

# The New Criterion

October 2017

A monthly review *edited by Roger Kimball*

Notes & Comments, I

Solzhenitsyn's cathedrals *by Gary Saul Morson*, 4

The first global conflict *by Conrad Black*, II

Protestantism at 500 *by James Nuechterlein*, 19

The Anthony Burgess catalogue *by Dominic Green*, 28

New poems *by J. T. Barbarese & David J. Rothman*, 33

Washington journal *by Bruce Cole*, 36; Reconsiderations *by James Como*, 39;

Theater *by Kyle Smith*, 43; Art *by Karen Wilkin, Mario Naves & James*

*Panero*, 47; Music *by Jay Nordlinger & Paul du Quenoy*, 56; The media *by*

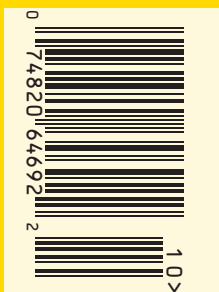
*James Bowman*, 64; Books: *John McPhee Draft No. 4* reviewed *by Brooke*

*Allen*, 68; *Patricia Gherovici & Manya Steinkoler, editors Lacan, psychoanalysis &*

*comedy* reviewed *by Christie Davies*, 70; *Rosemary Ashton One hot summer*

*reviewed by Henrik Bering*, 73; *David S. Brown Paradise lost* reviewed *by Carl*

*Rollyson*, 75; Notebook: *Christie Davies, 1941–2017* *by Anthony Daniels*, 78



Volume 36, Number 2, \$7.75 / £7.50

# The New Criterion *October 2017*

Editor & Publisher *Roger Kimball*

Executive Editor *James Panero*

Associate Editors *Rebecca Hecht & Eric C. Simpson*

Assistant Editor *Benjamin Riley*

Poetry Editor *David Yezzi*

Hilton Kramer Fellow *Andrew L. Shea*

Office Manager *Cricket Farnsworth*

Assistant to the Editors *Caetlynn Booth*

Editorial Intern *Solveig Gold*

---

Founding Editor *Hilton Kramer*

Founding Publisher *Samuel Lipman*

---

## Contributors to this issue

---

**Brooke Allen's** most recent book is *Benazir Bhutto: Favored Daughter* (New Harvest). She teaches literature at Bennington College.

**J. T. Barbaresi's** collection *True Does Nothing* (Plume) is forthcoming in spring 2018, along with a selection of translations of Jacques Prévert.

**Henrik Bering** is a writer and critic.

**Conrad Black** is the former publisher of the London Telegraph newspapers and the *Spectator*.

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

**Bruce Cole** is a Senior Fellow at the Ethics and Public Policy Center and former Chairman of the National Endowment for the Humanities.

**James Como's** latest book is *The Tongue is Also a Fire*, a collection of essays from *New English Review*.

**Anthony Daniels** is a contributing editor at *City Journal*.

**Christie Davies** (1941–2017) was a professor at the University of Reading and the author of *Jokes and Targets* (Indiana University Press) and *The Strange Death of Moral Britain* (Transaction Publishers).

**Dominic Green** is a writer living in Boston.

**Gary Saul Morson**, the Lawrence B. Dumas Professor of the Arts and Humanities at Northwestern University, co-authored, with Morton Schapiro, *Cents and Sensibility: What Economics Can Learn From the Humanities* (Princeton).

**Mario Naves** teaches at the Pratt Institute.

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

**James Nuechterlein** is a Senior Fellow of the Institute on Religion and Public Life and an Editor at Large at *First Things*.

**Paul du Quenoy** is Associate Professor of History at the American University of Beirut.

**Carl Rollyson** is the author of *American Isis: The Life and Art of Sylvia Plath* (Picador) and the forthcoming *This Alarming Paradox: The Life of William Faulkner* (University of Virginia Press).

**David J. Rothman** directs the Graduate Program in Creative Writing at Western State Colorado University.

**Kyle Smith** is critic-at-large for *National Review*.

**Karen Wilkin** is an independent curator and critic.

---

The New Criterion. ISSN 0734-0222. October 2017, Volume 36, Number 2. Published monthly except July and August by The Foundation for Cultural Review, Inc., 900 Broadway, New York, NY 10003, a nonprofit public foundation as described in Section 501 (c) (3) of the Internal Revenue code, which solicits and accepts contributions from a wide range of sources, including public and private foundations, corporations, and the general public. Subscriptions: \$48 for one year, \$88 for two. For Canada, add \$14 per year. For all other foreign subscriptions, add \$22 per year. Periodicals postage paid at New York, NY, and at additional mailing offices. Postmaster and subscribers: send change of address, all remittances, and subscription inquiries to The New Criterion, P.O. Box 3000, Denville, NJ 07834. Notice of nonreceipt must be sent to this address within three months of the issue date. All other correspondence should be addressed to The New Criterion, 900 Broadway, Suite 602, New York, NY 10003. (212) 247-6980. Copyright © 2017 by The Foundation for Cultural Review, Inc. Newsstand distribution by CMG, 155 Village Blvd., Princeton, NJ 08540. Available in microfilm from University Microfilms, 300 N. Zeeb Road, Ann Arbor, MI 48106. Internet: [www.newcriterion.com](http://www.newcriterion.com) Email: [letters@newcriterion.com](mailto:letters@newcriterion.com)

**Advertising:** Telephone: (212) 247-6980 Email: [advertising@newcriterion.com](mailto:advertising@newcriterion.com).

**Subscriptions:** To subscribe, renew, or report a problem please call (800) 783-4903.

# Notes & Comments: October 2017

---

## *Constitution Day*

As we write, the two-hundred-and-thirtieth anniversary of the ratification of the Constitution of the United States just passed. The holiday, celebrated on or about September 17 (depending on whether that date falls on a weekend), was known as “Citizenship Day” until 2004, when Congress officially renamed the commemoration “Constitution Day and Citizenship Day.” The new law stipulated that all federally funded educational institutions, and indeed all federal agencies, provide additional programming on the history and substance of the Constitution.

In that spirit (although *The New Criterion* receives no federal funding), we wanted to offer a few brief observations about that remarkable document and its contemporary significance.

The U.S. Constitution is, by a considerable measure, the oldest written constitution in the world. (Only half of the world’s constitutions make it to their nineteenth birthday.) It may also be the shortest. The main body of the text, including the signatures, is but 4,500 words. With all twenty-seven Amendments, it is barely 7,500 words. The Constitution of the European Union, by contrast, waddles to the scale at 70,000 words—an adipose document the girth of a longish book.

What really distinguishes the U.S. Constitution, however, is its purpose. The Framers—James Madison first of all, but also John Adams, Thomas Jefferson, and others—were well acquainted with the effects of arbitrary and unaccountable state power courtesy of the

depredations of George III. Accordingly, they understood the Constitution prophylactically, as a protection of individual liberty against the coercive power of the state. “In framing a government which is to be administered by men over men,” as Madison noted in *Federalist 51*, “the great difficulty lies in this: you must first enable the government to control the governed”—that is hard enough. But then “in the next place [you must] oblige it to control itself.”

As many observers have noted—though perhaps not so many among the governing class—the U.S. government has, in recent decades, done a better job at the former than at the latter.

Part of the problem is the proliferation of laws. The U.S. Constitution may be admirably compact. But the U.S. Code of Laws runs to fifty-three hefty volumes. And then there are the thousands of Statutes at Large representing the blizzard of Acts and Resolutions of Congress. There is a great deal to be said, we think, for proposals to include an annual or biennial sunset provision in laws so that those not deliberately renewed would lapse.

But the proliferation of legal instruments is only part of the problem. Perhaps even more serious is the proliferation and institutionalization of administrative power that operates outside the direction and oversight of Congress, the sole body invested by the Constitution with legislative power. As the legal scholar Philip Hamburger has noted, the explosion in the number of quasi-governmental agencies and regulations over the last few decades has become “the dominant reality of American governance,” intruding

everywhere into everyday economic and social life. As if in explicit violation of the second part of Madison's observation about the difficulty of framing a government, the growth of what has come to be called "the administrative state" seemingly flouts the obligation of state power to control itself.

In our view, the question of how best to deal with the enervating and liberty-sapping effects of the administrative state should occupy a prominent place on the agenda of our national conversation. Doubtless a first step is rhetorical: to bring about a more broad-based and vivid recognition of the extent of the problem. From time immemorial, complacency (often abetted by simple cowardice) has been a great enabler of despotism (and the reality of the administrative state is nothing if not despotic). Challenging that complacency with appropriate bulletins from the front is the first order of business. It is a task that—living up to Madison's quiet phrase "great difficulty"—will be as protracted as it is important.

But in the context of Constitution Day, we wanted to sound a note of homage as well as admonition. To this end, we would like to remind readers of a document from America's founding generation that is well known without quite being, we suspect, known well: George Washington's Farewell Address of 1796.

A first draft of this speech was completed with the help of James Madison in 1792 but was shelved when Washington embarked on a second term. As that drew to a close, Washington once again turned his mind to valedictory remarks and engaged Alexander Hamilton as his principal editor. Probably the most famous part of the six-thousand-word address comes towards the end, when Washington warns the country against "interweaving our destiny with that of any part of Europe, entangl[ing] our peace and prosperity in the toils of European ambition, rivalry, interest, humor, or caprice." It is folly, Washington observes, for any nation to look for "disinterested favors from another."

The great rule of conduct for us in regard to foreign nations is in extending our commercial rela-

tions, to have with them as little political connection as possible. So far as we have already formed engagements, let them be fulfilled with perfect good faith. Here let us stop. Europe has a set of primary interests which to us have none; or a very remote relation. Hence she must be engaged in frequent controversies, the causes of which are essentially foreign to our concerns.

The world has changed, and America's place in the world has changed, a good deal since 1796. Yet the spirit of Washington's observations continues to resonate.

Even more pertinent, perhaps, are Washington's plea for national unity and his Madisonian cautions about the dangers of partisanship and that great eighteenth-century bugbear, "faction." The unity of government, Washington argues, is "a main pillar" not only of America's independence but also of its peace, prosperity, and political liberty. Accordingly, it is easy to foresee, Washington observes, that America's rivals and enemies, domestic as well as foreign, would work industriously to assail that allegiance to national unity.

[M]uch pains will be taken, many artifices employed to weaken in your minds the conviction of this truth; as this is the point in your political fortress against which the batteries of internal and external enemies will be most constantly and actively (though often covertly and insidiously) directed, it is of infinite moment that you should properly estimate the immense value of your national union to your collective and individual happiness.

Class, geography, the prominence of agricultural activity in one part of the country against manufacturing in another part of the country: these and other differences serve to divide individuals and communities one from another. But against these centrifugal forces, the pull of national unity provides a bedrock that underlies not only a higher sense of purpose and identity as one people but also a shared foundation of liberty.

The machinations of partisan interest work against that commitment to unity in insidious ways. "One of the expedients of party to acquire influence within particular districts," Washington notes, "is to misrepresent the opinions and aims of other districts. You can-

not shield yourselves too much against the jealousies and heartburnings which spring from these misrepresentations; they tend to render alien to each other those who ought to be bound together by fraternal affection.”

Underwriting that union is the Constitution, painstakingly designed, freely chosen, “better calculated” than the Articles of Confederation to safeguard liberty, and “containing within itself a provision for its own amendment.” Such an instrument, Washington writes, exerts a sacred obligation upon all citizens: “The very idea of the power and the right of the people to establish government presupposes the duty of every individual to obey the established government.” Since the Constitution provides for its own alteration and amendment, all efforts to circumvent its authority are destructive of liberty and the rule of law: “They serve to organize faction, to give it an artificial and extraordinary force; to put, in the place of the delegated will of the nation the will of a party, often a small but artful and enterprising minority of the community.”

Like Madison in *Federalist 10*, Washington understands that “the spirit of party,” though baneful, is “inseparable from our nature, having its root in the strongest passions of the human mind.” But though the spirit of faction cannot be extinguished without extinguishing liberty itself, governments, especially republican governments, should seek to “mitigate and assuage it.”

His reflections on the dangers of factional interests and their objective correlative, political parties, lead Washington to two further points. The first concerns the inviolability of the separation of powers. Those entrusted with the administration of government, he writes, should “confine themselves within their respective constitutional spheres, avoiding in the exercise of the powers of one department to encroach upon another. The spirit of encroachment tends to consolidate the powers of all the departments in one, and thus to create, whatever the form of government, a real despotism.” Throughout the Farewell Address, Washington is at pains to stress this homely truth: that *preserving* the institutions that safeguard liberty—above all, the Constitution—is as necessary and as arduous as the establishment of liberty. If the people conclude that the distribution of constitutional powers requires

modification, the law demands that they avail themselves of the mechanisms for amendment provided by the Constitution. “[L]et there be no change by usurpation,” Washington warns, for whatever local advantage might be gained by circumventing the law, recourse to unconstitutional means “is the customary weapon by which free governments are destroyed.”

A common if not inevitable view of the Founders presents them as aggressively secular, anemically deist if not forthrightly atheistic. So it is interesting to contemplate Washington’s last major theme—the importance of religion as a support for democratic institutions. “Of all the dispositions and habits which lead to political prosperity,” he writes, “religion and morality are indispensable supports.” He contends, moreover, that morality without the support of religious principle is vain: “[L]et us with caution indulge the supposition that morality can be maintained without religion. Whatever may be conceded to the influence of refined education on minds of peculiar structure, reason and experience both forbid us to expect that national morality can prevail in exclusion of religious principle.”

As we look back at the two-hundred-and-thirtieth anniversary of the ratification of the U.S. Constitution—and as we look around at the many pockets of ferment and histrionic political disaffection—there is something reassuring about Washington’s valedictory remarks. Reassuring, but also hortatory and admonishing. And yet, how quaint some of his advisories must sound to the ears of us modern sophisticates. After all, America did not become the world’s preeminent power by avoiding foreign entanglements. What do our major cultural and political institutions have to do with “religious principle”? Why should Constitutional niceties stand in the way of promulgating the dogmas of progressivism?

At the same time, there is a current of seriousness and political—nay, human—insight in Washington’s address that must give pause to anyone not wholly ensorcelled by the contentious political evils that Washington anatomizes with such frank earnestness. That is the heartening aspect of this great address.

# Solzhenitsyn's cathedrals

by Gary Saul Morson

---

*Germans rely on heavy artillery, Russians on God.*  
—Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn, *The Red Wheel*

In Russia, history is too important to leave to the historians. Great novelists must show how people actually lived through events and reveal their moral significance. As Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn explained in his 1970 Nobel Prize lecture, literature transmits “condensed and irrefutable human experience” in a form that “defies distortion and falsehood. Thus literature . . . preserves and protects a nation’s soul.”

The latest Solzhenitsyn book to appear in English, *March 1917*, focuses on the great turning point of Russian, indeed world, history: the Russian Revolution.<sup>1</sup> Just a century ago, that upheaval and the Bolshevik coup eight months later ushered in something entirely new and uniquely horrible. Totalitarianism, as invented by Lenin and developed by Hitler, Stalin, Mao, Pol Pot, and others, aspired to control every aspect of life, to redesign the earth and to remake the human soul. As a result, the environment suffered unequalled devastation and tens of millions of lives were lost in the Soviet Union alone. Solzhenitsyn, who spent the years 1945 to 1953 as a prisoner in the labor camp system known as the Gulag archipelago, devoted his life to showing just what happened so it could not be forgotten. One death is a tragedy but a million is a sta-

---

<sup>1</sup> *March 1917: The Red Wheel, Node III, Book 1*, by Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn, translated by Marian Schwartz; University of Notre Dame Press, 688 pages, \$39.

tistic, Stalin supposedly remarked, but Solzhenitsyn makes us envision life after ruined life. He aimed to shake the conscience of the world, and he succeeded, at least for a time.

In taking literature so seriously, Solzhenitsyn claimed the mantle of a “Russian writer,” which, as all Russians understand, means much more than a writer who happens to be Russian. It is a status less comparable to “American writer” than to “Hebrew prophet.” “Hasn’t it always been understood,” asks one of Solzhenitsyn’s characters, “that a major writer in our country . . . is a sort of second government?” In Russia, Boris Pasternak explained, “a book is a squarish chunk of hot, smoking conscience—and nothing else!” Russians sometimes speak as if a nation exists in order to produce great literature: that is how it fulfills its appointed task of supplying its distinctive wisdom to humanity.

Like the church to a believer, Russian literature claims an author’s first loyalty. When the writer Vladimir Korolenko, who was half Ukrainian, was asked his nationality, he famously replied: “My homeland is Russian literature.” In her 2015 Nobel Prize address, Svetlana Alexievich echoed Korolenko by claiming three homelands: her mother’s Ukraine, her father’s Belarus, and—“Russia’s great culture, without which I cannot imagine myself.” By culture she meant, above all, literature.

Solzhenitsyn was of course aware that, even in Russia, not all writers take literature so seriously and many regard his views as hopelessly

unsophisticated. He recalls that in the early twentieth century, the Russian avant-garde called for “the destruction of the Racines, the Murillos, and the Raphaels, ‘so that bullets would bounce off museum walls.’” Still worse, “the classics of Russian literature . . . were to be thrown overboard from the ship of modernity.” With such manifestoes the avant-garde prepared the way for the Revolution, and, when it happened, were at first accepted “as faithful allies” and given “power to administrate over culture” until they, too, were thrown overboard. For Solzhenitsyn, a great writer cannot be frivolous, still less a moral relativist, but must believe in and serve goodness and truth.

Naturally, Solzhenitsyn expressed contempt for postmodernism, especially when it infected Russians. After the Gulag, he asks, how can anyone believe that evil is a mere social construct? Such writers betray their tradition: “Yes, they say, Communist doctrines were a great lie; but then again, absolute truths do not exist anyhow . . . . Nor is it worthwhile to strive for some kind of higher meaning.” And so, “in one sweeping gesture of vexation, classical Russian literature—which never disdained reality and sought the truth—is dismissed as worthless . . . it has once again become fashionable in Russia to ridicule, debunk, and toss overboard the great Russian literature, steeped as it is in love and compassion toward all human beings, and especially toward those who suffer.”

