of the specter of "nostalgia" an attack on ourselves—especially, perhaps, on our defense of the family and traditional morality, as in Stephanie Coontz's *The Way We Never Were* (and *passim* for the last twenty years). But, as R. R. Reno pointed out last year in a lecture titled "Thinking Critically about Critical Thinking," that which Ms. Boym prefers to "emotional bonding" is not so easily relinquished nor so readily disentangled from "critical thinking" as she supposes. For, just as "extremism" has to be extreme about something, so critical thinking has to be critical about something, and neither term can be of much use without specifying what that something is—the something, in the latter case, to be affirmed before it can be criticized. I think what some people mind about when President Obama goes on one of his international "apology tours"—as he did again recently in Laos—or when a professional football player refuses to stand for the national anthem, or when both flatter (as much as they dare) the Black Lives Matter movement, is the lack of this sense of prior affirmation, expressed or implied. Their criticisms do not seem to come from within, from a love of the thing criticized. Instead, by echoing our country's enemies, they suggest the same ideologically-founded enmity to what America is, has been, and still stands for in most of the world.

In other words, as in Warren Hinckle's day, bias is giving way to mere advocacy because the political culture has again become (rhetorically, at least) revolutionary—which is the only way so established a figure as Mrs. Clinton can claim to be the candidate of "change." She and her fellow progressives, like the revolutionaries of old, have themselves created the "post-truth" era as the quickest way to claim for their own ideology the "truth" that everyone else is supposed to be "post." But their certainty of owning the truth has only served as a permission to the other side to emulate it. That's how we do politics now: by each side shouting "liar" and "bigot" at the other because post-truth culture has given them title to their own, proprietorial truth. Mr. Trump is simply playing the game the way the progressives do, without the gentlemanly reserve and forbearance of a Bush or a McCain or a Romney. At least he doesn't pretend to any high-mindedness about his scurrility and vulgarity.

In the pre-post-truth era, Mr. Trump's appeal to patriotism might have been expected to prevail over Hillary Clinton's claims to moral superiority over Mr. Trump and those "deplorable" and unsophisticated millions who support him. No more. The late Irving Kristol once said of Mr. Trump's predecessor as the American Left's chief bogeyman, Senator Joseph McCarthy, that the American people knew one thing about him: that "he, like them, is unequivocally anti-Communist. About the spokesmen for American liberalism, they feel they know no such thing." Large-C Communism is now supposed to be defunct, but its utopianism, its historicism and much of its anti-Americanism live on in the progressive left. We shall see in November if, sixty years on from Senator McCarthy, the utopian, politically correct dream has become more compelling to a twenty-first century American electorate than Mr. Trump's mere nostalgia for a long-dead past. If that is what it is.

Books

Mr. Tough Love

by James F. Penrose

In the spring of 1938, the publisher William Morrow & Co. approached Virgil Thomson for a book on music and contemporary culture. It was a great idea, though perhaps not quite in the way that Morrow thought.

Objectively, it was a great idea because if anyone knew the subject, it was Thomson. He spent a lot of time in Paris, still a hive of creative activity, where he kept a flat on the quai Voltaire, and was a keen participant in Paris's frothy musical life. When not in Paris, he patrolled the East Coast between Boston and New York trying to stir up interest in his opera *Four Saints in Three Acts*, his ballet (the unprepossessingly titled *Filling Station*), and other music. On top of that, he could write, and write he did with lively pieces on the French musical scene for the *Boston Evening Transcript* and new American music for *Modern Music*, and with sassy articles for *Vanity Fair*. He was a classically trained musician with a classy prose style who fought in the musical trenches of two continents.

The bad news (for Morrow) was that while *The State of Music* got sensational reviews when it was published in 1939, it sold only a few thousand copies and was regarded as a commercial dud. The good news (for Thomson) was that one of those copies was read by the cultural editor of *The New York Herald Tribune*, who met Thomson over a boozy lunch after his evacuation from France in 1939, liked him, and offered him a job as music critic to replace the late Lawrence Gilman. That was the start of fourteen years of uproarious and compulsively readable music criticism republished a few years back by the Library of America in *Virgil Thomson: Music Chronicles 1940–1954*. More good news, this time for us: the Library has continued with a second volume offering us *The State of Music*, selections from *American Music Since 1910* (1971), the posthumously published *Music with Words* (1989), occasional essays and reviews of books on musicians, and Thomson's eponymous biography.[1] The works in this volume show Thomson's characteristic go-straight-at-'em-take-no-prisoners style. It is rich stuff, however, and the longer works are best consumed in several courses rather than at one sitting.

When Thomson retired in 1954, it was ostensibly to concentrate on composing and the performance of his own works. While he composed several songs and a Requiem in the next few years, in that latter aspect he failed; Thomson was not the only person to convince himself that he would be enthusiastically welcomed outside of the bully pulpit and he had gored too many sacred cows. But there was another reason, as he tells us in his autobiography published a dozen years after his retirement. He was tired:

> I came to realize, once I had given up reviewing, that I could not bear the stuff [listening to

1 *Virgil Thomson: The State of Music and Other Writings*, edited by Tim Page; The Library of America, 1,169 pages, $50.

> music] in any form. Moreover, observing my [fellow critics who composed], I realized that they too were finding music unattractive. . . . In America, where the very air we breathe is oversaturated with processed auditory stimuli, the composer . . . finds the whole musical hoopla unacceptable.

Five years in the writing, his autobiography *Virgil Thomson* describes his early life in Missouri, his time at Harvard, life in the Twenties, and his on-again, off-again friendship with Aaron Copland. The autobiography, though lively and engaging, has gaps. It reveals little about the war years or about Thomson's intimate life—he was from an age and lived in a generation that disapproved of such disclosures. And curious, if only as an example of Thomson's relaxed (or oblivious) view of what was to come, are the chapters about Paris in 1939 when he tells us how he threw Friday night parties, composed his musical "portraits" of friends, savored the first peaches and fillets of fawn ("tender, pale pink, and no more than an inch across") of 1939, and played Bach and Mozart just as the Wehrmacht's tanks were rolling into town with *le tout Paris* evacuating just below his window. Name-dropping is a common feature of autobiographies but can sometimes lead to surprises: Thomson tells us that when he finally evacuated, he was accompanied by one Suzanne Blum, described as "one of my small handful of French with whom misunderstanding has never occurred." This would be the same Suzanne Blum who, as the lawyer to the aged and incompetent Duchess of Windsor (widow of the abdicated Edward VIII), stashed her away to die in the royal couple's house in the Bois de Boulogne and dissipated her estate. Though all this happened long after the autobiography went to press, it suggests that despite Thomson's critical eminence, as with the rest of us, his people judgment occasionally misfired.

The State of Music was a call to action to the musical world to take control of its commercial affairs, dumping "the amateurs and businessmen who were still trying to administer our properties when they couldn't even handle their own." Written in Paris, it is a polemic structured as a series of amusingly titled essays such as "Our Island Home, OR *What it feels like to be a musician*," "How Composers Eat, OR *Who does what to whom and who gets paid*," and "Why Composers Write How, OR *The economic determinism of musical style*." Thomson states that while every profession is a "secret society" and compares music to the other arts, he goes on to claim that the musical world (the "island home") is "the only purely auditory thing there is. It is comprehensible only to persons who remember sounds . . . [which] gives them access to a secret civilization completely impenetrable by outsiders." In his preface to the 1961 edition, Thomson admitted that while the work was dated as regards fees and cost of living, that its premise—if musicians do not take care of their affairs, nobody else would—still applied, and that if not careful, "some church, some state, some business combine will be running their lives." Still true, and not just for musicians.

Have you ever wondered why, listening to broadcast classical music, one hears the same works played time and again? What we are hearing, for the most part, is loosely termed the "standard repertory," and one could be forgiven for thinking that, apart from the standard repertory, the remaining 99.5 percent of western classical music was somehow unworthy of programming. Thomson alludes to this in The Appreciation-racket, part of the essay "Why Composers Write How," when he explains that:

> Music is neither taught nor defined. It is preached. A certain limited repertory of pieces, ninety per cent of them a hundred years old, is assumed to contain most that the world has to offer of musical beauty and authority . . . ninety per cent of [this repertory] is the same fifty pieces. The other ten is usually devoted to good-will performances by local celebrities. All the rest is standardized.

Thomson blames this on commercial interests and declares that for a musician "to lend the prestige of his name and knowledge

to any business so unethical . . . is to accept the decisions of his professional inferiors . . . .” This is, of course, a variant of the timeless lament of the composer-critic who earns his living from musical journalism but who would dearly prefer to retire on his musical royalties. *The State of Music* is a polemic, depressing at times, for the situation has only deteriorated, but a most entertaining one.

The volume concludes with charming appreciations of old friends and fellow warriors—Lou Harrison, Edwin Denby, Elisabeth Lutyens among them, and his old teacher Nadia Boulanger, as well as reviews for *The New York Review of Books* including the excellent “‘Craft-Igor’ and the Whole Stravinsky,” “How Dead is Arnold Schönberg?,” and “Berlioz, Boulez and Piaf,” each of them an example of Thomson’s deep knowledge, stylishly expressed.

Though shamelessly pursuing his bêtes noires (too many to list) and his personal agendas (primarily Virgil Thomson and his music), Thomson was the greatest of our American music critics. He informed and instructed, but most of all he entertained. His description of Olin Downes, the late music critic of *The New York Times*, applied equally to him: “[h]e swam in the full musical current of a great epoch, kept his head up, breathed deeply, clung to rocks, waved at the fishes, and had a wonderful time.”

According to the OED . . .

John Simpson
The Word Detective.
Basic Books, 384 pages, $27.99

reviewed by Henrik Bering

In Howard Hawk’s *Ball of Fire* from 1941, a group of otherworldly scholars inhabit a gloomy New York townhouse, home of the Totten Foundation, where for nine years they have toiled away on a mammoth encyclopedia. Gary Cooper plays their leader, the linguist Bertram Potts who is working on an entry on slang. Realizing that his examples are hopelessly outmoded, he ventures out to gather material and chances upon a swank nightclub, where Barbara Stanwyck as the singer “Sugarpuss” O’Shea is the star attraction backed by Gene Krupa’s big band. With Krupa unleashing glorious mayhem behind his drum kit, she sings “Drum Boogie,” while the professor scribbles away on his notepad words like “Boogie” and “Killer Diller.” For an encore, Krupa performs his drum routine on a matchbox while Sugarpuss whispers the words, bringing down the house. If God were to design a nightclub, this would be it.

When Potts asks her for help with his research, Sugarpuss initially brushes him off, but needing to lie low as she is wanted by the D.A.’s office to be a witness against her mob boyfriend, the nightclub’s owner, Joe Lilac, she shows up at the Foundation’s address, offering to join the group as the in-house resource on slang. Delighted to have their routines disrupted, her vivacity wins over Potts’s colleagues who in the final reel manage to outwit Lilac and his thugs, allowing Potts to get the girl. A charming riff on Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs, the movie features Stanwyck at her sparkling and long-legged best, while Cooper’s mid-western air of puzzled innocence makes him perfect as the professor, who learns the meaning of “yum-yum.”