Among Solzhenitsyn's many works, two great “cathedrals,” as one critic has called them, stand out, one incredibly long, and the other still longer. His masterpiece is surely the first cathedral, his three-volume *Gulag Archipelago: An Experiment in Literary Investigation*. I suspect that only three post-Revolutionary Russian prose works will survive as world classics: Isaac Babel's *Red Cavalry*, Mikhail Bulgakov's *The Master and Margarita*, and Solzhenitsyn's *Gulag*. For that matter, *Gulag* may be the most significant literary work produced anywhere in the second half of the twentieth century.

Like Gibbon's *Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*, *Gulag* is literary without being

fictional. Indeed, part of its value lies in its bringing to life the real stories of so many ordinary people. When I first began to read it, I feared that a long list of outrages would rapidly prove boring, but to my surprise I could not put the book down. How does Solzhenitsyn manage to sustain our interest? To begin with, as with Gibbon, readers respond to the author's brilliantly ironic voice, which has a thousand registers. Sometimes it surprises us with a brief comment on a single mendacious word. It seems that prisoners packed as tightly as possible were transported through the city in brightly painted vehicles labeled “Meat.” “It would have been more accurate to say ‘bones,’” Solzhenitsyn observes.

Every reader recalls the introduction to the chapter on “Interrogation”:

If the intellectuals in the plays of Chekhov, who spent all their time guessing what would happen in twenty, thirty, or forty years, had been told that in forty years interrogation by torture would be practiced in Russia; that prisoners would have their skulls squeezed with iron rings; that a human being would be lowered into an acid bath; that they would be trussed up naked to be bitten by ants and bedbugs; that a ramrod heated over a primus stove would be thrust up their anal canal (the “secret brand”); that a man's genitals would be slowly crushed beneath the toe of a jackboot; and that, in the luckiest possible circumstances, prisoners would be tortured by being kept from sleeping for a week, by thirst, and by being beaten to a bloody pulp, not one of Chekhov's plays would have gotten to its end because all the heroes would have gone off to insane asylums.

Comparisons with pre-revolutionary writers provide a constant source of irony. They thought they had seen suffering! Tolstoy and Korolenko “shed tears of indignation” that from 1876 to 1904, the tsars executed 486 people and then, from 1905 to 1908, another 2,200! But from 1917 to 1953, the Soviets on average doubled that total every week. Unlike their tsarist predecessors, prisoners in Soviet labor camps suffered constant hunger, and no other writer has ever described hunger so well.

And then, with delicate irony, as if he were an anthropologist describing the customs of a remote tribe, Solzhenitsyn informs us that among prisoners the mention of Gogol, famous for his descriptions of food, was taboo.

*Gulag* also sustains interest by its core story, the moral progress of the author. Solzhenitsyn's description of how he was arrested leads to his account of countless other arrests, and in this way we learn about every stage of the long process leading either to execution (officially "imprisonment without the right to correspond") or a labor camp. What is particularly impressive is the author's unsparing account of his own moral shortcomings. Arrested as an army officer, he considered himself superior to ordinary people. Over hundreds of pages, we watch his initial naïve assessments of his new surroundings and his slow process of learning the truth about the ideology he once accepted. Gradually he embraces moral truths he had never suspected. *Gulag* is a real-life *Bildungsroman*—a novel of how a young person learns about life—with insights about "higher meaning" relevant to us all.

In one memorable scene, Solzhenitsyn describes how a believing Jew shook his worldview. At the time he met him, Solzhenitsyn explains, "I was committed to that world outlook which is incapable of admitting any new fact or evaluating any new opinion before a label has been found for it . . . be it 'the hesitant duplicity of the petty bourgeoisie,' or the 'militant nihilism of the déclassé intelligentsia.'" When someone mentioned a prayer spoken by President Roosevelt, Solzhenitsyn called it "hypocrisy, of course." Gammerov, the Jew, demanded why he did not admit the possibility of a political leader sincerely believing in God. That was all, Solzhenitsyn remarks, but it was so shocking to hear such words from someone born in 1923 that it forced him to think. "I could have replied to him firmly, but prison had already undermined my certainty, and the principle thing was that some kind of clean, pure feeling does live within us, existing apart from all our convictions, and right then it dawned on me that I had not spoken out of conviction but because the idea had been

implanted in me from outside." He learns to question what he really believes and, still more important, to appreciate that basic human decency morally surpasses any "convictions."

Once he admits that he has supported evil, he begins to ask where evil comes from. How do interrogators, who know their cases are fabricated and who use torture every time, continue to do their work year after year? He tells the story of one interrogator's wife boasting of his prowess: "Kolya is a very good worker. One of them didn't confess for a long time—and they gave him to Kolya. Kolya talked with him for one night and he confessed."

One way to commit evil is simply "not to think," but willed ignorance of evil already means "the ruin of a human being." Those who tell Solzhenitsyn not to dig up the past belong to the category of "not-thinkers," as do Western leftists who make sure not to know. The Germans, he argues, were *lucky* to have had the Nuremberg trials because they made not-thinking impossible. This Russian patriot advances a unique complaint: "Why is Germany allowed to punish its evildoers and Russia is not?"

Solzhenitsyn discovers yet another cause of totalitarianism's monstrous evil: "Progressive Doctrine" or "Ideology." In one famous passage, he asks why Shakespeare's villains killed only a few people, while Lenin and Stalin murdered millions. The reason is that Macbeth and Iago "had no ideology." Real people do not resemble the evildoers of mass culture, who delight in cruelty and destruction. No, to do mass evil you have to believe it is good, and it is *ideology* that supplies this conviction. "Thanks to ideology, the twentieth century was fated to experience evildoing on a scale of millions."

One lesson of *Gulag* is that we are all capable of evil, just as Solzhenitsyn himself was. The world is not divided into good people like ourselves and evil people who think differently. "If only it were so simple! If only there were evil people somewhere insidiously committing evil deeds, and it were necessary only to separate them from the rest of us and destroy them. But the line dividing good and evil cuts through the heart of every human being. And who is willing to destroy a piece of his own heart?"



The core chapter of *Gulag*, entitled “The Ascent,” explains that according to Soviet ideology, absorbed by almost everyone, the only standard of morality is success. If there are no otherworldly truths, then effectiveness in this world is all that counts. That is why the Party is justified in doing anything. For the individual prisoner, this way of thinking entails a willingness to inflict harm on others as a means of survival. Whether to yield to this temptation represents the great moral choice of a prisoner’s life: “From this point the roads go to the right and to the left. One of them will rise and the other descend. If you go the right—you lose your life; and if you go to the left—you lose your conscience.”

Some people choose conscience. To do so, they must believe, as Solzhenitsyn came to believe, that the world as described by materialism is only part of reality. In addition, there is, as every religion has insisted, a realm of objective values, which are not mere social constructs. You can’t make the right choice as a postmodernist.

Once you give up survival at any price, “then imprisonment begins to transform your former character in astonishing ways. To transform it in a direction most unexpected to you.” You learn what true friendship is. Sensing your own weakness, you become more forgiving of others and “an understanding mildness” informs your “un-categorical judgments.” As you review your life, and face your bad choices, you gain self-knowledge available in no other way. Above all, you learn that what is most valuable is “the development of the soul.” In the *Gulag* I nourished my soul, Solzhenitsyn concludes, and so I say without hesitation: “Bless you, prison, for having been in my life!”

The *Gulag* was the product of the Revolution, but why was there a Revolution? Solzhenitsyn’s second “cathedral,” the multi-volume novel *The Red Wheel*, attempts to answer that question. The title comes from a passage in which Lenin, during his exile in Zurich, sees a train whose engine had “a big red wheel, almost the height of a man.” Interpreting the train’s relentless power as a symbol of merciless historical inevitability, Lenin thinks:

All the time, without knowing it, you were waiting for this moment, and now the moment had come! The heavy wheel [of history] turns, gathering speed—like the red wheel of the engine—and you must keep up with its mighty rush. He who had never yet stood before the crowd, directing the movement of the masses, how was he to harness them to that wheel?

*The Red Wheel* consists of four long “knots,” or, as Marian Schwartz prefers, “nodes.” Like Tolstoy’s *War and Peace*, each volume includes both fictional characters and real historical figures, along with non-fictional essays by the author. Solzhenitsyn also adds countless authentic documents: letters between Nicholas and Alexandra, transcripts of debates in the Duma (the nascent Russian parliament), and a letter from Rasputin to the Tsar warning against war. We read “screens” or instructions for how a scene could be filmed. In the historical sections, the author sometimes switches to small print to indicate strict adherence to fact, with no admixture of imaginative reconstruction. Introducing one sixty-page small-print section, the author suggests that “only the most indefatigably curious readers immerse themselves in these details” while the rest might skip “to the next section in larger print. The author would not permit himself such a crude distortion of the novel form if Russia’s whole history, her very memory, had not been so distorted in the past, and her historians silenced.” Tolstoy insisted that *War and Peace* belonged to no recognized genre but was simply “what the author wished to express and was able to express in that form in which he expressed it,” and Solzhenitsyn advances much the same claim. Formal experimentation never occurs for its own sake.

The first node, *August 1914*, focuses on the disastrous Russian military losses in that month, but its real energy lies in its fictional characters. We meet the hero, Colonel Vorotyntsev, a dedicated officer who aspires to modernize the Russian army and, beyond that, Russian society. Such conservative reformers, we learn, represented Russia’s only hope to avoid revolution, but by August 1914, there was little they could do. Surrounding the foolish tsar were incom-

petent time-servers, who viewed the monarchy merely as a source of gifts. Their “marsh-like viscosity” made reform impossible.

But reform had not always been hopeless, and *August 1914* includes a hundred-page flashback account of the book's most admirable historical figure, Prime Minister Stolypin, who tried to liberate the peasants from their communes and turn them into wealthy, independent farmers with full legal rights. Unappreciated by the tsar, and insufficiently protected from Russia's countless terrorists, he was assassinated by a double agent in 1911. Lenin himself understood that if Stolypin's reforms succeeded there would be no revolution. This whole section of the book becomes an exercise in counterfactual history. More precisely, the future Stolypin envisioned was Russia's true destiny and the revolutionary path that usurped its place was the counterfactual that somehow became real. “Stolypin's stand could have been and looked like the beginning of a new period in Russian history. . . . ‘Another ten or fifteen years,’ Stolypin would tell his close collaborators, ‘and the revolutionaries won't have a chance,’” a judgment with which the author agrees.

Russia was the first society where, believe it or not, terrorism was an honored, if dangerous, profession—at times even a family business passed on from parent to child. We trace the history of one such family, the Lentaroviches, whose many members—all but one—pride themselves on their revolutionary “family tradition.” The exception, young Veronika, prefers art and symbolist poetry, a dereliction her aunts describe as “nihilism”! To bring her to her senses, they recite “the sacred traditions” of the intelligentsia, focusing especially on women terrorists. “In our day girls used to be blessed . . . with [the terrorist] Vera Figner's portrait, as though it were an icon. And that determined your whole future life.” They remind her of Sofya Perovskaia, a governor's daughter who directed the assassination of Tsar Alexander II; of Dora Brilliant, whose “big black eyes shone with the holy joy of terrorism”; of Zhenya Grigorovich, who appreciated “the beauty of terror”; and of Yevlalia Rogozinnikova, who decided to

take as many lives as possible by becoming a suicide bomber. “What fanatical zeal for justice!” the aunts proclaim. “To turn yourself into a walking bomb!”

When Veronika questions the morality of such killing, especially random murder, her shocked aunts explain that revolutionaries “are not to be judged by the yardsticks of old-fashioned morality. To a revolutionary, everything that contributes to the triumph of the revolution is moral.” All that matters is the terrorist's pure intention: “Let him lie—as long as it is for the sake of truth! Let him kill— but only for the sake of love! The Party takes all the blame upon itself—so that terror is no longer murder, expropriation is no longer robbery. Just as long as the revolutionary does not commit the sin against the Holy Ghost, that is, against his own party.” Is it any wonder that the revolutionaries who did take power proved so bloodthirsty?, Solzhenitsyn asks. And why does anyone suppose that revolutionaries, who specialize in violence, will somehow become compassionate when governing?

Veronika later meets Olda Andozerskaia, an unorthodox professor of medieval history who, to the amazement of her students, maintains that historical research must be judged by criteria of truthfulness rather than political usefulness. What's more, “we must accept the conclusions as they come, even if they go against us.” Andozerskaia even argues that spiritual values, as well as economic interests, shape history and that “personal responsibility” may demand going against prevailing opinion. If only she were my colleague!

Both *August 1914* and the next “node,” *November 1916*, focus on the many liberals who apologized for terrorism. Without their support, the revolutionaries could not have succeeded. Why would privileged, educated people, who would themselves be destroyed should the revolutionaries seize power, offer them cover? This question, as Solzhenitsyn notes, pertains not just to pre-revolutionary Russia, but to many other societies, including those of the contemporary West.

There appears to be a certain “leftward dislocation of the neck obligatory for radicals

[liberals] the world over.” The Russian liberal Party, the Kadets—Constitutional Democrats—dominated the Duma, and yet, instead of making parliamentary politics productive, they joined with the revolutionaries to make the Duma unworkable. Even when Stolypin endorsed the very reforms they had advocated, the Kadets refused to cooperate, lest they earn the ridicule of those further left. Above all, they always made their first and most important demand unconditional amnesty for all terrorists, including those pledged to resume killing the moment they were released. As Petrunkevich, the patriarch of the Kadets, remarked: “Condemn terror? Never! That would mean the moral ruin of the Party!”

Terror reached an amazing scale. Beginning with the manifesto creating the Duma in 1905, some ten thousand people were killed, twice as many by the terrorists as by the police hunting them. Officials often refused to wear their uniforms because to do so was to make oneself (and one’s family) a target. Terror was often random: “Instructions to terrorists recommended that bombs should be made of cast iron, so that there would be more splinters, and packed with nails,” while “random shots were fired at train windows.” Whole buildings with dozens of innocent bystanders were blown up. Dynamite, “beautiful dynamite,” was sacramental.

Educated society greeted these killings “with pious approval, gloating smiles, and gleeful whispers. Don’t call it murder! . . . terrorists are people of the highest moral sensitivity.” The greater the violence, the greater the glee. Liberals “would sign any sort of petition, whether or not they agreed with it.” They continued to demand the abolition of censorship, but prevented any antagonistic publications from appearing. In hospitals, left-wing doctors would treat only revolutionaries: “Any simple soul who makes the sign of the cross is refused admission.”

By his own experience, Colonel Vorotyntsev comes to realize that “educated people were more cowardly when confronted by left-wing loudmouths than in face of machine guns.” In one remarkable scene, he finds himself in an informal meeting of garrulous Kadets. “Each of

them knew in advance what the others would say. But . . . it was imperative for them to meet and hear all over again what they collectively knew. They were all overpoweringly certain they were right, yet they needed these exchanges to reinforce their certainty.” Oddly enough, Vorotyntsev, who thinks quite differently, finds himself echoing their beliefs, and wonders: what exactly is the pull that he and other conservatives or moderates experience on such occasions? I have not seen this question, as relevant today as ever, addressed anywhere else, and Solzhenitsyn handles it brilliantly. Vorotyntsev at last breaks free “from the unbearable constraints, the bewitchment.” It is his escape from this “bewitchment” that makes Professor Andozerskaia, who witnesses it, fall in love with him.

When the first volumes of *The Red Wheel* were published, some readers, detecting Solzhenitsyn’s Christian belief and disapproving of his portraits of Jews, accused him of anti-Semitism. To be sure, some of his portraits of Jews—most notably, Bogrov, who assassinated Stolypin—are less than flattering. What is more, Bogrov decides to kill Stolypin, rather than the Tsar, because he knows that regicide would provoke pogroms and his first loyalty is to his own people.

Unlike George Eliot’s novel *Daniel Deronda*, in which Jews are invariably portrayed as superhumanly good, here they are no better, but also no worse, than everyone else. Vorotyntsev refutes with disdain the idea, common at the time, of an international Jewish conspiracy. He also calls for equal rights and wonders why Jews are *not* disloyal to Russia when Russia’s enemy, Germany, affords them rights denied in Russia. We know that the wealthy Jewess Susanna Korzner, who argues passionately against persecution of Jews, has her heart in the right place when she declares that “Russian literature is my spiritual home.”

At the end of *August 1914*, a Jewish engineer, Ilya Isakovich, argues with his daughter Sonya and her friend Naum about politics. The whole intelligentsia favors revolution, the young people argue, as if that proves revolution correct. Ilya Isakovich replies

that engineers believe in construction, not destruction, and that it takes real intelligence to create wealth, while “poorer heads can attend to distribution.” This Jew speaks for the author: “No one with any sense can be in favor of revolution, because it is just a prolonged process of insane destruction. The main thing about any revolution is that it does not renew a country but ruins it.” When Sonya asks how a Jew can be a patriot in a society with pogroms, he replies that there is more to Russia than Black Hundreds: “On the one side you have Black Hundreds, and on this side Red Hundreds, and in between . . . a handful of practical people.”

Though overtly Christian, *The Red Wheel* does not treat Judaism, or any other religion, as false. The work's wisest character, Father Severyan—this is a Russian novel, after all!—maintains that a religion proves its godliness by humility, which means not treating other faiths as inferior. He narrates the folktale of seven brothers who look for Mother Truth. Each sees her from a different angle and so all conclude that the others lie and must be slain: “They had all seen the same Truth but had not looked carefully.”

The volume that has just appeared in English, *March 1917*, traces the beginning of the Revolution. To be precise, this volume is only the first of four books comprising *March 1917*. Like the earlier volumes translated by the late Harry Willetts, Marian Schwartz's rendition is superb. I discovered no errors, and the tone is perfect. (Full disclosure: forty-seven years ago, Willetts was my Oxford tutor, and I collaborated with Marian Schwartz on her recent version of *Anna Karenina*.)

Unlike *August 1914* and *November 1916*, both of which contain long chapters and longer digressions, the present volume is divided into 170 brief chapters. Almost moment by moment, we follow historical and fictional characters from March 8 to March 11, 1917, as chaos unfolds. Although the Kadets think that

history must fulfill a story known in advance, Solzhenitsyn shows us a mass of discrepant incidents that fit no coherent narrative. Later accounts discovering a pattern are simply false, and it is plain that, Hegel, Marx, and all theories of inevitable progress notwithstanding, history has no inbuilt direction. It depends on what people do, and people act without benefit of hindsight. Tolstoy, too, argued that novels give a truer portrait than histories because they can show people experiencing events before their outcome was known and when more than one course of events was conceivable.

In scene after scene, no one has the perspective to recognize what exactly is going on. Told that his family is in danger, the Tsar stupidly insists that “this wasn't an insurrection but an exaggeration.” Historians have attributed the riots to a bread shortage, but Solzhenitsyn demonstrates that there was no bread shortage, only rumors of one. Everyone in Petrograd expects the regime to use outside troops, as they easily could have. Far from inevitable, the revolution depended on repeated failures to do the obvious.

In the final analysis, *The Red Wheel* is less a political novel than an anti-political novel. Like so many intellectuals today, who proclaim that “all is political,” the revolutionaries reduce everything to political power, but the book's wisest characters know that that is the road to totalitarian disaster. To see life solely in political terms is to misunderstand it. For Solzhenitsyn, the meaning of life lies in the moral development of each individual soul, each person's struggle with the evil within us all, and the achievement of wise humility and compassion for others. We each contain an unfathomable “great mystery.” One wise character, Varsonofiev, asks himself: “How long would it take to understand that the life of a community cannot be reduced to politics or wholly encompassed by government? Our age is a mere film on the surface of time.”

# The first global conflict

by Conrad Black

---

As anyone familiar with Victor Davis Hanson's writing would expect, his new, exhaustively researched summary of World War II comes from a novel angle and is a very stimulating and original work.<sup>1</sup> The war is not approached chronologically, and its origins are only cursorily summarized, but it is examined thematically, as if by a scanner or ultrasound from different perspectives. Thus, the plural title *Second World Wars* and the subtitle *How the First Global Conflict Was Fought and Won*. The component analyses are grouped in the vast categories of Ideas, Air, Water, Earth, Fire, People, and Ends. This technique produces, from early on, an extensive variety of surprising facts that are very informative and will enhance the knowledge even of people who are already well read on the subject.

These insights from unusual angles start with the very first paragraphs, where it is explained that from the outbreak of World War II on September 1, 1939 to the formal end of it on September 2, 1945, twenty-seven thousand people perished in war-related activity every single day: sixty million people, an unheard-of total in world war-making history, and almost four times the total of World War I, in which a large number of deaths were from epidemics. The subtitle refers to World War II as the "first global conflict," by which Mr. Hanson apparently means that, despite the small though historically

important skirmishes in North America, Africa, the Middle East, South Asia, and the far Pacific, previous intercontinental wars were essentially European. World War II racked up heavy casualties between main force units of the Great Powers in Europe, Asia, Africa, and Australasia, and the naval war came into the coastal waters of all continents except Antarctica. Certainly, World War II was the first war in which Great Powers located on both the Atlantic and Pacific Oceans fought each other with the intention of subduing the other completely.

Mr. Hanson cogently ascribes the unprecedented bloodletting of World War II to the full-scale involvement of all of the Great Powers, seeking either the complete humiliation or the unconditional surrender of their enemies. He also cites the tremendous advancements in the destructiveness of weapons up to the dawn of the nuclear age and the policies of the Germans, Japanese, and Russians of deliberate mass murder of some of the combatants and civilians of certain ethnic groups and nationalities. Seventy to eighty percent of those killed were civilians, a much larger proportion than in any other modern war. One learns that the Anglo-Americans dropped thirty times as great a weight of bombs on German cities in the four months after D-Day as the Germans unloaded on the British in the six months of the Blitz. (Though he touches on the moral implications of bombing civilians, and quotes Mr. Churchill many times, always with admiration, Mr. Hanson unfortunately omits Churchill's assertion that "The hideous, stertorous sleep of the Hun

---

<sup>1</sup> *The Second World Wars: How the First Global Conflict Was Fought and Won*, by Victor Davis Hanson; Basic Books, 720 pages, \$40.

must be disturbed.”) This is the first major war in history in which the victors sustained more casualties than the defeated powers (because of the terrible numbers of casualties in Russia and China, where the Germans and Japanese claimed to be exterminating inferior races).

The phenomenon of appeasement is very precisely examined and explained in a few apposite quotes: the British ambassador to France in the 1930s said that because France had been victorious in World War I, “The British thought the French have become Germans and by some mysterious transmutation the Germans had become Englishmen”; the chief author of appeasement, Prime Minister Neville Chamberlain, is authoritatively quoted as blaming the Austrian Anschluss on his anti-appeasement foreign secretary, Anthony Eden, and wrote that it could have been avoided if he had brought the appeaser Halifax into the Foreign Office earlier.

Mr. Hanson sketches out in non-chronological order the major causes of the war. He debunks the theory that Versailles was a Carthaginian peace: none of Germany was occupied, the disarmament requirements were unenforceable, as were the reparations, and the peace was less onerous than that dictated by Bismarck at the end of the Franco-Prussian war in 1871 (also at Versailles) was for France. Germany’s direct enemies were in worse condition than Germany was in 1918: Russia was in revolution and civil war, and France had suffered far greater per capita casualties than Germany in World War I and much of the French industrial heartland had been destroyed. The British and French were shortly governed by people fiercely determined to avoid another war, while Germany fell into the hands of a leader determined to exploit the weakness of the West as long as he could and then to unleash on it a far more violent war than had ever been known before.

Mr. Hanson writes that “Allied statesmen assumed that the Germans would soon tire of their failed painter and Austrian corporal” (Hitler). These same statesmen had wasted the 1920s with ridiculous gestures towards peace. When the economic follies of the time brought the later aggressors to power, their tasks had been made easier: the Washington Naval Disarmament Conference helped enable the enemies of

the Allied countries to challenge them at sea in World War II, and the Kellogg-Briand pact conferred upon the Western powers for a time an absurd serenity that war could be outlawed as a means of national policy through moral suasion.

Germany and Italy were governed by dictators who had served in the ranks in World War I and liked war. They just kept picking their rivals’ pockets until France, exhausted, leaderless, and irresolute, crumbled under the weight of the German Blitzkrieg, and Britain, as is its ancient historic habit in wars with Great Powers that are going badly, suddenly changed leaders and elevated a statesman of unlimited, but just, bellicosity. Though he does not put it in this way, and Mr. Hanson, an eminent classicist, tends to draw on ancient Greek and Roman analogies, Winston Churchill was following in the British tradition which calls for the man of action in war emergencies: William Pitt the Elder and Younger (Seven Years’ and Napoleonic Wars), Palmerston (Crimea), and Lloyd George (World War I).

Hitler began with the determination to shred the Treaty of Versailles and re-establish Germany as the greatest power in Europe. He seized upon the scattering of irredentist German minorities all over Central and Eastern Europe to single out the host countries one by one, like a great cat choosing a vulnerable beast in a herd; terrorized these countries singly on pseudo-righteous and racist grounds; and then devoured them, claiming at each turn that he had no further ambitions: regaining the Saar, remilitarizing the Rhineland, annexing Austria, the Sudetenland, Czech and Moravian areas, the Lithuanian Memel, and Poland. When the “worms” he had seen at Munich—namely, Chamberlain and Daladier—went inexplicably to war after Poland’s turn came, Hitler gave them seven months to come to their senses, and then attacked with immense speed and mass (the combination that Napoleon had said comprised force) in Scandinavia, the Low Countries, and France.

Although he does not explicitly state it here, Mr. Hanson effectively follows the traditional truism about Germany—that it was too late in unifying, too late in determining whether it

was an eastward- or westward-facing country, and that whenever it sought to strengthen its own security it destabilized its neighbors. Mr. Hanson believes that Hitler, having sloughed off the restraints of Versailles and having accustomed the British and French to accepting timidly whatever outrages he wished to inflict on their Versailles Treaty protégé-states, intended to continue on his winning streak, picking up what was easy, and would work it out, objective by objective, as he went gluttonously along.

At the twilight of peace, the only leader of a great power who had a serious concept of what he was doing was Franklin D. Roosevelt, whom Mr. Hanson treats generally respectfully but underestimates as a strategist. He does assist in disposing of the canard that the United States underperformed Nazi Germany economically in the Depression. The United States did better than Germany and the other Great Powers at producing infrastructure, conservation, and, ultimately, defense production workfare programs (including the construction of the frequently mentioned aircraft carriers *Enterprise* and *Yorktown*) for the steadily shrinking number of unemployed people, than they did conscripting every serviceable male into either the armed forces or war production.

Until the elevation of Churchill on May 10, 1940, most of the leaders of the Great Powers were, to a remarkable extent, delusional, and the Axis leaders continued to be so. Stalin, ignored in the run-up to the Munich give-away, became disgusted by the feebleness of London and Paris, and made his deal with Hitler, dividing Poland between them and, as he thought, shrewdly ushering Germany into a lengthy and enervating war in the West. Russia would be *tertius gaudens* on the sidelines. Hitler had assumed the “worms” would keep on giving, and could not imagine that they would suddenly be replaced in London by a mighty warrior.

German use of armor and coordinated air attacks was already styled, in the catchy, pagan Nazi propagandistic vocabulary, “Blitzkrieg,” but the French and British had superior and more numerous tanks and aircraft, if only they had had the military and civilian leaders to deploy their military strength intelligently. The

German mystique was instantly created by, as Churchill wrote in an early message to Roosevelt, smashing up “the little countries like matchwood.” In fact, as the surviving Allied powers all proved, Blitzkrieg could be countered by more purposeful commanders armed with tanks and aircraft of adequate number and quality, and the Allies already had the designs and productive capacity.

Hitler, after strolling around Paris for a few hours, and after his peace offering was rebuffed by Churchill, assumed that he could just keep winning aggressive wars against his neighbors. I disagree with Mr. Hanson’s theory, widely shared, that withholding a Panzer attack on the Dunkirk perimeter was a great mistake. Committing those divisions then would have brought increased activity from the RAF, which had already demonstrated that it could hold its own with the Luftwaffe, and would have caused Churchill to move heavy units of the Royal Navy, unchallengeable in the English Channel, close in-shore, and its big guns could have smashed 1,500 or so German tanks in an hour. Hitler, for once, was in the bounds of reason, for chasing the British out and preserving all his strength to rout the main French army to the south and sweep France out of the war before Paul Reynaud (who had replaced Daladier), Georges Mandel, and the young Charles de Gaulle could assert themselves and move the navy, air force, and much of the army to North Africa to carry on the war.

It is disappointing that France is not more thoroughly treated in this book, and that de Gaulle is only mentioned in passing as an early advocate of mechanized warfare. France was a more substantial power than Italy, and de Gaulle was a statesman on approximately the same plane as Roosevelt and Churchill. By the end of the war, he had secured France an occupation zone in Germany and status as a co-founder of the new international organization in which for a time some hopes were invested (the United Nations).

Benito Mussolini had persuaded himself by fifteen years of bravura and the shameful assault on underdeveloped Ethiopians and Albanians that Italy, too, was a Great Power, but it wasn’t. Italian aircraft, tank, and artillery designers and naval ar-

chitects had produced fine and competitive models, but Italian industry had comparatively little capacity to build them, and Italy had a chronic insufficiency of the resources needed for a serious war, oil and steel in particular. Its ships were fine, and it had the world's fifth-largest navy after Britain and America (which were about equal in size, despite Mr. Hanson's frequent claim that the British was larger), Japan, and France. But Italy had no aircraft carriers or radar: its ships valued speed ahead of armor and were very vulnerable to British torpedo planes and heavy units, or in any night-time exchange. The senior military staff, apart from the charismatic Air Marshal Italo Balbo, was a gang of patriotic fuddy-duddies, fascist roués, and scoundrels who couldn't lead Italy across the Ponte Vecchio. Mussolini, in de Gaulle's phrase, "flew to the aid of the German victory" in 1940, was disgraced by Roosevelt's description of him as having "struck the dagger into the back of his neighbor," and was soundly thrashed by the British (and the Greeks) on land and sea at every opportunity, apart from the brief Italian victory in Somaliland.

The Japanese leadership was collegial, colorless, and set on a course of regional domination. It was headed by General Hideki Tojo, a bland military committee chairman, leading a coterie of military counselors to the Emperor. Hirohito, whom Mr. Hanson scarcely mentions, proved the great survivor of all the leading personalities in World War II, continuing serenely on the Chrysanthemum Throne until 1989, after an astounding reign of sixty-three years, following five years as Prince Regent. There was no Japanese leader with a public following apart from the Emperor; a clique of belligerent officers evicted the relatively sensible Prince Fumimaro Konoe in October 1941.

Konoe and Hirohito had grave misgivings about attacking the United States, but the Tojo faction prevailed and sold the argument that it was better for Japan to do this than to submit to American pressure to withdraw from China and Indochina or face a permanent embargo on oil imports, for which Japan was reliant on the United States for 85 percent of its supply. The Japanese militarists had talked themselves into a dream world wherein Japan could demoralize the United States with a sneak attack and hold

them at bay thereafter. Mr. Hanson portrays the celebrated Admiral Isoroku Yamamoto, well remembered in the West for his comment that the Pearl Harbor attack he had planned would "wake a sleeping giant and fill it with a terrible resolve that will shortly be turned upon us," as both an advocate of and opponent of war with the United States. I don't doubt that is true, but it could have been elaborated, as Yamamoto is generally credited with having both successfully planned and presciently opposed the attack on Pearl Harbor.

This brings us to the last of the Great Powers to be engaged, and much the greatest of them, the United States, and its longest-serving president. Here, I'm afraid, Victor Davis Hanson falls a bit short of the mark. He gives due attention to the immense industrial capacity and war production of the United States and credits Roosevelt with imaginative assistance to Britain and Canada to keep them in the war. But I believe he is too muted in his praise of the astoundingly agile political finesse Roosevelt displayed from 1937, with his "Quarantine Speech," through Pearl Harbor, and in securing the cross-Channel invasion in 1944. He also buys too much into the argument of Roosevelt's supposed naiveté opposite Stalin.

Roosevelt gave the British fifty destroyers (which Hanson rightly defends from the charge of complete obsolescence) and introduced the first peacetime draft in the country's history. He packed his administration with Republicans (War Secretary Stimson, Navy Secretary Knox, Intelligence Chief Donovan, Ambassador to London Winant—the closest the United States ever came to coalition government), all while breaking a tradition as old as the republic in taking, after a fake spontaneous draft at the Democratic convention and a strenuous election, a third presidential term. All of this was predicted to Hitler by his ambassador in Washington, Hans Dieckhoff, an able man despite being the brother-in-law of Hitler's imbecile Foreign Minister, Joachim von Ribbentrop. Roosevelt pulled his ambassador from Berlin after the infamous Kristallnacht pogroms in November 1938, and Hitler reciprocated. Roosevelt extended territorial waters from 3 to 1,800 miles



in the Atlantic, and ordered the U.S. Navy to attack on detection any German or Italian vessel and to notify the British and Canadians of their location. He rammed through Lend-Lease that effectively gave the British and Canadians—and eventually the Russians—anything they wanted, and they could pay for it when they could. (As a member of the British House of Lords, I voted to approve the final Lend-Lease repayment in 2002.) Roosevelt's view of neutrality was, to say the least, an idiosyncratic one; Mr. Hanson credits him with his political management of the requirements of the American strategic interest, and a formidable defense build-up from 1939 to 1941, but short-changes him on the consequences of his benign Machiavellianism.

More importantly, Mr. Hanson gives Roosevelt inadequate commendation both for rejecting the usually very sensible General George C. Marshall's insane plan for a forty-division "Sledgehammer" landing in northern France in 1942 (the Germans would have killed or captured all of them) and also for forcing Marshall into the Torch invasion of North Africa, that, as foreseen, delivered the French empire to the Free French, caused the German occupation of the fraudulent and treasonous state of Vichy France, eased supply to the USSR, and put a rod to the back of Rommel in Tunisia, while sobering the quasi-German sympathizers, Franco (Spain) and Salazar (Portugal).

Mr. Hanson further passes over entirely the reluctance of the British to invade northern and southern France in 1944. Churchill badgered the Americans with hare-brained schemes for invading Norway, for bribing Turkey into the war as Britain had Romania and Italy—to their sorrow—in the Great War, and for charging up the Adriatic (narrow waters with the German air force on both sides) to invade Slovenia and pass through the "Ljubljana Gap"—which, according to General Eisenhower, did not exist—to take Vienna as the Red Army advanced through Germany and into France. It was a mad enterprise. Churchill prevailed upon Roosevelt to join him in propositioning Turkish President Inonu after the Teheran Conference, to no avail (a photograph of the meeting is in this book, without the context). Roosevelt had to stay in

the Soviet legation in Teheran to assure himself, in advance of the first Big Three summit conference, of Stalin's preference for a cross-Channel invasion of France over the Adriatic plan.

Churchill and his Chief of the General Staff, Field Marshal Sir Alan Brooke, believed Stalin only supported it because he thought, as they did, that the Western Allies would be thrown into the sea by the Germans, as the British had been at Dunkirk and in Greece and Crete, and that this would facilitate Russian advances into Germany. They may have been right about Stalin, but Roosevelt correctly foresaw that, due to superiority in the air and in mechanization, there would not be a repetition of the ghastly blood-letting on the Western Front of France and Flanders in World War I. Roosevelt spoke German and French and knew those countries well, and he also knew that in every major European conflict starting with the Thirty Years' War, the victor was the power that controlled Germany. Invading France and proceeding into Germany was the only way for the Western Allies to do that.