For twenty years until his retirement in 2013, John Simpson served as the Chief Editor of *The Oxford English Dictionary*, and no wonder *Ball of Fire* is his favorite movie about reference books—though in his memoir *The Word Detective* he hastens to assure us that the OED “never knowingly employed anyone called ‘Sugarpuss.’” The excitement of lexicography is of a different kind, and the book does a splendid job conveying it. Cleverly, throughout, he has scattered definitions of words marked in bold that have some relevance for his story and in the process provides mini-lessons on how English has developed through the ages.

Thus under “deadline,” of which there are a great many in the book business, we learn that the term originally comes from angling

with an OED first mention in 1860: a *dead line* refers to the angler's line lying motionless in the water waiting for the fish to bite. A few years later, it is used in a very different sense to refer to the lines drawn around a military prison to deter prisoners from escaping, as exemplified by a quote from Benson John Lossing's *Pictorial History of the Civil War in the United States of America*, volume three, from 1868: "Seventeen feet from the inner stockade was the 'dead-line'—over which no man could pass and live."

It is only in the early twentieth century that we find its current meaning, namely the point when an article is due, though in dealing with tardy reporters, editors have occasionally envied the camp commander and the extreme measures available to him in the earlier example.

The son of an intelligence official, Simpson's involvement with the OED started in 1976 when his girlfriend and soon-to-become-wife Hilary spotted an advertisement in *The Times Literary Supplement* seeking an assistant for *The Pocket Oxford Dictionary*. Simpson, who was about to finish his Master's in medieval studies at the University of Reading, applied and was called in for an interview. But he wasn't overly disappointed when he did not get the job. A pocket dictionary is by definition . . . well, small, with no room for the rich etymologies that interested him. But he must have done something right: a month later he was called back and hired as an editorial assistant to work on what became the four-volume *Supplement* to the OED, exactly the right shelf for him.

Typical of the kind of grand project undertaken by the Victorians, the OED is a historical dictionary, which provides each word with its own biography from when it first appeared in the language and illustrative examples to go with its definitions. Before his interview, Simpson had read up on its background: it traces its origins back to 1857, when Richard Chenevix Trench produced two papers for the Philological Society in London arguing that the dictionaries of the day were substandard, particularly when it came to old words and new scientific ones. But it took the Society a few decades to find a publisher brave enough to sign up for it. Finally, in 1879, Oxford University Press agreed to take on the task.

To collect material for what was then known as *The New English Dictionary*, the editor-in-chief, John Murray, employed a world-wide army of volunteers, who ploughed through assigned lists of books, put interesting examples of word use on index cards known as "slips," and fired them off to Oxford, where they would be processed by Murray and his team. Among the most prolific contributors was an American army surgeon, Dr. William Chester Minor, who had moved to Britain. Dr. Minor had plenty of time on his hands: he was locked up in the Broadmoor Insane Asylum for murder, as described in Simon Winchester's excellent *The Professor and the Madman*.

With the project scheduled to take up a decade or so, the first installment of the OED—A to Ant—came out in 1884, notes Simpson, but by 1903, they were only about to start on the letter R. World War I brought the work almost to a standstill, as most of the staff were off to the front. The final installment, volume 10, appeared in 1928, after forty-four years, with a one-volume *Supplement* appearing in 1933. But, as Simpson points out, this is positively an express job compared to the Deutsches Wörterbuch, which started in 1854 and took the Germans 107 years to complete, not to mention the Dutch, who spent 134 years on theirs.

But if Simpson had expected to start defining words straight away, he was told not so fast. As his first assignment, he was given a book titled *Film Language* by Christian Metz, translated from the French, to sift through for new terms and concepts, index-card them and file them away for the day when an editor would get around to composing an entry. After three weeks, he had come up with some 200 words that might be of interest—about par for the course for that kind of book. This mode of "reading" of course "played havoc" with his ability to enjoy literature, notes Simpson,

who believes it takes about five years to learn to keep the two ways of reading apart: the OED way, and the normal way.

Having passed the first hurdle, he was entrusted with updating the entry for the word "queen," which had acquired a host of new meanings and constellations since 1928: everything from sizes of beds, homosexuals, and Cunard liners, to puddings—the Queen of Puddings being a particularly unpleasant Oxford dessert, consisting of breadcrumbs, jam, and meringue. Especially delightful here is the "queen excluder," which Simpson defined as "a metal screen with holes large enough for the worker honeybees to pass through but too small to allow the passage of the queen," and reading up on which "for a few moments" turned Simpson into the world authority on the term.

Settling in, he acquired on his own initiative an old set of eighteenth-century novels and, holding them up against the OED, discovered numerous earlier uses than those recorded in the dictionary. He also bought *Rolling Stone* and a heap of underground Rastafarian and punk rags, including a publication called *Sniffin' Glue*, not because he himself was a big fan of punk rock—thankfully—but because of its significance as a "cultural phenomenon."

"Cultural" is perhaps not the first word that comes to mind in connection with the vomit-strewn punk scene—but never mind. His point with these purchases was that to form a true picture of language one needs to cover a broad spectrum of classes and occupations: high, low, slang, scientific, medical, show business, etc. And here the trouble with the OED's earlier readers was that—though by no means all academics—they were people who loved books and thus tended to come from similar backgrounds. Consequently, their examples were mostly taken from classical authors such as Shakespeare, Milton, Swift, and Pope.

"I don't think the editors intended to privilege 'highbrow' literature. It was just that these were the texts to which readers had the easiest access," he writes. Those early editors "did a remarkable job with the resources at their command." And Simpson was acting on the best of precedents: Murray had in fact himself insisted on including newspapers, for which he received an earful of complaints.