Roosevelt was always aware that the Germans and Russians could make a separate peace if Stalin became convinced that the Anglo-Americans were just playing games in western Europe. Stalin volunteered at Teheran that there had been preliminary discussions with the Germans in Stockholm in the summer of 1943. Roosevelt also believed, accurately, that once the Anglo-Americans were across the Rhine, the Germans would cave quickly in the West, while continuing to fight fiercely in the East, in order to surrender to powers that observed the Geneva Convention and would therefore be civilized occupiers, rather than the Russians, with whom Germany had conducted the most barbarous war in world history, reciprocally murdering millions of civilians and POWs. In all of this, Roosevelt was correct. His success in these matters is rivaled as the supreme triumph of American strategic diplomacy only by Benjamin Franklin's persuasion of the absolute monarch of France, Louis XVI, to lead his bankrupt state into war against Britain in the American Revolutionary War, and in favor of republicanism, democracy, and secessionism. FDR's strategic judgment was impeccable and

exceeded in prescience and realism that of any of the other contemporary leaders.

Mr. Hanson refers somewhat disapprovingly to the demarcation of occupation zones in Germany, but does not mention the European Advisory Council, which determined the zones. Roosevelt didn't want such a commission, which was set up at the foreign ministers' meeting in Moscow in the autumn of 1943. He believed, as has been stated, that the Western Allies had a chance to occupy all of Germany, but Stalin was afraid of that and Churchill was afraid that Britain would have a small zone because it only would have 14 divisions in Germany (not counting the Canadians, as the British liked to do, but Canada was an independent country with its own army) against 70 American and 150 or more Soviet. The delineation of East and West Germany was agreed upon, as the Soviet zone became East Germany. But these zones were agreed upon after the Teheran Conference had secretly decided to move Poland's eastern and western borders 200 miles to the west, so most of the Soviet zone of Germany was really in Poland. Also, as was somewhat, but not entirely, foreseen, up to 12 million ethnic Germans moved west in advance of the Red Army, to avoid it, consolidating Germany, finally, as a western-facing country. The rap on Roosevelt for letting Stalin so far into Europe is an outrage, and it was the great anti-communist Winston Churchill who, against Roosevelt's wishes, accepted the "naughty" spheres of influence agreement in Moscow in October 1944, conceding Hungary, Romania, and Bulgaria to Stalin, dividing Yugoslavia equally, and reserving Greece to the West. Stalin tried to renege on the last two.

Mr. Hanson rightly stresses the seventy-five thousand casualties the United States took occupying Iwo Jima and Okinawa, but he gives short shrift to the Joint Chiefs' beseechings not to forgo Soviet promises to share the million casualties anticipated if it proved necessary to invade the Japanese home islands, in the event that the atomic bomb, only tested three months after Roosevelt died, did not work. Mr. Hanson makes a little-known point that, because of the peace that existed between Japan and the USSR until August 1945, the Soviets were able to deliver

Lend-Lease assistance to themselves unhindered, from Seattle and San Francisco to Vladivostok, on American ships reflagged as Soviet.

The greatest strengths of this very fine book are in the comparative weapons and logistical assessments and the evaluations of strategic alternatives. With all the hype about Blitzkrieg, which lingers yet, the German army was largely reliant on horse-drawn transport, right to the end, while the Americans swamped the Allied armies with trucks and jeeps. The Russians had better tanks than the Germans and the American tanks, especially after modification by the British, were perfectly competitive, and were produced in unimaginable quantities. The same pattern was repeated in aircraft of all types. The Germans never had a serious long-range bomber, despite Hitler's and Göring's fantasies about bombing New York. Another remarkable fact, rarely emphasized, is that the U.S. Army really only had about one hundred divisions of trigger-pullers (plus twenty or more Marine divisions). Eighty percent of the army's personnel were occupied with logistics and administration, nonetheless achieving amazing results in medical care and supplies of all kinds. (Mr. Churchill was astounded when President Roosevelt invited him to a Thanksgiving dinner in Cairo in November 1943 on their way to meet Stalin at Teheran, and told him that every member of the U.S. armed forces everywhere in the world was having a turkey dinner that day.) The veteran German infantryman was the most efficient at killing his opponent, but not in the face of heavy numerical odds and predominant enemy firepower, conditions the Allies were able to create from late 1942 on.

The perceptions of resource allocation in this book are also brilliant and original. The money wasted by the Germans and Japanese on gigantic battleships didn't achieve anything and these, mainly because of Allied air power, were all dispatched to the bottom quite promptly (*Bismarck*, *Tirpitz*, *Yamato*, and *Musashi*). Devoting the same resources to building submarines could have mitigated the greater Allied talent in code-breaking and anti-submarine warfare.

In strategic areas, it was tremendously interesting to read Mr. Hanson's views that the

liberation of the Philippines should have been achieved with the defeat of Japan, and not after one hundred thousand U.S. and huge numbers of Filipino casualties, and that MacArthur's command should have been folded into Nimitz's command of the Central Pacific. Mr. Hanson incites us to infer—and the inference may be accurate but should have been explicitly stated—that MacArthur was humored because of his political popularity. Also welcome are the description of the Market Garden fiasco of September 1944 as a foolhardy initiative doomed completely by Field Marshal Bernard L. Montgomery's unhurried approach to it; and the impeachment of Eisenhower's continuous front offensive and restraint of General George S. Patton's Third U.S. Army, when it looked like it could cross the Rhine in 1944, outflank the Ardennes offensive, and possibly win the war six months earlier than actually occurred, before the Soviet armies had entered Germany.

Mr. Hanson offers a good many stimulating alternate scenarios, in campaign strategies and weapons procurements, and makes the point that the Allies were fundamentally immensely stronger than the Axis, worked much better together, and had much more capable top leadership. Hitler was brilliant at times, but was mad as well as evil; Tojo was a military clerk; and Mussolini had become an operatic buffoon. Roosevelt and Churchill were almost sublime leaders (as, in his rancorous and under-armed way, was the almost unmentioned de Gaulle), and Stalin, though satanically wicked and not altogether sane, was not completely detached from reality and was a very formidable national and military chief. There was no coordination at all among the Axis powers, but the Western Allies had an integrated command and cooperated broadly well with the Soviet Union, as long as they were fighting the same enemies toward the same, or at least reconcilable, goals.

If they had had Churchill and de Gaulle leading them from the start, the British and French might have been able to contain Germany, but ultimately could only defeat it with the collaboration in combat of the Americans or Soviets. When France was swiftly and decisively beaten and surrendered at once, Britain,

with Commonwealth and American help, was unconquerable in its home islands and much of its overseas connections, but could only be a victorious power in Europe in company with the United States and Soviet Union. Mr. Hanson gives no credit to Hitler's view that by mid-1941 he was, by Roosevelt's actions, almost at war with the United States, and that if such a war erupted, Germany would be vulnerable to attack from Russia—the nightmare of the two-front war. Hitler reasoned that if he could eliminate Russia from Europe before the Americans came in against him, he could keep the Anglo-Americans out of Europe for at least a whole generation. It was not as insane a gamble as it has been represented to be, though, as this book explains, Hitler bungled the war in Russia, and it may have been unwinnable for Germany anyway. Hitler's speech declaring war on the United States was insane, in concept and in content, but it would not have taken Roosevelt long after Pearl Harbor to bring Germany into direct hostilities, whatever Hitler did.

With all the Great Powers engaged, the correlation of forces asserted itself: Italy, out of its league, was crushed more abjectly than France, and then surrendered and joined the Allies. The Free French also became steadily stronger and more militarily useful—ten French divisions and the extensive French resistance underground participated in the Liberation of France. Germany, correctly judged a more dangerous as well as a more proximate enemy than Japan, was remorselessly beaten into unconditional surrender, smashed to rubble, and entirely occupied. Japan's turn came quickly after, hastened by atomic bombs. Most of the leaders of the Axis powers and the more egregious French collaborators were executed, committed suicide, or were imprisoned. All four countries settled comfortably into complete domination by their former enemies. The early German occupation of France was uneventful, and the stylish French were impressed by their virile conquerors in their crisp Hugo Boss uniforms, who had beaten them so easily. It became much nastier later. Italy, Germany, and Japan developed great admiration for their relatively generous Anglo-American conquerors. The United States was the greatest power, followed by the USSR, and Germany and

the British Commonwealth were approximately even, followed by Japan, France, and Italy. These relative forces played out accordingly, while Hitler and the Japanese falsely convinced themselves that their principal enemies were racially inferior.

Mr. Hanson's treatment of the military leaders is fine, but I think he overestimates Admirals King and Leahy, whose brilliance I have not discovered, even with Mr. Hanson's help. I am to some extent influenced by Leahy's preposterous respect for Marshal Pétain, to whom he was Roosevelt's ambassador for two years. (Roosevelt told King he had promoted him because "I heard you cut your nails with a torpedo-net cutter and shave with a blow-torch.") Mr. Hanson rightly debunks Omar Bradley and praises Admirals Nimitz and Spruance and General Patton, but he gives no evaluation at all of the leading American army theater commanders, Dwight D. Eisenhower and Douglas MacArthur.

I think it is hard to attack them much for their performance in those roles, but I wish Mr. Hanson had gone farther with his alternate scenarios. I believe that if in 1943, President Roosevelt had followed Mr. Hanson's retroactive advice to avoid the Philippines and consolidate the Pacific command under Nimitz, and had moved the somewhat redundant Cordell Hull from the State Department to the Supreme Court, elevated Marshall and Eisenhower to the posts they would soon occupy with distinction—Secretary of State and Army Chief of Staff—and put MacArthur in charge of Overlord (the Normandy invasion), then there would have been no Market Garden, and Montgomery would have taken the port of Antwerp instead. There then would have been twenty more divisions not used in the Philippines, for southern France or even Churchill's Adriatic Plan, and Patton would have crossed the Rhine in September or October and the war would have been over by Christmas, with almost all Germany and half of Czechoslovakia in Western Allied hands.

Roosevelt would not have handed over any territory in Germany to Stalin, any more than he released any of the 6.5 billion dollars in economic aid he had promised, until Stalin honored his Teheran and Yalta commitments to Poland and the rest of Eastern Europe, a matter that, had he lived, Roosevelt told Stimson he

would discuss with Stalin in light of America's monopoly of atomic weapons. MacArthur could have become a very serious candidate for president by 1948, but that is outside the ambit of this book and its reviewer.

What is ultimately important—and Mr. Hanson largely makes the point—is that of the world's seven Great Powers at the start of World War II, all of them except the United Kingdom and the United States were, in the summer of 1940, in the hands of dictatorial regimes hostile to the British and Americans. But in the late summer of 1945, four (Germany, France, Italy, and Japan) were in the hands of and generally occupied by the British and Americans, and on their way to becoming flourishing democratic allies of the Anglo-Americans. And the remaining Great Power—the Soviet Union—compensated itself by occupying six pre-war East European countries where it was not welcome, was unable to install itself durably, and was present contrary to its treaty obligations, all after the Soviet Union, as between the Big Three Allied Powers, had taken over 90 percent of the combat casualties and 99 percent of the physical damage in subduing our common enemies.

This is the sure measurement of who won. It was the genius of Churchill and Roosevelt that they won with inordinate reliance on the blood and courage of the Soviet masses, sacrificed for victory by the man whose treacherous arrangement with Hitler began the war. The Western Allies, in addition to their great strategic and demographic strength (about twenty-five million people in their armed forces), benefited from consummate statesmanship, especially Winston Churchill from 1940 to 1942, and mainly Franklin D. Roosevelt from 1942 to 1945, and consistently intelligent and well-executed command decisions from their armed forces chiefs. To the extent that all of the West does not recognize what we owe to those two men, we are uninformed ingrates, as Victor Davis Hanson has done a fine job of explaining.

That this book has a few imperfections does not materially alter the fact that it is a brilliant and very original and readable work by a great military historian and contemporary commentator.

# Protestantism & its discontents

by James Nuechterlein

---

This year's five hundredth anniversary of the origin of the Protestant Reformation—the issuing by Martin Luther of ninety-five theses objecting to the Catholic Church's sale of indulgences—provides a convenient opportunity for a comprehensive exploration of Protestantism's extraordinarily diverse past. Alec Ryrie, a historian at Durham University in England, has taken on that daunting project, and while some readers may take issue with his theological perspective, all will owe him a debt of gratitude for his impressive historical reconstruction.<sup>1</sup>

Date-marking considerations aside, this would not seem a propitious time for Ryrie's project. Western Protestantism has fallen on lean days. To the most severe of its critics, it seems a burnt-out case. This is less so in the United States, where evangelical and Pentecostal churches often thrive, but even here the mainstream Protestant denominations derived from their Lutheran and Calvinist roots in the sixteenth century live with declining numbers and dwindling theological energy.

Professor Ryrie acknowledges the Western mainstream's current low estate. But he reminds us that the West is not the world, and he shows that in Africa, Asia, and Latin America Protestantism is considerably more vibrant than it is in its European birthplace. In any case, Ryrie's primary concern is not religious scorekeeping. He wants to tell the Protestant

story, and, as his subtitle indicates, he thinks that story worth hearing if for no other reason than its protagonists' ethos-making effect on the world we now inhabit. The long arm of the Reformation “helped to seed,” in Ryrie's terms, much of modern secularity: “rationalism, capitalism, communism, democracy, political liberalism, feminism, pluralism,” even “some forms of atheism.”

All that is not, of course, what Luther and his successors intended. Theirs was a spiritual enterprise. As Ryrie notes, they wanted not to modernize the world but to save it. But their religious efforts produced more, and often other, than what they intended. In the Protestant story, ironies abound.

The ironies begin with Luther himself, who, in the indulgences dispute and for a period thereafter, intended only lower-case reformation. In his own prolonged search for a gracious God, a search rooted in an inability, despite his agonized efforts, to rid his conscience of the burden of sin, he finally experienced a revelation. Contrary to the established doctrine of cooperation with grace, he concluded that we are made right with God solely by grace alone, through faith alone, by the merits of the crucified Christ alone. Salvation is pure undeserved gift. Our good works have no salvific content or effect; they are simply responses of love to God's prior love. Luther initially hoped that his new understanding of justification—he actually thought it a recovery of Christianity's original gospel—would find acceptance within the Church. It instead found

---

<sup>1</sup> *Protestants: The Faith that Made the Modern World*, by Alec Ryrie; Viking, 513 pages, \$35.

appalled rejection and, for its unrepentant author, excommunication as a heretic in 1521.

Theological judgment of his teachings aside, Luther's doctrine of free grace in Christ undermined the Church's central role as mediator between God and the individual believer. More particularly, in basing his assault against Church teaching on the authority of the Bible alone—he had come to his views through his reading of Pauline epistles—Luther uprooted the sense of the Church as guarantor, under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, of orthodox teaching. The principle of *sola scriptura* was, Church authorities insisted, an invitation to theological anarchy.

And, as the history of Protestantism has demonstrated ever since, they had a very considerable point. All serious Christians believe that the Bible is the source of the truths of faith, but their varying readings of that source have regularly led to bitter disputes as to the truths it conveys. Luther's insistence on the fallibility of the teaching authority of the Catholic Church is infinitely arguable, but as a practical matter there can be little doubt that the absence of a definitive ecclesial magisterium makes it difficult for Christians to maintain a common understanding of what it is that defines them. (In time, a number of Protestant churches would adopt articles of faith—the Augsburg and Westminster Confessions, for example—that functioned as magisterial authorities.)

The Reformation's fissiparous tendencies revealed themselves immediately. In his home city of Wittenberg, Luther struggled to keep control over purported followers for whom reformation required stripping the town's churches of Catholic statues, images, and relics. These unruly iconoclasts were among an ever-expanding group of radicals who took his movement in religious directions he thought wrongheaded and in political directions he never intended.

By far the most extreme manifestation of the latter was the German Peasants' War of 1524–25, a violent uprising inspired in part by preachers like Thomas Müntzer who appropriated Luther's idea of Christian freedom to demand the end of serfdom and an egalitarian

restructuring of society. This mass rebellion—the largest, Ryrie notes, in European history prior to the French Revolution—took bloody form and was even more bloodily put down. Luther afterward condemned the peasants in the raw and brutal language he customarily employed against anyone who aroused his polemical instincts.

The most significant of Luther's Protestant opponents were those who came to make up the Reformed tradition, a group commonly referred to as Calvinists—a term Ryrie thinks misleading because the movement preceded the man. Before John Calvin came on the scene (he was only eight years old when Luther issued his theses), Luther encountered competition from reformers gathered around the Swiss theologian Huldrych Zwingli. Luther and Zwingli agreed on much, but came to complete loggerheads over the Eucharist. After extensive talks between them in the late 1520s, Luther decided that the denial by Zwingli and his colleagues of Christ's real presence in the sacrament made fellowship between their churches impossible.

Ryrie's treatment of Calvin focuses on his efforts to bring unity to the Protestant world, a goal the author thinks Calvin came "agonizingly close" to achieving. But Ryrie's own narrative suggests otherwise. Calvin's attempt to bridge the gap between Lutherans and Reformed on the Eucharist failed, although he received some encouragement in his larger enterprise from Philip Melancthon, Luther's more irenic colleague and successor. But soon Calvin and Melancthon were wrangling over the confounding issue of predestination, a doctrine of central concern to Calvinists but one which Lutherans, then and since, have preferred to fudge. (The difficulty, briefly put, is this: denial that it is God's inscrutable will that preordains some to heaven and others to hell challenges his sovereignty, but affirmation brings into question his love.) Over the decades to come, Calvinists and Lutherans disagreed with each other and among themselves about a wide range of issues, all of which Ryrie explores in informed detail. Beyond this, assorted sectarian radicals were propagating

doctrines, such as denial of the Trinity, that seemed no less heretical to mainstream Protestants than they did to Catholics.