What, then, are the qualities required in an aspiring lexicographer? According to Simpson, candidates should combine a scientist's skepticism with a writer's sense of elegance: he compares the pleasure in crafting a nice tight entry to that of writing a poem. In addition, the job requires stamina, committing for the long haul, and extreme rigor: entries have to be "stone cold sober"—there is no room for the kind of whimsy Dr. Johnson sometimes indulges in. Out of five hundred applicants, we learn, only two would be of use. For fun, Simpson speculates on famous authors as applicants: Dickens need not apply, he would be way too prolix. Kant would confuse the reader with his fondness for philosophical abstraction. But Agatha Christie might do.

From Simpson's description of the office atmosphere, one gathers that party animals would have a hard time fitting in: "When people came into our office, it would take them a while to realize that we were in fact conducting a conversation." "Sussuration," a quiet murmur, a colleague calls it: "The more prosaic tended to refer to bats." Being a good listener he values more highly than being a great talker. Simpson himself is certainly economical with his words: on some days he would only spend 200 of them.

One of his pet peeves is people who profess to love words: "I do like a modicum of enthusiasm over words, but not too much," as he finds it incompatible with the analytical mindset involved. When asked at dinner parties about his favorite word, his standard answer is that he hasn't one, as that "would compromise the strict neutrality required of the historical lexicographer." But from his stint as the editor of *The Concise Oxford Dictionary of Proverbs*, he will offer an early sixteenth-century proverb: "The longest way round is the shortest way home" as especially pertinent to lexicographers, since "language development isn't linear."

As an example of the detective work involved, Simpson recalls an occasion when he was working on revising the entry for the word "pal" meaning "a friend" or "mate." "Pal" dates back to the seventeenth century, Simpson explains, where the word carried a strong whiff of bad company, of a highwayman's or a thief's sidekick. So the first example listed in the OED in support of the "an accomplice in crime or dishonesty" sense is this passage from 1682: "Where have you been all this day, pall. . . . why pall, what would you have me to doe? (*Hereford Diocesan Register: Depositions* (1682), 29 January, p.51)"

But something about the 1682 quotation struck Simpson as odd, as somehow strangely formal. So he decided to go to Herefordshire to check the old records for himself. Here he found out that the case before the church court had involved a woman called Mary Ashmore who had been sleeping around, and the bit quoted by the OED is her lover recalling a conversation the two had had. And suddenly the quote made sense since "Poll" is an informal variant of Mary, and "Pall" a regional form: in short, he says, this is not a guy addressing his lady friend as his "pal," he is just using her nickname. Which meant that this particular OED quotation had to be struck.

As for the criterion for including a word, says Simpson, "we didn't add a word to the dictionary until we had records for it spanning over ten years, to give it a chance to settle down in the language." There was, however, a second rule: "If a new term came to extraordinary prominence, then we bent the first rule." That was the case with "perestroika" and "glasnost" which were the buzzwords of the Gorbachev era. "Crowdsourcing," which they first spotted in *Wired Magazine* in 2006, made it in seven.

Obsolete words, which are defined as words that have not appeared in print for the past one hundred years, merit a dagger. But he rather disapproves of the concept since words have a way of returning from the dead: which was the case with the word "nut" in this instance referring to "a revolving claw that holds back the drawstring of a crossbow until released by a trigger." Its reemergence is of course explained by the renewed interest in archery, and the dagger was consequently withdrawn.

Since memoirs require candor, Simpson confesses that some words did annoy him. He is clearly no fan of Mrs. Thatcher and the transformation she wrought: "We were moving out of the Thatcher years and the language was beginning to experience (I almost said 'suffer' but we don't like value judgements) its social effects:" The words he takes umbrage with are terms like "gastropub" (1996), which was killing off the traditional "spit and sawdust" pub and which he imagines being peopled with "brash and self-centered" *new lads* and *ladettes*. But then finding a Thatcherite academic in Britain would be about as rare as spotting a penguin in the Amazon rainforest. And as long as he did not allow his prejudices to influence his definitions, and one trusts he didn't, that's all right.

Long before the final of the four *Supplement* volumes came out in 1986, Simpson and his colleagues were becoming dissatisfied with the concept of supplementing—adding "lights and tinsel" rather than doing what was really required: subjecting the OED to a complete overhaul. Because even with the updates, he writes, the dictionary remained essentially a Victorian product, "a dinosaur's bones." And just to make matters worse, even the folks at *The Encyclopædia Britannica* had managed to keep up with the times: "We fared badly against that."

Remedying this situation was an uphill struggle, he recalls: sentimentalists regarded the original text "as holy writ," while the hard men of the OUP accounting office dismissed the OED as a white elephant. But eventually it was decided to computerize the dictionary, to plop the contents of the old OED and of the *Supplement* into two larger files—the whole thing had to be keyed manually, not scanned, and only seven mistakes per 10,000 keystrokes were tolerated—and then merge them into a single massive file, which would then be put on the market as a CD-ROM.

To test the idea, Simpson and his colleagues pretended to be computers, doing a cut-and-paste job from the old OED and the new *Supplement*: "If we could do that in a fairly mechanical way with glue and staples, then maybe a computer could be taught to do the same thing automatically and at great speed." As it turned out, the basic model still held up: "The old OED editors had devised the dictionary as if they were waiting for computers to be invented."