The Reformation was first and finally a religious affair, but it pervaded every realm of life, politics most notably. Protestants understood from the beginning that their survival depended on support from the secular leaders (mostly kings and princes) who ruled Europe and who had it in their power to crush the reform movement in its infancy. Once reformers gained that support—as in England, Scotland, and mostly central and northern regions of the Continent—they had to put together and, where they could, put into effect political principles consistent with their theological convictions. Ryrie’s painstaking description of how this played out defies neat summary because reformers never fully agreed among themselves about those principles and, in any case, displayed creative flexibility in applying them to the needs of the circumstances they variously encountered. It seems generally the case, however, that the politics of Protestantism inched fitfully away from autocratic authority in the direction of popular involvement. The theological principle of the sovereignty of the biblically informed individual conscience spilled into politics and subverted traditional habits of deference.

As seen already in the Peasants’ War, the social and political side effects of the Reformation were anything but peaceful. Catholics persecuted Protestants, and Protestants (though they had fewer opportunities) persecuted Catholics and also each other. For Protestants and Catholics alike, the stakes involved were high: how could truth tolerate error if the propagation of error endangered susceptible people’s eternal salvation? The punishments for heretical teaching were often horrific in nature—burning at the stake, drawing and quartering—but the three thousand or so victims of judicial executions in the several decades after 1517 paled in number compared to the millions who perished in the religious wars that broke out in the 1530s and continued into the mid-seventeenth century. The final and most awful of them, the Thirty Years’ War,

eventually drew in most of the great powers of Western Europe and before it ended in 1648 had disastrous effects in lives lost, economies ruined, and landscapes laid to waste.

As the wars of religion dwindled to an end, some Protestants were reconsidering their attitude toward toleration. The costs of rejecting it in pursuit of religious uniformity—persecution and catastrophic war—had been intolerably high. As a positive incentive, the example of a thriving Dutch Republic that accepted de facto religious pluralism indicated that a policy of confessional latitude was conducive to economic prosperity. Practical considerations aside, the Protestant doctrine of the inviolability of the individual conscience had from the beginning argued against coercion in spiritual matters. Error might not have rights, but it could, at least to a degree, be lived with.

Ryrie’s extended discussion of the Reformation experience in Britain—his academic specialty—serves to recapitulate the Protestant drift toward limited forms of tolerance. In the aftermath of the English Civil War, a conflict about much more than religion but which, Ryrie says, religion made toxic, Oliver Cromwell in the 1650s became the first Protestant ruler to support religious toleration as a matter of principle. Protestants still feared and abhorred Catholics, but, as Ryrie nicely concludes, by the late seventeenth century they were “slouching toward a grudging, genuine tolerance.”

Ryrie devotes the middle section of his book to the development of Protestantism in the West from the eighteenth century to the present, interspersing his chronology with detailed explorations of specific critical moments and concerns. As with his discussion of the Reformation era, the analysis is both lucid and comprehensive, though marred at points by questionable emphases and interpretations. (There are also, on American matters, a number of distracting errors, including the dumbfounding assertion that, when elected president in 1860, Abraham Lincoln was an “avowed abolitionist.” How Ryrie could write that, or how any even half-attentive editor could let it pass, is entirely inexplicable.)

Christians necessarily concern themselves both with thinking correctly about their faith

(orthodoxy) and with embodying that faith in practice (piety). As they moved from the late seventeenth to the eighteenth century, Protestants increasingly shifted their emphasis from the former to the latter—a shift that among the majority of them has never been reversed. Pietists, dismissed as “enthusiasts” by their critics, concerned themselves less with abstractions of doctrine than with immediacies of being and doing; theirs was a concern with experience, a concern manifested in outbursts of renewal and the fervent pursuit of holiness. Be ye perfect, Jesus had said, and the enthusiasts took him at his word. The pietist impulse, which began in Germany, developed in time into evangelical Protestantism, and John Wesley’s Methodism, originally a movement within the Church of England, became its quintessential expression.

By the mid-nineteenth century, the Methodist Church was easily the largest Protestant denomination in the United States. But Ryrie’s chapter on what he calls “Protestantism’s Wild West,” after perfunctory notice of Methodists and the other mainstream Protestants who dominated the American scene—Congregationalists, Episcopalians, Lutherans, Presbyterians, and Baptists—preoccupies itself with extended descriptions of various groups on the Protestant fringe: Millerites, communitarians, Shakers, food faddists (Sylvester Graham, John Harvey Kellogg), Christian Scientists, Jehovah’s Witnesses, and sundry others. The impression conveyed is of an American Protestantism composed mostly of exotics, eccentrics, and outright crackpots. Ryrie of course knows better, but here his encyclopedic ambition—leave no one or nothing out of the Protestant story—produces a lopsided narrative.

American Protestants in the first half of the nineteenth century spent much of their time quarreling among themselves over the vexed issue of slavery. No one today doubts that antislavery adherents had the moral argument right, but for orthodox Christians at the time the matter appeared less certain. The Bible, after all, never condemned slavery and in many places—Old and New Testament alike—appeared to condone it. Pro-slavery Protestants in the South suggested that the

condemnation of slavery as sin by Northern Protestant critics revealed their indifference to the biblical text. When those critics replied that the “spirit” of Scripture took precedence over its “letter,” or when they implied the possibility of “progressive revelation,” the pro-slavery forces felt confirmed in their suspicions. And, as Ryrie notes, theologically speaking there was something to their claim. After the slavery issue was finally settled by the Civil War, some victorious Protestants wondered: if the biblical tradition could have for so long tolerated so intolerable an evil, what other venerable scriptural assumptions might also require reconsideration?

Protestants had always viewed Catholics as their primary existential threat, but from the Enlightenment onwards they confronted a new, and over the long run more dangerous, opponent in secularist modernity. Over the course of the nineteenth century, Christians of all persuasions experienced assaults on their faith from a ceaseless battery of sources: philosophical naturalism, biblical higher criticism, and the emerging sciences of geology and biology. The net effect of these assaults was to bring into question the authority of the biblical text and, beyond that, the whole notion of divine purpose and control—indeed, divine presence itself. Where Christian belief wasn’t in error, secularists charged, it was irrelevant.

Most Protestants ignored the skeptics or rejected them with fundamentalist fervor, but from the outset an elite liberal minority, responding both to modernists’ arguments and to their own doubts, attempted to preserve Christianity by defending its essential core while discarding its most vulnerable elements. That was no simple exercise, of course—how in the process could one avoid reduction of Christian particularity to, in Ryrie’s phrase, “pantheist mush”?—and traditionalist believers regularly accused liberals of selling out the faith. Ryrie defends the progressives against their conservative critics. They were malleable, he admits, but hardly less so than their accusers. “All Protestants adapt,” he says, “the difference is that liberals admit it.” That attempt at evenhandedness seems empirically dubious. Protes-



tant conservatives and liberals are not, as Ryrie here suggests, equidistant in their beliefs from where Protestantism began. Whether they are right or wrong to do so, progressives virtually by definition concede more to their ambient circumstances than do traditionalists.

As Ryrie carries his chronology into the twentieth century, he pauses to dwell on Protestant behavior during the Third Reich, an ignominious episode that implicated conservatives and liberals alike. The failure traced back to Protestantism's founder: there is no direct line connecting Luther to Hitler, but Nazi propaganda made effective use of Luther's vile rants against Jews to justify their anti-Semitic policy. German Protestants also employed an extreme version of Lutheranism's Two Kingdoms doctrine to rationalize their overall political acquiescence. In this understanding, God has ordained the rulers of the left-hand realm of the state; citizens in the right-hand realm of the church are therefore justified in opposing those rulers only when they intrude in the spiritual order. Thus much of the opposition to the regime by the Protestant Confessing Church had to do with protection of religious boundaries and prerogatives rather than dissent on ideological grounds. Its founding Barmen Declaration of 1934, Ryrie emphasizes, was a theological statement, not a political manifesto.

As for the notorious *Deutsche Christen*, the German Christians enthusiastic in their support of the Nazis, theirs was a pathetic attempt to curry recognition from a regime that refused their church formal involvement in the Party. Most Nazi leaders, Hitler included, were content to let Christianity dwindle into insignificance without persecution. They required compliance from the churches, but were otherwise indifferent to them. Only those rare Protestants actively opposed to the regime, Dietrich Bonhoeffer most notably, had reason to fear that their faith would cost them. Ryrie's judgment is severe. Protestants were by and large complicit or unconcerned in the face of Nazi evils; and while they could not have prevented the worst that happened, they could have done more than they did. But he wisely concludes by warning readers

against facile condemnation or the assumption that, in the Germans' place, they would have behaved more nobly: "There is only one reason why we do not share in their guilt: we were not there."

Protestantism in the postwar West enjoyed a season of religious resurgence. This was especially true in the United States, where during the Cold War 1950s, as Ryrie notes, "In God We Trust" became the national motto, the phrase "under God" was added to the Pledge of Allegiance, Billy Graham's revivalist Christian crusades drew the nation's attention, and the country recorded the highest percentage of church membership in its history. Catholics remained a significant numerical presence, but Protestantism's traditional cultural hegemony seemed as secure as ever. In the popular imagination, America remained, as it had always been, a Protestant nation. Europe experienced nothing so exuberant, but there too the Protestant churches continued to exert considerable cultural influence.

And then suddenly, in the late 1960s, things fell apart. The Protestant surge ended (with the notable exception of evangelicals and Pentecostals). Among opinion leaders of the American Protestant mainline, Reinhold Niebuhr's Christian realism—liberal in politics and neo-orthodox in theology—gave way to a secularized theology subsumed in radicalized politics. That new dispensation, in Ryrie's view, traced back in significant part to Bonhoeffer, who, while languishing in prison prior to his execution by the Nazis in 1945, had reflected on the meaning of the failure of the churches and their traditional theology.

The fundamental problem, he concluded, lay in the churches' outdated ways of thinking and talking about God. In a post-metaphysical world—a world intellectually "come of age"—self-aware people could no longer be religious, at least not in the way religion had customarily been understood. The only honest theological response to the message of modernity was a "religionless Christianity," a faith stripped of traditional spiritual assurances and dedicated not to vacuous hopes of "saving souls" but to building a this-worldly kingdom of righteous-

ness in the service of “the distressed and the excluded.”

Bonhoeffer’s perspectives resonated with those in both Europe and America dismissive of conventional religion but still eager to employ “prophetic” and “authentic” Christian perspectives in the remaking of society. As the reigning religious mantra of the day put it, “The world sets the agenda for the church.” In the 1960s and beyond, involvement in the civil rights movement in America and the worldwide anti-Vietnam War and anti-apartheid crusades demonstrated religionless Christianity in action. In Europe, the accompanying mood frequently expressed itself in Marxist analysis; in America—though Ryrie does not say this—it increasingly took the form of a furious, inchoate discontent with a society presumably so morally degraded as to be beyond redemption.

Ryrie’s judgment of the Bonhoeffer moment is wry and mordant; it was, he says, “courageous, sincere, and utterly disastrous.” Christianity as quasi-revolutionary politics appealed to many Protestant leaders; it left the rank and file bewildered and angry. People in the pews—those who stayed—puzzled over the meaning of a Christianity with the religion left out, and they rejected the febrile left-wing politics that accompanied it. Declining membership rosters and financial contributions concentrated the minds of American church officials to a degree, and as radical tempers cooled the Protestant free fall leveled off. But the mainline churches have never fully recovered.

A lingering effect of the time of troubles is a voiceless Protestant liberalism. The novelty of our age, Ryrie claims, is “not the prominence of the religious Right but the silence of the religious Left.” He is sympathetic to the liberals’ plight. Their reluctance to assert a distinctive non-secular identity, he says, stems not from lack of conviction but from an admirable impulse, in our post-Auschwitz world, to approach moral issues in an inclusive manner that precludes emphasis on Christian particularity. The mainstream’s noble Bonhoefferian devotion to “self-sacrificial service” to the world rather than “its own narrow confessional self-

interest” makes it hesitant to speak its faith (“prayer might offend”) in the social realm.

That seems more than a little strained. An application of Occam’s razor would suggest, as Ryrie’s preceding analysis in fact indicates, that much of liberal religion got swallowed up in secular politics for the simple reason that politics *is* its gospel. The contemporary disinclination among liberal Protestants to emulate Martin Luther King, Jr. in unashamed display of Christian commitment has to do more with diminished faith than with a creative reordering of moral norms.

The religious Right has its own political temptations, of course, and it quite regularly succumbs to them. The difference is that politics is a second-order reality to those of evangelical or traditionalist persuasion. They do not speak the language of politics at the expense of the language of faith, and it is the latter in which they are most at ease and most fluent. They give natural priority to matters of sin and grace, incarnation and resurrection. Their faith does not reduce to metaphor, and, unlike so many on the religious Left, they can talk about God without changing the subject.

Ryrie’s concluding section on global Protestantism—whose contents can only be sketched here—sensibly makes no effort at comprehensive treatment. He instead takes selective instances, with chapters on South Africa, Korea, China, and the worldwide explosion of Pentecostalism. If there is a dominant theme in all this, it is that in non-Western settings Protestantism has rediscovered the urgent vitality of its origins—though there is some question as to whether that energy can be sustained.

South Africa is a special case, unrepresentative of the modern Protestant experience in most of the continent, but Ryrie is drawn to it by Protestantism’s formative role both in the establishment of white supremacist rule and in its final dismantling. From 1948 to 1994 South Africa was governed by the National Party, the voice of the Dutch-settler Afrikaner “nation,” as it imagined itself. Afrikaners were (and are) a deeply religious people, and the National Party was intimately allied with the Calvinist Dutch Reformed Church. (The long-standing

joke had it that the only difference between the NP and the DRC was the day of the week.)

The policy of official racial separation inaugurated in 1948 by the NP found its moral and theological justification in the DRC's teaching, based on its reading of the Old Testament, that diversity among peoples and nations is God's will. From that assumption there followed conveniently the notion of "separate development" for South Africa's blacks and whites, expressed politically in the system of apartheid. The reasons for the final collapse of white rule between 1990 and 1994 are complex and not yet fully agreed on, but no small part of the story, as Ryrie points out, was the regime's gradual loss of "moral self-confidence," which in turn stemmed from the declining plausibility—including within the DRC—of the idea that racial separation (i.e., white domination) had anything whatever to do with the will of God. Ground down by condemnation from outsiders and their own self-doubts, the leaders of the National Party lost the capacity to defend their cause when they could no longer convince themselves—much less their children—that the cause was just. Regimes fall as often from internal loss of will as from external pressure, and Ryrie's analysis offers suggestive evidence that apartheid fell apart mostly from the inside.

Unlike in sub-Saharan Africa, where in the post-colonial period Christianity has enjoyed spectacular success (from negligible status in 1900 to a substantial majority of the population today), Christian gains in Asia have been limited, with the exception of South Korea and China. The Korean Protestant experience is remarkable: Between 1960 and 1990 South Korea went from being a desperately poor nation to a very rich one; during that same period the proportion of Protestants in the population increased from 2.5 percent to 27 percent. That growth came almost entirely from conservative evangelical churches. (Liberal Protestantism had no more attraction in late-twentieth-century Asia than it did in the West.)

The simultaneity of economic and religious growth had theological repercussions. The

South Korean economic "miracle" unsurprisingly produced, among the nation's religious adherents, something of a "prosperity gospel." As Ryrie puts it, religious conservatives celebrated "a liberation from bondage that combined the spiritual and the practical." In this perspective, Christians were not meant to be materialistic, but they should hope to prosper—God does not intend poverty for his people—and might thereafter enjoy that prosperity for themselves and for the generosity they can then extend to others. Overall, South Korean Protestants have been staunchly orthodox, often apocalyptic (most anticipate the imminent return of Christ), and largely apolitical. Since 1990, the Protestant churches have hit a wall, and their future appears uncertain. Numbers are down and may remain so as, in a reenactment of Western experience, rationalist modernity erodes the openness to transcendence necessary to traditional religious faith.

The percentage of Protestants in the People's Republic of China does not begin to match that in South Korea, even as the Korean numbers decline. A recent credible estimate (precise figures do not exist) pegged the proportion as 5 percent, but 5 percent of 1.4 billion still works out to seventy million people—which means, as Ryrie points out, that Protestantism is winning more converts in China than anywhere else in the world. (Protestantism predominates among Chinese Christians.) Those numbers are the more impressive because Christianity in China endured terrible oppression under Mao Tse-tung. Conditions are much better today, but China's Protestants still experience occasional crackdowns, perpetual suspicion, and the threat at any time of renewed persecution. As in South Korea, most Chinese Protestants are evangelical or Pentecostal, and in the early post-Mao period their inclinations were similarly apolitical—they avoided involvement in the democracy movement that ended in the Tiananmen Square massacre of June 1989. In recent years, however, they have become increasingly active in human rights campaigns.

Wherever one goes in the religious "Global South"—Africa, Asia, Latin America—Pentecostalism is a ubiquitous presence. Assuming its modern identity in the Azusa Street revival

in Los Angeles in the early twentieth century, the movement now constitutes a staggering one quarter of all Christians in the world, which makes it, Ryrie notes, not only the “main engine” of contemporary Protestantism but “the most dramatic religious success story of modern times.” Known mainly for its glossolalia (speaking in tongues) and emphasis on healing, Pentecostalism in the broader sense involves a “thrilling, rapturous, transformative inner encounter with the Holy Spirit.” Its open embrace of the miraculous makes it attractive to Catholics, millions of whom, most notably in Latin America, have defected to Pentecostal churches. Pentecostalism is less noticed than it should be largely because of its indifference to political matters, but its success in effecting moral transformation in its followers’ personal lives might well make those whose religion puts politics first reconsider their priorities.

Alec Ryrie is in many ways an ideal teller of the Protestant tale. He describes himself as “a believing Protestant Christian and a licensed lay preacher in the Church of England,” but his book is in no way an apology for the Anglican faith—or for any other particular church or movement. It would be difficult to imagine a more fair-minded, dispassionate chronicler of the infinitely varied expressions of Protestant identity. He approaches each movement on its own terms, describing it as though from within, almost always in ways that its adherents would find difficult to fault. When opinions collide, he is careful to give each side its due, and he seldom reveals his own preferences.