After an early trial version was finished in 1989, the Second Edition of the OED on CD-ROM was finished in 1992. But even this was just a transitional phase. Having been named editor-in-chief in 1993, Simpson kept pressing for a full, proper root-canal job. But since researchers in Toronto and Ann Arbor were hard at work on the Old and Middle English period, to cut costs, a member on the OED advisory committee suggested they just leave the old stuff before 1500 to the competition and let the OED take it from there. The trouble with this, says Simpson, was that it would be "representing English as if it were mainly a Renaissance creation." "We'd break in on important meanings halfway through their existence, unable to speak from proper knowledge about their early life." Even the person who had brought it up realized this was a dumb idea.

Finally, Simpson got the go-ahead for a completely revised online edition. Which means that with its quarterly updates, the OED has become a never-ending project, subject to constant expansion: "We had initiated what was effectually an invitation to beat us and at the same time improve the record of the language." In addition, it allows a host of refinements such as links to the text from which the quotations are taken or fancy graphs to illustrate the periods when foreign loanwords, say from Japan or China, entered the language.

Following his retirement in 2013, Simpson has co-founded *The James Joyce Online Notes*, a website for Joycean scholarship—Joyce being, as he notes, "an obvious choice" for an ex–OED editor to devote himself to. But Joyce is also the prime example of the need to be careful when assigning authors credit for word innovations. As Simpson notes, in the Second Edition of the OED Joyce gets first user credit for some 575 terms, but the current revision has so far come up with earlier references for more than 40 percent.

The point is that Joyce was "an avid magpie copying down expressions he saw and heard, intending to reuse them in his novel," says Simpson, but when we do not recognize the terms, we automatically assume he invented them. Thus in *Ulysses*, Molly Bloom pines for a *kidfitting* corset she had seen in *The Gentlewoman*, which was long thought to be Joyce's coinage. But in his research, Simpson came across an advertisement for just such a contraption, held together by kidfittings, i.e., "fittings made of soft goatskin": "Royal Worchester Kidfitting Corsets. The Corsets of Style Superiority. Light and Flexible. . . . There is a model for every type of figure—slender, medium or full—in the Royal Worchester Kidfitting Corsets. Pim Brothers., Ltd., South Great George Street, Dublin."

Earlier in the book, Simpson said of OED editors, "Yes, we read everything." No idle boast, that.

The Thomas Blood affair

Robert Hutchinson
The Audacious Crimes of Colonel Blood: The Spy Who Stole the Crown Jewels and Became the King's Secret Agent.
Pegasus Books, 352 pages, $27.95

reviewed by Justin Zaremby

On May 9, 1671, five men stole the crown jewels from the Tower of London. The leader of the party, an experienced criminal dressed as an Anglican priest, grabbed the imperial state crown and used a wooden mallet to flatten its raised bows in order to fit it in a small bag. Another stashed the gold orb in his breeches. With the elderly keeper of the jewels lying on the floor—brutally beaten and stabbed—they would have had a clean

escape, except that, with providential timing, the keeper's son chose that moment to return home after ten years overseas. The criminal party hurried away to the sound of the rising hue and cry. What followed was a cinematic chase. When finally taken prisoner, the "priest" told his captor that "It was a gallant attempt, however unsuccessful! It was for the crown."

This was not the first violent crime attempted by the Irish-born Colonel Thomas Blood (1618–1680). Under a variety of aliases, Blood had engaged in a series of intrigues against the restored Stuart monarchy, including attempts to capture Dublin Castle, to seize the city of Limerick, to foment an uprising in Scotland, and to assassinate both the Duke of Ormonde and the King himself. Blood gained renown throughout the kingdoms of England, Ireland, and Scotland for his violent adventures. Nevertheless—for reasons that baffled his contemporaries and later historians—instead of a death sentence, Blood received a royal pardon and a pension. Robert Hutchinson's *The Audacious Crimes of Colonel Blood* tells the story of Blood's extraordinary career against the tumultuous backdrop of seventeenth-century England.

When King Charles II, whose father died on the scaffold at the hands of a regicidal parliament, returned from exile in 1660, the streets of London were filled with good cheer. John Evelyn, the Restoration diarist, described a triumph of twenty thousand on horse and foot, streets filled with flowers, bells ringing, and fountains running with wine. To Evelyn, the Restoration was the "Lord's doing. . . . For such a restoration was never seen in the mention of any history, ancient or modern, since the return of the Babylonian Captivity, nor so joyful a day, and so bright, ever seen in this nation."

Following the rule of Oliver Cromwell's commonwealth government, during which power rested in the hands of non-conformist Christian sects, royalists and Anglicans saw in the new king a chance to return to power and influence. Charles's court developed its own brand of notoriety as the King surrounded

himself with influential mistresses and cunning figures like Barbara Palmer, First Duchess of Cleveland, and her cousin George Villiers, Second Duke of Buckingham. The colorful intrigues of the court at Whitehall, however, were unable to distract from the lingering religious and political animosities that had previously driven the kingdoms to civil war.

During the English Civil Wars, Blood fought for the King, at one point being identified by the cavalier general Prince Rupert as a "very stout, bold fellow in royal service." Yet as parliament appeared more and more the likely victor, he switched sides, possibly serving briefly under Cromwell in Ireland. Blood became a beneficiary of Oliver Cromwell's brutal campaign to suppress a confederation of Irish Catholics who had rebelled against protestant rule. When Cromwell forced the Irish from their homes and redistributed their property, Blood found himself in possession of profitable confiscated lands—which he soon lost when the Restoration Irish Parliament passed an act in 1662 to restore lands to the old English royalists and Irish Catholics who had played no role in the earlier uprising. Bereft of his lands and poverty-stricken, Blood began to pursue a violent campaign to limit Catholic influence in Ireland, to undermine Stuart rule, and to resist the imposition of the established Anglican Church. Blood joined a network of non-conformist revolutionaries who felt disenfranchised and persecuted under the new regime and who worked to advance their own political and religious interests at any cost. It was this network that later made Blood useful to the King: the price of clemency was ultimately a commitment to serve as part of the King's intricate web of spies. Yet because of his notoriety and capriciousness, Blood seems to have been even less successful at espionage than he was at revolution.

Hutchinson presents Blood as a sort of dissenting Scarlet Pimpernel whose adventures he describes vividly and cites with scholarly detail. Throughout the book, the reader is torn between fleeting admiration for the chutzpah of the non-conformist revolutionary, and scorn at his continuing opportunism and buffoonery. Alas, the book's frenetic pace, although perhaps appropriate for the peripatetic and ever-scheming Colonel, may pose a challenge to readers unfamiliar with the complicated politics of Restoration England.

Blood's notoriety grew after his death (his body was even exhumed to prove that he had, in fact, died). One author wittily thanked the "kind fates for your last favour shown/ Of stealing BLOOD who lately stole the Crown." The same author then suggested, on perhaps a more dour note, the following epitaph:

> Here lies the man who boldly has run
> through
> More villainies than ever England knew
> And nere to any friend he had was true
> Here let him then by all unpitied lie
> And let's rejoice his time has come to die.

Hutchinson admires Blood's drive, stating that "[w]hat drove him on was the same irrepressible motivation that later forced people to climb mountains purely because they were there." He views Blood as having been a "different kind of desperado" than the "grim-faced religious fanatics" with whom he associated. Readers may be unconvinced, however, that Blood was indeed an "eccentric gambler" driven by a sense of adventure rather than just a failed, self-centered, and violent revolutionary.

Notebook

Afghan artisanship reborn

by Peter Pennoyer

No American embraced South Asian woodwork more than Lockwood de Forest. Born in 1850, de Forest was from a prominent New York family, which brought him into the orbits of such nineteenth-century cultural luminaries as Frederic Church. It was at Church's Olana that de Forest browsed the books that inspired his love of exotic ornament. On his two-year honeymoon he became fascinated by the elaborate woodwork in Indian architecture. This vision fit perfectly into the American Aesthetic–movement style of exotic, complex patterns, rich colors, and handwork. Seeing an opportunity to make the wood components for both his projects and a broader market, he and a local partner established the Ahmadabad Woodcarving Company. A display of the company's work at the World's Columbian Exposition proved popular. Commissions in New York included interiors in Andrew Carnegie's mansion on Fifth Avenue (now the Cooper Hewitt, Smithsonian Design Museum) and a townhouse for his parents in New York City's Greenwich Village.

As part of Associated Artists, a collaborative design group that included Louis Comfort Tiffany, Samuel Coleman, Stanford White, and Candace Wheeler, de Forest contributed to public rooms at the famed Seventh Regiment Armory on Park Avenue, where the elaborate carved woodwork is a frame for the equally exotic metalwork, glass, and ceramics. For these artists, architects, and designers, Islamic geometric patterns, vegetal patterns, and even calligraphy offered an alternate language to classical artistic and architectural principles, an enriching layer that was an essential part of a truly American style. While a deep understanding of geometry was a prerequisite for the use of Islamic patterned woodwork, sometimes exotic emblems were used without regard for meaning. The Arabic calligraphy on Olana's doorframes, for example, is gibberish. But in general, American designers rose to the difficult challenge of understanding Islamic geometric pattern- making in order to be able to incorporate it into their own work. But in the recent past it was rightly feared that these traditional forms that so enraptured de Forest and his colleagues might be lost forever.

In 2005, Hamid Karzai, the then–Prime Minister of Afghanistan, took time on a visit with the Prince of Wales to see the Prince's School of Traditional Arts in London, a program that reflects the Prince's long-held belief that the training and practice of traditional arts leads to cultural renewal and vitality. A core part of the curriculum in this school, as it had been in the Prince's Institute of Architecture, was instruction in geometry. Here students were learning the common lessons of Euclidean geometry, but more remarkably they were introduced to Islamic geometry and pattern-making. Karzai was reportedly saddened as the sight of students in London recapturing these traditions, which made him think of his own nation where decades of war and struggle had eviscerated a rich cultural heritage of artisanship.

In the vast majority of art schools, fundamental skills such as drawing based on careful observation, underpinned by an understanding of anatomy and geometry, have been devalued by the ever-changing fashions in the visual arts. Beauty, proportion, and representation have been deemed either irrelevant to artistic expression or anachronistic in a world where traditional measures of artistic achievement have been turned upside down. The Prince's program, a rare exception in arts education, made Karzai wish that Afghanistan had a similar school. Prince Charles—who has been described as a serial entrepreneur in his charitable ventures—agreed, and the two men put their significant imprimatur on a project that has become the greatest success in urban regeneration in the troubled country.

Prince Charles entrusted the creation of Turquoise Mountain, the British non-governmental organization that would bring back crafts to Kabul and regenerate the old city, to his trusted friend Rory Stewart, who had served as a coalition deputy governor for two southern provinces in Iraq. Stewart knew about funding projects in war-torn regions: as a deputy governor in Iraq he was given $10 million of coalition funds in sealed packets monthly to dispense for the restoration of schools and hospitals, and for myriad other projects that would rebuild Iraq and diminish the insurgency. These included training in governance and anti-corruption seminars and other staples of the well-intentioned policies of many NGOs.