Ryrie does, however, insist on an inclusive understanding of what it means to be a Protestant, and, pushed to the limits, that can be problematic. For him, proper definitions must provide room not just for mainstream Calvinists and Lutherans, but also for “Anabaptists, Quakers, Unitarians, Jehovah’s Witnesses, and Pentecostals.” Efforts by so-called “magisterial” Protestants to define Protestantism in theological terms are illegitimate, he suggests, because their intention is to exclude churches that have in the mainstream view transgressed the boundaries of doctrinal acceptability.

Ryrie thus rejects as “special pleading” the attempts by early reformers to draw the line at the doctrine of the Trinity; the proto-Unitarian Socinians, he insists, had traceable Calvinist roots that identified them as Protestants. But by insisting on this genealogical definition, Ryrie wanders into questionable theological territory. Christians through the ages have stipulated and worshipped God as triune. According to the common understanding of the faith, God *is* Trinity. In this light, Ryrie’s insistence on including non-Trinitarians in the Protestant community puts him in the peculiar position of maintaining that one can be a Protestant without being a Christian. (Ryrie himself is not infinitely accepting. He categorizes Mormonism not as Protestant but as “a new religion,” one that is “at least as far removed from Christianity as Christianity is from Judaism.”)

Ryrie’s definition of Protestantism goes beyond the genealogical. Protestants are not merely those whose religion “derives ultimately from Martin Luther’s rebellion against the Catholic Church,” they are a family—“sprawling, diverse, and extremely quarrelsome,” but tied together by more than accidents of birth. There is, to begin with, a commonality of mood: “a generic restlessness, an itchy instability . . . [a spirit] of dissatisfaction and yearning.” This persistent spiritual discontent, matched with an instinct for uninhibited intellectual inquiry, typically results in a politics impatient with “established orthodoxies and distinctions of race, nation, and gender.”

But for Ryrie it is not mood, habit of mind, or political style that most unites Protestants. At the heart of Protestant identity, he believes, is a consuming “love affair with God.” He does variations on the love affair theme with Luther in the sixteenth century, with the Pentecostal experience today, and with much that intervenes. Ryrie recognizes, of course, that intense love of God has always marked the Christian community, but among Protestants, he thinks, that love has been pursued with a “reckless extravagance” and a “blithe disregard” for ecclesial authority or tradition that sets their movement apart. He

affirms, somewhat equivocally, that the love affair persists among Protestants as “a lived experience, a memory, or a hope.”

Ryrie’s attempt to make of the disparate Protestant reality a family is inventive, but not finally persuasive. There are, as he would probably concede, multiple significant exceptions to the family resemblances he sets forth. And his assertion that the love affair with God is “the distinguishing mark of a Protestant” does an injustice to the Catholic experience (think for a moment of any number of Catholic saints) and is not fully adequate to the Protestant one (to say of Luther’s theology, for example, that it is not a doctrine but a love affair posits an odd and misleading polarity that would have baffled Luther himself).

If there were a Protestant family, it would not be the one Ryrie imagines. Should the members of his putative clan ever get together to compare belief systems, many would recognize each other as at least shirttail relatives, but they would regard certain others with blank incomprehension. That incomprehension would be mutual. Most participants would wonder how, for instance, the Jehovah’s Witnesses were any part of this gathering, and the Witnesses would likely wonder the same thing.

The problem of Protestant identity goes well beyond judgments concerning Alec Ryrie’s perception of it. At issue is whether, in the

Western world at least, the word Protestant today denotes anything beyond a name commonly applied to those Christians who are neither Roman Catholic nor Eastern Orthodox. The melancholy reality is that it probably does not.

It is no longer the legacy of the Reformation that most divides Christians. Protestants and Catholics alike are not what they were five hundred years ago, and in most Protestant churches Reformation Day is not the triumphalist occasion it once was. Denominational names and identities linger, but individual Protestants increasingly find their deepest attachments across denominational lines. In an ecumenical age, a conservative Methodist is more likely to feel at home among traditional Catholics than he is among liberal Methodists. He remains attached to his church’s name and tradition, but the term Protestant no longer signifies anything substantial.

People will fight to defend things that matter to them. Even in a time of religious debility, where secularity can seem the wave of the future, countless faithful Christians of Protestant heritage would surely fight to defend their identities as Presbyterians, Baptists, or Lutherans—or more generally as evangelicals or Pentecostals. It’s hard to imagine why anyone would lift a finger in the cause of Protestantism.

# The most of Anthony Burgess

*by Dominic Green*

---

When a well-known writer dies, there ensues either a period of mourning and exaggerated praise (see: Leigh Fermor, P.), or a silence like that which follows an outburst from the dock. Typically, this silence is a probationary interlude before the sentence of utter obscurity (see: Mailer, N.). Frequently, the silence is broken, and the jury fixed, by whispers of political and marital malfeasance (see: Bellow, S.). When the political deviation is considered especially offensive to decency, the whispering begins while the writer is still alive, in the way of dismemberments for treason (see: Naipaul, V.; Steiner, G.).

The birth of Anthony Burgess was one of the lesser upheavals of 1917. His death in 1993 inspired the critical equivalent of last orders, a cocktail of hurried tributes and foreshortened arguments. In *The New York Times*, Herbert Mitgang called Burgess a prolific, versatile, witty, and erudite follower of Sterne, Joyce, and Waugh. Yet Mitgang demurred from saying which of Burgess's books were worth reading, or from suggesting which might endure. Instead, the obituary ended with a list of Burgess's "most widely read" books. In the London *Independent*, Roger Lewis wrote that the "sheer quantity" of Burgess's books amounted to "a resplendent career," and identified "flashes and sparks of genius in every one." But Burgess, Lewis said, was "a great writer who never wrote a single great book." He did, however, achieve something much harder, by making himself "the first highbrow millionaire since Somerset Maugham."

In the centenary of his birth, it is clear that Burgess has failed his posthumous audition for obscurity. Today, most of his thirty-three novels are in print, including lesser works like *The Kingdom of the Wicked* (1985)—a tedious precursor to an Anglo-Italian television epic on the origins of Christianity—and *Tremor of Intent* (1966), an unsolicited bid for the James Bond franchise. Admittedly, almost all of Burgess's twenty-five works of nonfiction are out of print, even his incisive guides to James Joyce's method, *Here Comes Everybody* (1965) and *Joysprick* (1973). But his two volumes of autobiographical *Confessions* have remained in print since their respective publications in 1986 and 1990. And this year, the press at his alma mater, Manchester University, issued the first volumes of the Irwell Edition, which will give Burgess's collected works the scholarly treatment, regardless of individual merit.

Burgess has also survived a posthumous mugging by Roger Lewis, whose 2002 biography purported to expose Burgess as a sex-obsessed, money-hungry charlatan, a music-hall turn in modernist drag. Yet Burgess was always as candid about his motivations as he was ironic in his grandiloquence: "I call myself a professional writer in that I must write in order to eat, and I am not ashamed to belong to the 'Grub Street' confraternity which Dr. Johnson honored. But primarily I call myself a serious novelist who is attempting to extend the range of subject matter available to fiction, and a practitioner who is anxious to exploit words much as a poet does."

He enriched himself with the pragmatic and public fecundity of an Augustan, but he aspired to the austere coteries of Modernism. To which the critical impulse, like Alex in *A Clockwork Orange*, asks, “What’s it going to be then, eh?” But this misses the point. Burgess’s quality cannot be separated from his quantity. The best of Burgess is, like the worst of Burgess, the most of Burgess. If he was the heir to the vitalists Joyce and Lawrence, and even a usurper of Waugh’s Augustan irony, he was also an entertainer. The son of a music-hall dancer and a pub pianist became the talk-show anecdotalist with a daft comb-over, and the composer of *The Blooms of Dublin* (1982), a musical adaptation of *Ulysses*. He also became the author of *Earthly Powers* (1980), in which the most frivolous of vehicles, a satire on twentieth-century English fiction, carries the reader through a moral wasteland to the limit of fiction—to the boundary where literature, unable to answer the problem of evil, returns to religion.

“Anthony Burgess” was the invention of John Wilson. Burgess was his middle name, and the maiden name of the mother who died of Spanish flu with the infant John in the crib by her bed. Anthony was his confirmation name. The mixing of genres between Manchester Catholic and tax-exilic man-of-letters produces the tension between the grafter who knocked out 2,000 words a day and the polymath who turned every interview into a lecture.

“Actuality,” reflects Kenneth Toomey, the narrator of *Earthly Powers*, “sometimes plays into the hands of art.” In *Little Wilson and Big God*, the first half of his memoirs, Burgess admits to a “willed collapse” in Brunei. The doctors in London diagnose “psychological stress”—drink and tropical demoralization, like one of Maugham’s planters. Lynne, by now a hallucinating, trembling alcoholic, tells Burgess that one of the doctors had “mumbled” that he has “an inoperable cerebral tumour.” So Wilson, in trying to redeem his “prospective widow,” becomes Burgess in earnest: “I would have to become a professional writer. Work for the night is coming, the night in which God and little Wilson, now

Burgess, would confront each other, if either existed.”

In fact, Burgess had already completed or drafted the material of eight novels, and published three of them, as well as a guide to English literature. The first novel, *A Vision of Battlements*, written in 1949 and published in 1965, reflects Burgess’s unheroic wartime experiences on Gibraltar. The second, *The Worm and the Ring*, derived from Burgess’s postwar employment as a schoolteacher in Banbury, Oxfordshire. It appeared in 1961, only to disappear because the Mayor of Banbury, recognizing herself in the character of the school secretary, sued Burgess for libel. The Banbury interlude also generated a play, *The Eve of St. Venus*, which Burgess was to recycle into a novella in 1964.

Burgess had published all three parts of *The Long Day Wanes*, his Malayan trilogy: *Time for a Tiger* (1956), *The Enemy in the Blanket* (1958), and *Beds in the East* (1959). In Brunei he had written a fourth Asian novel, *Devil of a State*, which he was to transpose to East Africa before publication in 1961 to avoid a second libel suit. And he had drafted *The Right to an Answer*, which began as a “true story” from Lynne about wife-swapping in wartime London, but was published in 1960 as a “sardonic study” of the England to which Burgess had returned—“all television, fornication, and a rising generation given to rock music and violence.”

In the Malayan Trilogy, Burgess appended himself to the confraternity of Kipling, Conrad, Orwell, and Maugham. The empire is dying, its functionaries are becoming post-colonial, and the natives are still unredeemed. The protagonist is a teacher, a member of the lower middle class who has risen by merit, but not far enough to allay his resentment of authority. The récit of the novels is realist and bitterly ironic. If *A Vision of Battlements* had been published when it was written, in 1949, Burgess might now be credited as the first of the Angry Young Men, for gin, black magic, and communists in the jungle are a more dangerous brew than Professor Welch’s sherry, and Burgess’s materials are much more exciting than Larkin’s *Jill* or Wain’s *Room at*

*the Top*. Instead, Burgess came too late to the English Fifties.

In “Eros and Idiom” (1975), George Steiner wrote that Dickens’s “genius and the representative stature he achieved were in large part the result of a vital accord between the taste of the public and Dickens’s profound sympathy with that taste.” Burgess had a vital accord with the taste of the postwar middle-class readership. His Irish grandmother had been illiterate. He had grown up in bookless rooms over pubs and tobacco shops. A Catholic education had made him a linguist. Conscripted had made him a teacher, charged with lecturing recruits about The British Way and Purpose. But his sympathy for the public’s taste contracted rapidly after his return to Britain.

Burgess had left England in 1954. “Meat was coming off the ration. We were too poor to afford T-bone steaks, but, by dint of waiting patiently and not indulging in union activism, we had seen the Burnham scale of teachers’ pay improve somewhat. . . . In time we would be able to afford a television set, if not a car.” He returned in 1960, on the cusp of the revolution in consumption and morals, “between the end of the Chatterley ban/ And the Beatles’ first LP.” He was out of time and place, and his purpose was increasingly at odds with the modern British way. Like V. S. Naipaul, Burgess responded with the fury of a lover betrayed. He had become a postcolonial novelist.

As a lowest-middle class northern Catholic of part-Irish extraction, Burgess had always felt himself to be one of “a gang of orphans.” The “bigger family of the nation” tolerated people like him, but only so long as “they kept quiet” and refrained from using the language. Common cradle Catholics “were not admitted to the drawing-room” with Eliot, Waugh, and Greene. He cut all three down to size in his criticism. When Eliot had coined “juvencence,” he had betrayed that he was no Latinist; the word, Burgess argued on impeccable grounds, should have been “juvenescence.” Greene was a joyless Jansenist, seeking out sordid heresies in the dark places. And when Burgess observed that Waugh used “repine” just as his father the Edwardian bookman had done, he

exposed Waugh as a suburban climber who had exchanged the maquillage of Oxford aestheticism for the camouflage of the squire of Stinchcombe.

Burgess was educated at Xaverian College, Manchester, a school named for the Apostle of the Indies, a founder of the Society of Jesus. “Nothing could be less English.” Nothing could be more English than teaching the British way as an apostle to the Malayans. As Burgess recoiled from Sixties England, his fiction rebounded and became less English. The Joycean experiments became more elaborate, the display of foreign tongues more aggrandizing, the fascination with French theory more irritating. Sentenced to “tobacco-addiction, an over-reliance on caffeine and Dexedrine, piles, dyspepsia, chronic anxiety, sexual impotence,” he served his stretch with gusto, writing eight more novels between 1960 and 1968, as well as a small mountain of literary journalism. But he never reconnected to English society. The changes of 1968—Lynne’s death, his remarriage to his Italian translator, Liana Macellari, and their departure for Europe in a Bedford Dormobile camper—confirmed rather than created his distance from the drawing room.

Burgess was now writing literature about literature; perhaps this is why he was such an observant critic. Now and then, this recipe worked. In *A Clockwork Orange* (1962), the English vocabulary is arranged so that the reader understands Nadsat through context alone. The Tudorbethan pastiche of the Shakespeare novel, *Nothing Like the Sun* (1964) evokes the passion for language shared by author, subject, and reader. The satirical realism of the Malayan novels continues with *Inside Mr. Enderby* (1963), but the reflexivity becomes stifling. Enderby, the bad poet who confuses Cicero’s *afflatus*, divine inspiration, with digestive *flatus*, appeared a year after Nabokov’s *Pale Fire*. Like Nabokov in Paris, he writes in the lavatory. Like Kingsley Amis, he destroys his digestion with fried breakfasts and spicy pickles. His verses are Burgess’s juvenilia, once written in earnest, now recycled as farcical self-loathing. Burgess published Enderby under a pseudonym, Joseph Kell, then reviewed it as Burgess.



The pickings from the Seventies are even slimmer. Burgess was so enamored with literature as to boast of being cuckolded by Dylan Thomas. After the film of *A Clockwork Orange*, he became so captivated by the role of Anthony Burgess that, as John Bright said of Disraeli, he became “a self-made man [who] adores his maker.”

“I first heard the phrase ‘queer as a clockwork orange’ in a London pub before the Second World War,” Burgess wrote in *The New Yorker* in 1973. “It is an old Cockney slang phrase, implying a queerness or madness so extreme as to subvert nature.”

*The New Yorker’s* fact-checkers missed that one. The phrase is not Cockney, but Mockney. There are similar formulations in London slang. The lexicographer Jonathan Green dates the obsolete “Queer as Dick’s hatband” to 1835. “Queer as a nine-bob note”—a “bob” was a shilling—is still in circulation, though altered by inflation and decimalization to “Queer as a three-pound note.” And “Queer as a coot” is still used too. Tellingly, Green attributes that one to Julian Maclaren-Ross, who was not a Cockney, but a novelist who spent too much time in the pub, some of it with Burgess.

Elsewhere, Burgess suggested that he overheard “clockwork orange” in an Army barrack during the war. This is plausible, but he either misheard it, or heard a malapropism. In 1932, when Burgess was fifteen, Terry’s Chocolate Works of York produced the Chocolate Orange. This bolus of fat, sugar, and milk chocolate comes in a box, as though it will bruise easily. It is wrapped in a skin of orange tinfoil. Its segments are stamped with a mock-pithy surface, and are freed from the fake fruit not by peeling, but by banging the “orange” on a table. It is bizarre and unnatural. Hence “Queer as a Chocolate Orange.”

A chocolate orange is a commercial counterfeit, a false nourishment. A nine-bob note is a criminal counterfeit, issued against the authority of the Bank of England. But a clockwork orange is a counterfeit issued by authority, a human mind reprogrammed. *Orang* is Malay for “man”—the clockwork *orang* is a man remade by the intrusion of the state into

his consciousness. *A Clockwork Orange* is less concerned with sex than with violence, and the argument that free will is a lesser danger than unfettered government. Yet the orange, chocolate or clockwork, is also sexually queer, as in the related coinages, “soft as a chocolate teapot,” and “bent as a three-pound note.” In *Earthly Powers*, Burgess placed the homosexual theme at the center of modern literature.

The “tonality” of the “modern movement,” Steiner wrote in “Eros and Idiom,” is inflected with “explicit homosexuality or homosexuality symbolically declared.” To Steiner, the prominence of “homosexual codes and ideals” reflects the “most characteristic of modern strategies: the poem whose real subject is the poem, art that is about self-possibility.” The artistic modes “seem to underlie, as if re-enacting their own solipsism, their own physiological and social enclosedness.” *Earthly Powers* is a tribute to the enclosed languages of English modernism—the class code, the Catholic code, and the homosexual code—by a writer who by origin, belief, or disposition cannot subscribe fully to any, yet who speaks them all with mimic fluency.

Burgess, who admired Herman Wouk’s management of character, plot, and historical tableaux, ironizes Toomey by placing a drawing-room farce on the stage of twentieth-century history. Toomey’s surname arrogates—“To me, to me!”—and twins author and character. Just as “Je est un autre,” so Toomey is Burgess’s “Two-Me,” his second “I.” Toomey’s split subjectivity witnesses the twentieth century, but the meaning of his life is beyond his ken. “Do more than write farces and sensational fiction,” the inner voices tell the young Kenneth. “Construct something in which to believe. Love and beauty are not enough.”

So Toomey, like “filthy Norman Douglas” with *South Wind*, writes *Moving South*, a paean to “sun, sea, wine, bad peasant cooking” that ends with “an Affirmation of Life.” Yet coded affirmations are dwarfed by the cosmic drama of religion, and religion’s decline and apotheosis as mass politics. Literature is comic when it aspires to tragic grandeur, tragic in its dream of sophistication, and finally bar-

ren—morally stunted before the human nature it purports to investigate, or maliciously fascinated by evil.

“The world of the homosexual has a complex language, brittle yet sometimes excruciatingly precise,” Kenneth Toomey tells himself on his eighty-first birthday. “So, Cher maître, these are the tangible fruits of your success.” Forcing his way into the drawing room, Burgess the highbrow millionaire destroys the thing he loves. The exalted but barren codes of aestheticism and snobbery merge with the low, money-breeding form of the blockbuster. As with Waugh’s *Sword of Honor* trilogy, the codes of the twentieth century are weighed

and found wanting. The officers are no longer gentlemen, and the gentlemen no longer command. The posh code of Anglo-Catholic converts loses its power to enchant. The exile is vindicated, because there is nothing left to which he might return. After *Earthly Powers*, the Anglo-Catholic novel belongs to Northern cradle Catholics like Hilary Mantel.

Burgess represents a late triumph of modernism, the diffusion of pure Joycean principles into the impure marketplace of mass literature. After the retreats to Taos, Trieste, and the cork-lined bedroom, the conquest of the cities of the plain.

# New poems

by J. T. Barbarese & David J. Rothman

---

## Old friend

That much-too-pregnant neighbor is being  
pulled down Cresheim by her Lab,  
being dog-walked, and I hear only  
your saying over mussels and clams,  
*You know, I may never come east again.*  
*Nothing's here.* Long pause. *How's the family?*  
Again, the dog-walked staggers past.  
Your mother is dead, sister "settled,"  
and you are single again. Somewhere too close  
another neighbor wades into flying  
sycamore trash with a blower,  
rips into it and through the words  
*never come again.* The leaves fly up,  
past your beautiful face, over a split of wine.

—J. T. Barbarese

## Telephone poles

Across the avenue, three of them  
throw long sundown shadows  
over the parking lot, and in the gloaming,  
our Wawa is Calvary, and all parked up.  
The vagrants are cadging change at  
both doors; the Hillers are grabbing  
Pampers and milk for Saturday;  
men eat hoagie dinners in their trucks,  
ogle the women in yoga pants,  
listen to sports talk, and slowly chew.  
The stoplights swing in the wind—  
rising now: summer storm.  
Which crossbar would be Dismas's  
and which the hanging god's  
depends on who is left, who is right.  
Does the god face south and watch  
us lost pedestrians come and go,  
heading home, our backs to him,  
or does he face the north,  
his back to ours, bleeding out  
and talking to the sky, as if it heard?

—*J. T. Barbarese*

## Kernels

When you told me about his whistling belt  
And your cruel stepmother, who placed each kernel  
On the hard floor then made you kneel, I felt  
Like I had wandered into some infernal  
Fairy tale. But it was real. How strange:  
To sit in your calm home, crisp autumn light,  
Jazz, coffee, hearing that. Failure to grieve  
Can freeze what frees us up. I'm sure you're right  
To try to let it go. And I believe  
You have. What strength it takes to be that story,  
See it clear, then give it up, conceive  
It now as a mere childhood allegory.  
You did the brave thing, learning how to live.  
But me? They hurt a child. I don't forgive.

—*David J. Rothman*

# Smithsonian: still in shambles

by *Bruce Cole*

Five years ago, I reviewed the National Museum of American History in these pages. What I found was a mess, a tired, run-down behemoth of a building, originally built to be a museum of both technology and history, yet still uncertain about its mission.

It was confusing and incoherent. Its vast open spaces had been divided into numerous galleries filled with thousands of objects and accompanied by what seemed like miles of wall text. Its millions of visitors wandered aimlessly and guideless around crowded displays of locomotives, coins from all nations, Julia Child's kitchen, President Lincoln's stovepipe hat, and the first working light bulb invented by Thomas Edison. They searched in vain for a unifying theme, something that would give them even a summary idea of the history of America. It was no wonder the museum was derisively called "the nation's attic."

My piece ended on an upbeat note. A new director had just been appointed, and I hoped, even in the face of the entrenched civil service bureaucracy awaiting him, that some reform and reorganizing might be in the offing.

It was not to be. To great fanfare, the museum unveiled a multi-million-dollar, three-gallery exhibition last September called "The Nation We Build Together," a curious title without any reference to the history of the American past, the museum's *raison d'être*. Nonetheless, these exhibitions, the museum modestly assures us, will transform "How Audiences Experience American Democracy." Given what visitors will see in the galleries,

this is something that one fervently hopes doesn't happen.

The new galleries, the director claims, are dedicated to helping "people understand the past" so that they can "make sense of the present and shape a more humane future." Is shaping the future to be more humane (whatever that might mean) what a federal museum of American history should be doing? To transform the function of an institution whose mission is to educate into an activist institution for social change seems misdirected, to say the least.

One of the two new permanent galleries is entitled "American Democracy: A Great Leap of Faith," while the other is entitled "Many Voices, One Nation." Both are tedious, but there is a bright spot among the new offerings: "Religion in Early America," an excellent display in the Taubman Gallery, a new space devoted to temporary exhibitions, which I will discuss below.<sup>1</sup>

Two "gateway" statues precede "The Nation We Build Together." The first is a bespoke nine-foot-tall, 125-pound Statue of Liberty made of green LEGO blocks that stands just off the Constitution Avenue entrance. At first one thinks the museum's curators could not have chosen something worse than this huge toy to introduce the new exhibitions—that is, until one encounters Horatio Greenough's *George*

---

1 "Religion in Early America" opened at the National Museum of American History, Washington, D.C., on June 28, 2017 and remains on view through June 3, 2018.

*Washington* at the entrance to the new second-floor galleries.

Commissioned by Congress (almost never a good thing) for the Capitol Rotunda in 1832, the colossal twelve-ton sculpture, inspired by copies of Phidias's statue of Zeus at Olympia, depicts a muscular, bare-chested Washington clad in only a toga and sandals, his right hand raised as though in benediction. Almost immediately after the statue arrived from Italy and was installed, it became an object of ridicule, a comical image of the reserved and dignified first president.

It was moved around the Capitol grounds several times before its transfer (perhaps "unloading" is a better word) in 1964 to the new Smithsonian Museum of American History, where it was banished to a location near the second-floor escalator. Now it has been resurrected and reinstalled to serve as a "landmark" and "beacon" to the new galleries.

Not a good start.

The first gallery, "American Democracy: A Great Leap of Faith," is enormous and bewildering. Covering over seven thousand square feet (the size of three average-sized American homes) it encompasses "six video presentations, five electronic interactives, and two touch stations," plus nine hundred objects, each accompanied by a sizable amount of wall text. If one were to spend just two minutes looking at a single object and reading its nearby text, it would take over a day to traverse just this one gallery. Few visitors will have the time, inclination, or interest to do this, because most will want to see the rest of the huge museum's chock-a-block displays. It is hard to believe that the curators were thinking very hard about most tourists who visit Washington for just a day or two and have other museums and monuments on their to-do list. It's not a case of "less is more," or even "more is more," but, instead, of "more is less."

This is a shame, because in this overwrought display there are many objects and subjects important for understanding the birth and flourishing of democracy in America. The portable desk on which Thomas Jefferson drafted the Declaration of Independence, the inkstand Abraham Lincoln used for the Emancipation

Proclamation, and Susan B. Anthony's red shawl are here, but these, and other iconic objects, fight for the visitor's attention amid a blizzard of photographs, posters, maps, clocks, cartoons, and assorted gewgaws in an exhibition lacking a chronological spine, rigorous intellectual conception, and a sense of what is needed to project order and coherence.

"Many Voices, One Nation" is equally large and crowded (290 objects, eight multimedia videos and animations, five interactive activities, flip books, and touch screens), but has, if possible, even less structure. It is fragmented into themes: "Unsettling the Continent," "Peopling the Expanding Nation," "Creating Community in Chicago and Los Angeles," and "New Americans, Continuing Debates 1965–2000" (complete with a piece of a Mexican–U.S. border fence). The exhibition reflects the current politically correct academic view of American history as a divided and contested space of various religious, racial, and ethnic differences. Many of the objects it features and the stories it tells, especially about territorial expansion and immigration, are important, but they, and the accompanying wall texts, stress differences rather than community, identities rather than citizenship.

But to move from "Many Voices, One Nation" into the new temporary exhibition gallery's "Religious Life in Early America" is like entering a different universe; in fact, it's hard to believe you are in the same museum. Unlike the other new galleries, which are massive exposition engines designed by committees, this is a focused exhibition with a limited number of important and beautifully displayed objects with just the right amount of clear explanatory text. What separates "Religious Life in Early America" from the other exhibitions is not just scale, but discernment and restraint.

Peter Manseau, the exhibition's organizer, and the author of its excellent companion book, writes, "We cannot hope to understand the history of the United States without grappling with how, why, and what Americans believed." He is to be congratulated for this exploration of the importance of religion in American history, a topic given short shrift

by many contemporary historians. Perhaps to address this lacuna, the museum will continue to explore religion through a multi-year grant from the Lilly Endowment for exhibitions and other activities. Let's hope they are all as good as this one.

Three clearly articulated themes are explored: the many religions in early America, the principle of the freedom of religion enshrined in the First Amendment, and the flourishing of religion in the new nation.

Manseau has carefully chosen a number of context-rich objects, each of which tells an important story. Among these is a large iron cross, rediscovered in a Georgetown University attic in 1989 and almost certainly made from metal salvaged from the *Ark* and the *Dove*, the two ships which in 1634 brought Catholics to Maryland under a charter granted by King Charles I. The chalice and paten displayed here belonged to John Carroll, the United States's first Roman Catholic bishop and archbishop. An important figure in the history of American Catholicism, Carroll founded Georgetown University and established the first Roman Catholic basilica in the United States in Baltimore.

A landmark of early-nineteenth-century American neoclassical architecture, the basilica was designed by Benjamin Latrobe and partially funded by lottery tickets sold by the thousands. One of these, ticket 3391, dated 18 September 1805, is in the exhibition.

Several Bibles with ties to the Founders are included in the exhibit. The so-called "George Washington Inaugural Bible," a large tome used at his first inaugural, was borrowed from a New York Masonic lodge. Washington placed his hand on it during the ceremony and then bent to kiss it. Although a Bible was not required by the Constitution, like so many other things of Washington's

precedent-setting presidency, the tradition of swearing on a Bible continues to this day. There's also "The Jefferson Bible," a compilation of extracts cut and pasted from the four Gospels to make Thomas Jefferson's personal New Testament.

The exhibition also explores some of the many non-Christian religions practiced in the early years of the country.

Shearith Israel, a Jewish congregation in New York City founded in 1654, was damaged in 1776 when the British reoccupied the city during the Revolutionary War. Hessian troops vandalized the building, setting fire to the congregation's Torah. In the exhibition the scroll is opened to reveal the scorch marks caused by the blaze.

A string of Native American wampum beads (today thought of as trading currency but originally considered sacred objects), coins minted by Mormon settlers as their own currency, a selection of Shaker crafts, and a thirteen-page manuscript on the Islamic faith written in Arabic by an African slave who lived on Sapelo Island, Georgia, are just a few of the objects used by the many religions and their creeds that flourished on American shores.

Excepting "Religious Life in Early America," the new galleries in the Smithsonian Museum of American History cannot, unfortunately, be judged a success. The idea to explore several central themes and issues of our history was a good one, and something the museum needed, but the new galleries are as bulging and confusing as their older counterparts elsewhere in the building. Americans, many of whom know little about their country's history (as tests and surveys prove), will be no better enlightened, educated, or inspired than they were before. And that's a real shame.



# A note on Robertson Davies

by James Como

Robertson Davies (1913–1995) was the foremost man of letters in Canada—and that by far—and if I knew enough of Canadian letters I would be tempted to argue that he is their greatest ever. In the event, his is the bar that anyone else must clear. Playwright and man of the theater, newspaperman, columnist, magazine editor, critic, and, above all, a novelist of great range and depth, prolific as ironist and humorist, as at home among ideas and with a variety of literatures as with manners, Davies was, in his spare time, headmaster (the first) of Massey College (University of Toronto, endowed in 1962 by the Massey Foundation—of the Massey family we know the actor Raymond best), and for twenty years a fellow of Trinity College in Toronto.

Davies's bibliography begins in 1949 with a play, *Fortune, My Foe*, and an essay collection, *Eros at Breakfast*. His final novel was *The Cunning Man* (1994), one of two free-standing novels, the other being *Murder and Walking Spirits* (1991; recurring characters in both suggest that another trilogy might have been in the works). Then, in 1995, came *A Gathering of Ghost Stories*. Between these two poles came fifteen collections and three trilogies: Salterton, Deptford, and Cornish. The first consists of *Tempest-Tost* (1951), *Leaven of Malice* (1954), and *A Mixture of Fraughts* (1958), together making for a small-town parodic masterpiece—minor, maybe, but with no single false, unincisive, or ungenerous note.

The third, Cornish, consists of *The Rebel Angels* (1981), *What's Bred in the Bone* (1985), and

*The Lyre of Orpheus* (1988). Here Davies mines settings, manners, and, especially, characters close to Trinity College; it is comedy high and dark, packed with biting satire: art forgery and other treacheries, philanthropic malfeasance, erotic misbehavior, and (eventually) a ghost narrator. How Davies manages to keep these balls—not to mention his mix of volatile characters—in the air at one time is . . . magic (an art that fascinated Davies and that he explored in his novel *World of Wonders*).

The acknowledged masterpiece of world literature is the second, Deptford, trilogy, above all its first book, *Fifth Business* (1970), followed by *The Manticore* (1972), an excursion into Jungian psychology, especially its archetypal thinking, and the aforementioned *World of Wonders* (1975), wherein many mysteries are resolved yet Mystery beckons. But before discussing these, a digression is in order, for last year we had another Davies book, the only diary so far published<sup>1</sup> and best read in the company of Judith Skelton Grant's *Robertson Davies: Man of Myth* (1994).

In 1960, at age forty-seven, Davies suffered theatrical devastation: his play *Love and Libel* (a staging of *Leaven of Malice*) failed in New York, virtually ending his big-time theatrical career, though his very busy involvement as playwright and dramaturge continued in

1 *A Celtic Temperament: Robertson Davies as Diarist (1959–1963)*, by Robertson Davies, edited by Jennifer Surridge and Ramsay Derry; McClelland & Stewart, 400 pages, \$32.95.

Canada. “What emerges is this: I am not successful as a playwright and I do rather well as a novelist, critic, and speaker . . . this chimes with my falling out of love with the theatre since *Love and Libel*. And two novels persist in getting notes made about themselves. [We know from Grant that by 1960 he had already made notes toward *Fifth Business*.] I must think carefully about this.”

A second motif is what passes for the quotidian: meetings (boring), academic planning, money talk, some disappointments, parties (with which he seems impatient), some conflict (with Davies as either spectator or mediator but rarely as participant), early worries over his writing, and . . . almost nothing about *Fifth Business*: fitful references only, with neither title nor discussion. His theatrical outings, of which there were many, were not always pleasant, and he could be biting in his criticism (though less so in public print than in private): “To the dress rehearsal of *Macbeth*: director Peter Coe. *Macbeth*, Chris Plummer. . . . Coe wanted to show a ‘classless society’ . . . Result: there was no tragedy. . . . Plummer’s tricks were many: a high singing delivery . . . falling on his knees and gripping [Lady Macbeth’s] loins, kneading her buttocks while butting her in the vulva.” (Almost makes one sorry to have missed it. Almost.)

But what would keep him busy was an offer from Vincent Massey, a mover-and-shaker (and a man who would prove difficult) from a family of high achievement and great prominence: would Davies be the first master and, part and parcel, be deeply engaged in planning Massey College, the first residential post-graduate college in Canada? “I am tired of the detail work that is laid upon me: *why* do I have to discuss the teapots?” He’s not joking. This occupation is the third major motif of Davies’s diary.

His religious beliefs were not simple. Born a Presbyterian and confirmed into the Anglican church, he believed that each should reap as he has sown. Christ was not the Lover and Forgiver. If God were to be glorified, it would be by doing one’s best work and offering it to him. Grant quotes him as seeing life as “a sort of lonely pilgrimage . . . in search of God” by acquiring self-knowledge. But

“it must be done alone . . . in the end, the approach will always be made alone.” Later he would conclude, though tentatively, that 1) an argument against the randomness of creation is “Art,” 2) Man’s destiny is in part undetermined, depending upon his ability to link with “elements of great power outside himself,” 3) not all goodness is the work of God nor is God’s goodness comprehensible by man, and 4) conventional belief and disbelief are “much alike in being dead to the spirit.” Eventually, under the influence of his deep study of Jung, he came to believe in “the existence of a power of good and a power of evil external to man, and working through him as an agency . . . infinitely greater than man can conceive.”

From the beginning, uncertainty marks the diary: What genre *is* a diary? What should he include? In 1963 he wrote, “the chapel is a great friend to me; I go there and think and pray and am quieted and strengthened; as I grow older I know more and more that I cannot live without this awareness and invocation of the Other,” later on adding, when the prospect of a professorship looms, “I am anxious that I should not cease to be a writer.” That immediately followed, “I am glad to be in a society where I need not always talk below my weight, and watch my vocabulary lest some unfamiliar word offend. . . .” He is fifty years old. At this point (1963) a fan must wish he would just *get on* with it, and indeed he would.