On the Prince's suggestion, Stewart backed a project that many NGO experts did not like: establishing a school that employed members of a union banned because of its ties to Saddam Hussein to teach carpentry to street children. Of all of the projects he initiated, none was so enthusiastically embraced by the Iraqis and none had such tangible results: these trainees all landed jobs and local officials vied to address the students.

He followed this posting by spending almost two years walking from Turkey to Bangladesh. His exposure crossing Afghanistan left him with a love of the country.

Starting in early 2006, in Kabul, Stewart was confronted by extensive challenges. Traditional art and artisanship had been lost in the maelstrom that extended from the 1979 Soviet invasion, when the country saw a third of its population flee the strife between the Russians and the mujahideen, and later from the ascendant Taliban. Woodwork, jewelry, gem-cutting, calligraphy, miniature painting, and ceramics had all but disappeared. With significant population loss came a collapse of the internal markets, and continued conflict shut off foreign trade. The Taliban suppressed all artisanship, shutting down small workshops, stealing tools, and restricting women to their homes. The general physical decline of Kabul meant that basic services—water, sewage, and electricity—gave out. The city was a pale specter of its former self. Even the trees, which once gave Kabul shade and greenery, had been cut and burned for heating fuel by the Soviets.

Turquoise Mountain, named after Firozkoh (the Turquoise Mountain), the capital of Central Afghanistan which was destroyed by invading Mongols in 1220, and which is still considered the capital of Afghan culture, was conceived to accomplish both the reestablishment of the great arts of Afghanistan through vocational training and to save the core of the old city of Kabul known as Murad Khani. Rebuilding the center of the old city was Stewart's first challenge.

Politically, the city was the scene of intractable rivalries among tribes and sects. The corrupting influence of the rich heroin producers added to the confusion. Starting with seed money that had been raised by Prince Charles for six months' worth of operations, Stewart rented a space at the back of a tailor's shop. His first step was to enlist the residents of Murad Khani in the reconstruction of their city—with the goal of regenerating this important part of Kabul's history and built environment. Additionally, he engaged the residents in the creation of permanent quarters for the Turquoise Mountain Institute for Afghan Arts and Architecture. The local authorities, however, were hostile to Stewart's

vision of reconstruction and restoration; their idea was represented in a rendering from the '70s: a modernist cityscape of concrete blocks, designed by Soviet planners, to replace the old city. At every turn the authorities opposed the restoration of Murad Khani, even objecting to the removal of the two-meter deep layer of rubbish that had engulfed the old buildings.

Stewart's weapon against all of the obstructions was the enthusiasm of the people of the old city for their heritage. Weaving together staff from the various sects and tapping into the pride of place shared by the few stalwarts who had remained in the derelict houses, Stewart and his group directed the removal of over 15,000 truckloads of rubbish, unearthing the remains of the city and setting the stage for the massive restoration. Working with a paid staff and foreign volunteers, Turquoise Mountain proceeded to restore the mud-brick houses and, most important, to restore and recreate the woodwork that gives the district its character and beauty. Because Kabul sat on the Silk Road, the influences of India, Persia, and Asia can be read in the wood walls and screens that form the courtyards of Murad Khani, from the vegetal Persian ornament of the spandrels to the Mughal geometric patterns of the *jali* lattice screens. The restoration project, which encompassed over 112 buildings, included infrastructure—Turquoise Mountain dug and refilled all of the trenches for water, sewer, and electric lines. The result took this area from the World Monument Fund's watch list to its list of award-winning projects in two short years. The work of the restoration had also trained hundreds in skills that were marketable and returned abandoned houses to families who had been in the old city for more generations than they could count. As the old city was burnished and repopulated, the drug dealers fled.

With the restoration well underway, the Institute began to train men and women in crafts that would resurrect artisanship and lead to sales both within Afghanistan and outside. Since there was no remaining community of artisans, Turquoise Mountain had to search for masters of the crafts who had drifted away over the decades. These missing individuals were—in most cases—the last remaining link in the chain of knowledge and skills in each art. Abdul Hadi, the wood carver to King Zahid Shah, the last king of Afghanistan, was found selling oranges in the market. He returned to teach his craft—almost everything that has been accomplished by Turquoise Mountain in woodworking can be traced to his hand, his teaching, and his students, among whom some happen now to form the next coterie of teachers.

All of this was accomplished without the typical NGO working groups, studies, or commissions. Turquoise Mountain simply worked within the complex and challenging tapestry of the surviving communities of Kabul. Instead of typical résumé credentials, trust was the guide to hiring decisions. Stewart's boldest stroke was to encourage members of once-hostile sects to join together by vesting each group in the mission to restore their city and to create the Institute. By 2007, the classes in woodwork, calligraphy, miniatures, ceramics, jewelry, and gem-cutting had begun, and Turquoise Mountain was connecting the unemployed with training and experienced artisans with pupils and trade.

While continuing to fundraise to support the nascent operation, Stewart and Shoshana Clark, who took over as managing director in 2009, expanded their mission to fill community needs, establishing a school for boys and girls that saw 160 students enroll in the first week, many of whom had never been to school. They also opened a clinic for the Institute and its community, which has grown to serve thousands of residents. Taken as a whole, Turquoise Mountain has created a multifaceted enterprise that addresses the future of Kabul while resurrecting its past. Turquoise Mountain is essentially setting up its graduates to go into their own businesses. The demand for their products is growing, from major retailers buying jewelry to hotels ordering miniatures and woodwork. The local energies released by this model were perhaps so successful because Turquoise Mountain seeks to create economic independence and freedom for individuals, including women,

the opposite of what the Soviets and Taliban had in mind.

At the heart of the Institute are the artisans who were able to dust off their tools, just as the old city had been restored, and to connect a generation that had known nothing but war and occupation. Some, like Abdul Hadi, were brought back from the streets to pass on the knowledge of former generations. Others were among the millions who returned to Afghanistan once the collation had driven the Taliban away.

Among these was Nasser Mansouri, a refugee who became a pillar of the Institute's faculty. Mansouri and his family had followed the exodus from Kabul in 1989, when he was six years old, settling into a community of refugees in Iran. He recalls living in the streets until an Iraqi wood carver took him in as an apprentice. Working every day, he wondered why he couldn't play soccer like other boys. But Mansouri's years of apprenticeship and innate talent made him an impressive carver. When he was eighteen, his mentor told him that he was ready to go out on his own. Modest about his own skills, he lacked the confidence to name a price for his commissions in advance but would let each customer decide what to pay, if anything, when the piece was complete. He gained commissions, mostly pieces in Western styles, yet he yearned to return to his native land.

In 2002, after the Taliban had been routed, Mansouri returned to Kabul, a city he could not claim to remember and that in any case had been savaged beyond recognition. He recalls that he could find only one band saw in Kabul, down by the Kabul River, which was usable only when electricity was available. Mansouri soon discovered that the raw material of his trade was missing: in the entire city, there was no wood for sale. Traveling north, where he heard there was lumber, he found none and resorted to buying a walnut tree, which he then had to transport back to Kabul.

Joining Turquoise Mountain in 2006, he learned from Abdul Hadi, who directed him in the wood shop. But, more important, Hadi sent him to find remains of significant original wood carvings within the derelict buildings of the old city. Seeing traces of Kabul's glorious architecture inspired him and gave him models to emulate. Mansouri now teaches in the Institute, focusing on *jali*, the screen panels that are emblematic of architecture in South Asia and the Arab world. He has also taken time, with a team of forty-five, to create a complete *caravanserai*, or courtyard, which was shipped to Washington, DC, where it anchors "Turquoise Mountain: Artists Transforming Afghanistan," an exhibition that contains jewelry, carpets, wood carving, calligraphy, and miniatures—all made within the Institute in Kabul.[1] At this point Mansouri is selling his work directly, hiring his own employees and thereby contributing to the economic and cultural life of the city that he was forced to leave when he was six years old.

Turquoise Mountain woodwork offers architects a rich source of inspiration and the challenge of incorporating elements that reflect handwork into modern buildings that are composed of machined components. Based on geometries that are derived from the square and the circle, the *jali* displays complex star patterns of a density that makes residual spaces as important as the figures of the wood. These screens, sometimes carved in stone, act as windows and allow air circulation and even, as stronger breezes force the air to be compressed entering the screen, cool the air temperature. Modernists who normally eschew specific ornament and cultural references in their work have been known to embrace the geometric pattern-making of the Islamic world, as Jean Nouvel and his team did at Centre du Monde Arab in Paris in 1987, where an entire wall of metallic *brise soleil* is inspired by *mashrabiya*, another type of Islamic lattice screen. But a more resonant, less abstracted approach is found in late-nineteenth-century American architecture and decorative art when great architects and designers were drawn to sources

1 "Turquoise Mountain: Artists Transforming Afghanistan," opened at the Smithsonian Institute, Washington, D.C. on March 5, 2016 and remains on view through January 29, 2017.

from outside the Western canon and specifically from the Islamic and Arab worlds. The artisans of Turquoise Mountain are creating works that offer today's architects the possibility of reengaging with the rich world of Islamic patterns and craftsmanship.

Inspired by the example of the Associated Artists and architects like Stanford White, who were masters of classicism yet catholic in the inclusion of a range of stylistic influences, my firm has attempted, at a more elementary level, to find ways to enrich our projects by understanding and then embracing the exotic. Mansouri's *jali* clearly fit this category. The fact that we are supporting this extraordinarily talented artisan in a war-torn country, the fact that our clients are sending dollars to Kabul—dollars that are neither a grant nor charity—adds to our feeling that this is a good collaboration, but we would order *jali* regardless.

I believe that Lockwood de Forest and Stanford White understood that, as designers, their imaginations and skills were stretched by embracing unusual sources and that their designs would be better and more resonant when they confronted and reinvented known forms. The incorporation of a complex geometry in a scheme that has its own underlying matrix is a complicated task. Architects are used to principles like the golden section which guide the proportions of finite elements and whole designs, but Islamic pattern-making consists of a system of generating shapes that has no end. Indeed in the Western canon we see the world within the sweep of the figure of the Vitruvian man—set in a circle—while in Islamic geometric patterns there is no one center, but multiple centers suggesting infinity.

While the Western humanist scheme puts man at the center, Islamic geometry leaves him in a maze. Making these evidently contradictory ways of looking at the world into a coherent design is the challenge of making a symphonic experience from potentially dissonant notes. Paradoxically, because the geometry of the *jali* is generally created by the artisan, not by the architect, it can be regarded as an imported element—theoretically easy to use—while it is in fact quite the opposite.

Jali also offer a tool for making the separation between rooms more porous than solid partitions or even windows. Using *jali* between two rooms or spaces allows clear spacial definition while offering layered views from room to room. The play of the pattern of the *jali* against the architecture of an adjacent space makes the space seem deeper and, when handled deftly, somewhat mysterious.

Finally, because *jali* and other Turquoise Mountain carved building elements are handmade, they have a material character that is simply impossible with machine-made products. So while architects, including my own office, are beginning to use three-dimensional printing to create prototypes for building elements, the hand-made has a fundamental and timeless appeal.

We mourn the passing of
William Louis-Dreyfus (1932–2016)
A valued contributor to The New Criterion