Grant reports that in 1958 “an image began to float insistently to the surface of Davies’s mind,” an image that would become the basis of the Deptford Trilogy and the first scene of *Fifth Business*. That book introduces us to Dunstan Ramsay, a first-person narrator who, now retiring from decades of teaching, will tell his story to the headmaster in the form of a letter. His tale spans decades, addressing more than one great mystery of his life, solving a compelling puzzle, and finally settling the question of how his life was saved in battle during combat in World War One. Short answer: it was a saint, whom he recognized, and who propelled him to achieve great expertise in the field of hagi-

ography. The trilogy thereafter spins into the compellingly flamboyant tale of Paul Dempster, the baby born prematurely as a result of Dunstan's act when he was a boy. As it happens, Dunstan learns from Paul, now a world-famous magician, irresistibly charismatic but morally bereft, that he, Dunstan, had far less to do with events—either as an agent, catalyst, or cause—than he had supposed. He was merely “fifth business,” a plot tool “in drama and opera companies organized according to the old style”—a device and a definition, it turns out, entirely of Davies's own invention!

Dunstan's search is tightly interwoven with the life of Paul's mother, Mary Dempster, weak and mentally unbalanced owing to having been hit by a snowball with a stone hidden within; it was meant for Dunstan, who had ducked without knowing that Mrs. Dempster was behind him. By the end of *Fifth Business*, Dunstan, who has searched his whole life for that certain saint who saved him on the battlefield, is on the brink—of mystery, or even of belief, but never of awe, let alone holiness. Instead he pursues pseudo-mystery first in the form of psychology then of magic, finally winding up with the anti-Mrs. Dempster, Liesl (Lieslotte Vitzliptzli[!], a giant troll of a woman). At the end of his days the most he can say is that the journey has not been about him. What the journey *is* about is a question he fails to ask, and except as a source of pedestrian, rather than of holy, mystery, Mary Dempster ceases to matter.

In fact, however, Mary is the genuine vehicle of awe and the numinous, and a genuine saint. One miracle was her saving the life of Dunstan's brother, Willie, who by all signs was dead, until, inexplicably, she revived him. A second miracle was changing the life of a tramp who, after having sex with a willing Mary (“because he needed it so much”), becomes a beneficent, self-sacrificing street minister. The third miracle is the one having the most impact on Paul. Wounded and lost on the battlefield, he shelters in the ruin of a small church:

I thought of Mrs. Dempster. Particularly I thought of her parting words to me: “There's just one thing to remember; whatever happens,

it does no good to be afraid.” Mrs. Dempster, I said aloud, was a fool. I was afraid. . . . It was then that one of the things happened that make my life strange. . . . I saw . . . in a niche a statue of the Virgin and Child . . . the Immaculate Conception. . . . But what hit me worse than the blow of the shrapnel was the face was Mrs. Dempster's. Years later . . . from time to time the little Madonna appeared and looked at me with friendly concern before removing herself; once or twice she spoke, but I did not know what she said and did not need to know.

The question here, I think, is how much of his own work Davies understood. Grant tells us that his notes show many shifts before Davies arrived at his final conception. Eventually he avowed that *Fifth Business* is autobiographical, “but not as young men do it . . . spiritual autobiography in fact . . . in what I must call a Jungian sense.”

Near the end of his life we've learned that Davies has become impatient with acclaim, especially with having been shortlisted for both the Nobel and Man Booker prizes (losing the former to Toni Morrison, the latter to Roddy Doyle). At the very end of her biography (which Davies disliked: overdone, he thought), Grant quotes from an article called “Jung and Heraldry.” Of the dragon Davies writes that it stands as

a reminder of the incalculability, the might and the chthonic force of the Unconscious. . . . His wings give him power to soar: he is no creeping thing. He is the Old Saurian who possessed the earth before the johnny-come-lately Man seized it. . . . The dragon says . . . do not fear to fly above the Earth, and Remember Me. The dragon frees the mind from the present, for he is old, and he frees the spirit from commonplace considerations, because he has wings. And the dragon, looked at in the light, is a dear companion indeed . . . a Counsellor that only a fool would neglect.

Davies is about to begin his final book, *The Cunning Man*, as crafty a self-portrait (of a shifty diagnostician) and with a title as eponymous as any author ever writ.

In his *New York Times* obituary (December 4, 1995), Peter B. Flint tells us that Davies rejected psychoanalysis in favor of “the creative maturity and wisdom” of Jung’s psychological thinking because the former was reductive (“getting you back to the womb and a lot of trouble”), and that he depicted self-discovery as expressions of free will exercised counter-conventionally but always avoided bringing pain to others. As an educator he believed “in encouragement. A great number of young people who are very brilliant come from very humble families, and they have to fight family criticism.” By the end of his life, Davies, whose work had been translated into seventeen languages, had received many awards and had

become the first Canadian to be named a member of the American Academy and Institute of Arts and Letters.

In his *Man’s Search for Meaning*, Victor Frankl teaches that “man’s search for meaning is the primary motivation in his life and not a ‘secondary rationalization’ of instinctual drives. This meaning is unique and specific in that it must and can be fulfilled by him alone; only then does it achieve a significance which will satisfy his own *will* to meaning.” Well, Samuel Johnson taught us that “people need to be reminded more often than they need to be instructed,” and Frankl’s lesson is the one of which Davies reminds us, and that consistent reminder is why *we* should be reminded of *him*.

---

## Forthcoming in *The New Criterion*:

Rossini’s sins *by James F. Penrose*

Global Latinists *by John Byron Kuhner*

Dante’s curse *by Dan Hofstadter*

Oakeshott & horse racing *by Timothy Fuller*

Imperial blend *by Justin Zaremby*

Theater

## Screen plays

by Kyle Smith

---

Published in 1962, Anthony Burgess's novel *A Clockwork Orange* proved to be prescient in a more oblique way than its admirers would have you believe. Though it foretold the surge of violence, crime, and social pathology that was about to overtake many Western cities, both the book and the 1971 Stanley Kubrick film that followed are so deeply equivocal that what is most unsettling about them is not so much that they predicted urban moral and literal decay but that they predicted the step beyond that—the cringing and excuse-making of the *bien-pensant* class, which would come to worry that the cure for crime might be worse than the epidemic itself.

After a crime spree that includes rape and murder, Burgess's young hood Alex is in effect mentally castrated by the Ludovico brainwashing technique. His interior reform results in his being freed from prison after a brief period when he should instead have been stowed behind bars for life. Burgess fretted that the treatment amounted to unconscionable dehumanization, withdrawal of freedom of choice. Yet prisoners, especially those placed under maximum security for committing the most heinous crimes, don't have a lot of choices, either. They certainly lack the option to commit violence against those outside the prison. Criminal justice means withdrawing from the convicted almost all choices: where to live, when to get up in the morning, when and where to move, where to eat, what to do all day, what time to put the lights out. The Ludovico technique therefore means, to Alex, a sizable *increase* in

liberty and choice. Yet we're meant to be more disturbed by its effects than by Alex's earlier crime spree. This is the most telling, and least intended, effect of Burgess's story.

In the decades following the film of *A Clockwork Orange*—which Kubrick caused to be withdrawn from view in Britain for many years because of copycat crimes linked to it—shocking crimes against society would be met by even more shocking handwringing by society. Cultural mandarins would survey a landscape of Boschian brutality and point the finger at the police, racism, capitalism—anything but the offenders themselves. To do so was, inconveniently for Burgess and Kubrick, to deny agency, to deny free will, and to reduce men to playthings of socioeconomic forces. As the film concludes with Alex reverting to his destructive ways, it amounts to the most intricate and dazzling of shrugs: Alex begins as a reprobate, efforts were made, they didn't work, so he finishes as a reprobate. The novel, though, carries on with one more chapter, an improbable happy ending in which Alex simply outgrows his criminal impulses and settles down for a life of bourgeois tranquility.

All of this is shunted to the background of the off-Broadway production of *A Clockwork Orange* (at New World Stages through January 6), a transfer from London. The director, Alexandra Spencer-Jones, has reshaped, or rather distorted, the story into an allegory of gay life. The musclebound lads in its all-male cast, clad in tight tank tops and suspenders, spend the hour and a half caressing each other, executing

fight scenes that involve more pirouetting than *Swan Lake*, and repeatedly stripping down to their jockey shorts. There is much hugging and slapping on the buttocks. Alex's rape victim is a man (sodomized with a broken bottle). The Ludovico technique starts out with a gay orgy, with Alex in a chair swarmed by a dozen other cast members, all of them wearing identical horn-rimmed glasses as if to enact some kind of Clark Kent fantasy scenario. There were moments during the evening when I felt as if I had wandered into one of those shadowy gentlemen's clubs in the West Village, the ones patronized by the fellows in motorcycle leathers. Yet at the end—Burgess's, not Kubrick's—there is a reversal of sorts and Alex has settled down for what promises to be a contented same-sex marriage.

Staged in minimalist style on a small stage of about twenty-five square feet, the play assumes you've seen the movie and jumps rapidly amongst its best-known scenes. The only colors in the costuming are black, white, and the occasional orange accessory (the phrase "a clockwork orange," which appears several times in the book as an expression of the organic forced to be mechanical, is awkwardly reiterated a number of times, until the audience can be forgiven for thinking it's being led around by the nose). As Alex, the imposing Jonno Davies cannot be said to be subtle; he has the presence of a physical trainer but also the wit of one. He tends to shout his lines. The kindest remark I can make about all this is that, at ninety-five minutes, the play at least does not monopolize your evening.

What is the takeaway from all the preening and flexing? The director's suggestion is, I think, that gay men, whose liberation movement began when their liaisons constituted actual criminal acts, eagerly seized on their outlaw status and reveled in being antisocial, engaging in much degrading and animalistic behavior. After having invited and endured much scorn, though, they have now advanced to a plane where they are free to be just as boring as the rest of us, trading druggy all-weekend raves and heedless promiscuity for cozy brunching *à deux* and picking out linens at Pottery Barn. Some of these points may be

worth making in another play, but what any of them has to do with *A Clockwork Orange* escapes me. There are times when the fixation on homosexual themes in the theater is like visiting a gallery in which every painter insists he needs only one color in his palette. Sunsets? Grass? Rivers? Render all of them in charcoal if that's what makes you happy, but after the thousandth iteration of the technique your viewers may grow bored.

The film version of Roald Dahl's 1964 novel *Charlie and the Chocolate Factory* arrived in theaters in 1971, the same year as *A Clockwork Orange*, but Dahl always had a refreshing impatience for silly equivocation. His wrongdoers, even those who have committed the most venial of sins, receive swift, meet, and amusing punishment. On many an occasion, Dahl seems to have the most indispensable attribute of a children's author, which is to be unsentimental about children. In return, attracted to the moral clarity, children have always loved him, few of them doubting his fitness to judge. What child ever stole a chocolate bar and declared "Society's to blame" or "I wasn't read my Miranda rights, hence my confession is inadmissible"? If only every novel for adults could distinguish right from wrong as readily as children's books do.

As staged on Broadway (at the Lunt-Fontanne Theatre) in a splashy full-blown musical adaptation that retains a handful of songs from the movie and adds many others, *Charlie* satisfyingly maintains Dahl's moralizing tone, sending erring children off to one colorful doom after another in macabre and mischievous fashion. Do take your little ones to see it, and you may be surprised at how much you enjoy its waspish songs and imaginative staging, too. Mark Shaiman (music and lyrics) and Scott Wittman (lyrics), along with the director Jack O'Brien, previously collaborated on *Hairspray*, which ran for seven years, and if this show isn't quite as brilliantly executed as their earlier effort, it has the same welcome balance of whimsy and wit.

As played by Christian Borle, who became a Broadway sensation with his hilarious portrayal of Shakespeare as a Renaissance Mick Jagger

a couple of years ago in *Something Rotten*, this Willy Wonka is daffy and ebullient, neither as sinister as Gene Wilder's superb portrayal, nor as silly as Johnny Depp's screamy and childish take in the regrettable 2005 film version. To placate the kids in advance of the dark deeds to come, Borle's Wonka lets us know at the outset that his goal is simply to find an heir to take over his factory, a detail that wasn't revealed until the closing moments of the original film, which cloaked the character's motives in strangeness. Nor does the stage version make use of Slugworth, the frightening rival candymaker to Wonka who was barely mentioned in the novel but played an important role in defining the moral stakes in the film. He was the stuff of nightmares, and it's a shame to lose him, but the Broadway production leans more heavily on laughs than on scares; the spooky tunnel sequence from the film, for instance, is toned down and turned into a more conventional funhouse attraction. What was G-rated entertainment in the 1970s is too scary for today's generation.

Most of the rest of the story is intact, though, as the impoverished, dreamy little boy of the title (three young actors rotate in and out of the part) yearns for some escape from his drab and colorless working-class life. He and a Model U.N. of international children almost as insufferable as the real U.N. win a trip to visit the mysterious candy titan Wonka for a tour of his factory, during which each of their various transgressions and vanities is serially exposed and delightfully punished. Other than Charlie, the children are played by college-aged actors, which comes off a bit odd but presumably saved the producers a lot of money and misery by avoiding excessive invocation of child-labor laws.

David Greig's brisk, funny book sharpens the character differences which emerge in an introductory song for each of the children invited on the factory tour. Veruca Salt, for instance, previously a spoiled, disagreeable Briton, this time is a vain Russian ballerina with an odious oligarch for a daddy. She and the others will exit the scene in appropriately grotesque ways; fittingly enough, for Veruca (drolly played by Emma Pfaeffle) the end

comes via a spoof of *The Nutcracker* and she gets shredded by giant squirrels.

Violet Beauregarde, the most boring of Dahl's characters and the one whose flaw (a predilection for gum chewing) seems more or less forgivable, has been reimagined as a hyperconfident aspiring R&B singer with fifty thousand Twitter followers and her own YouTube channel. She's a useful synecdoche for a far more pervasive and pernicious problem than chewing gum: those hideously precocious stage children who can sing, dance, tell jokes, everything but remain quiet. As Violet, Trista Dollison is a standout, obnoxious and hilarious in equal measure.

Another of the contest's winners, the entertainment addict Mike Teavee (a lively Michael Wartella), is the one who fits most easily into a 2017 setting, a tech and screen junkie with an overindulgent mother. His introductory song is a lumpy pseudo-patriotic march extolling the bounty of America (sung by his proud mama): "We give our little sons/ lots of love and lots of guns." Her *Music Man*-style number morphs into a grunge-metal tune in which Mike offers his take on himself: "I don't need to go outside to be what I be/ Reality is something I can get from TV," he sings, or screeches. It's a pleasure to spend much of the second act watching each of these brats get their comeuppance. After more than half a century, the Wonka fable seems as potent as ever.

If it's a history lesson you'd like to give the young ones, and tickets to *Hamilton* prove unobtainable without selling your car, you could scarcely hope for a better Broadway opportunity than *Anastasia* (at the Broadhurst Theatre), a sprightly exercise in anti-Bolshevism that is based on not one but two films: the 1956 movie that starred Ingrid Bergman and the 1997 animated feature in which the title character was voiced by Meg Ryan. In each of the three versions, conniving Russians in the 1920s try to pass off an amnesiac girl as an unexpected survivor of the massacre of the Romanovs, seeking to use her to buy their way out of the country and move on to Paris in hopes of claiming a reward offered by the Dowager Empress living there. As their plot

unfolds, though, the con men begin to suspect the stooge they picked up really is Anastasia.

Playing the street waif, Anya, who may be a princess, Christy Altomare sings angelically and is a winsome presence onstage as she becomes fast friends with the grifters, the handsome young Dmitry (Derek Klena) and the older, more comical figure Vlad (John Bolton). We learn about the situation in 1927 Leningrad via the company's explanatory song "A Rumor in St. Petersburg," which is not only one of the most dead-on satires of Soviet communism ever to appear on a Broadway stage but also one of the *only* satires of Soviet communism ever to appear on a Broadway stage:

They tell us times are better  
Well, I say they're not  
Can't cook an empty promise  
In an empty pot  
"A brighter day is dawning! It's almost at  
hand!"  
The skies are gray, the walls have ears,  
And he who argues disappears!

Anya's new friends take to coaching her about the life of Anastasia, finding her an eager student who memorizes every detail about the princess they tell her and, seemingly, some they don't. Their plot to bribe their way out of the country is excitingly rendered by the director Darko Tresnjak. In Paris, Anastasia's grandmother the Dowager is splendidly played by the effortlessly regal Mary Beth Peil, who gives a somewhat formulaic narrative its gravitas and its beating heart as she prays for another chance to meet her darling. Her lady-in-waiting, Countess Lily (delightfully played by Caroline O'Connor), provides considerable comic energy as a lusty oldster pining madly for her ex-love, Vlad, who conve-

niently is winging his way toward her along with Anya. Meanwhile, a conflicted Bolshevik officer, Gleb (Ramin Karimloo), whose father took part in the execution of the Romanovs, provides the element of danger as he pursues Anya all the way to Paris with an eye toward ending the Anastasia rumors with one more bullet.

Though primarily aimed at girls, the show is so exquisitely staged and the songwriting so accomplished that it should appeal to everyone who enjoys a grand Broadway experience. The opening song "Once Upon a December," from the composer Stephen Flaherty and the lyricist Lynn Ahrens, establishes a beautiful bond between the Dowager Empress and her granddaughter, and the songs throughout are so lustrous and densely crafted that together they sound more like a stand-alone pop album than the mere backdrop to a stage show. The standout among many strong tunes is "Journey to the Past," which earned an Academy Award nomination. The 1997 film featured a few of this slate of songs, which has been considerably reworked and filled out in the twenty years since that underwhelming movie.

If you're looking for dramatic heft at a splashy Broadway musical, you're probably looking in the wrong place, but *Anastasia* has far more of it than most, portraying tsarist Russia from the little girl's eyes as an enchanting place of ballrooms and fancy dress, while the dinginess and desperation of the era following the Revolution usefully illustrates how collectivist politics can immediately befoul and pollute even a gigantic country. If you can imagine an alternative society where children are regularly supplied with accurate readings of history's greatest horrors and taught early to be wary of revolutionary rhetoric and utopian zealotry, *Anastasia* would be staged in every high school. And it should be.



Art

# Casanova in Fort Worth

by Karen Wilkin

How do you create a potent art museum exhibition centered on someone who was not an artist? It's not impossible, of course. There have been fascinating shows at the Metropolitan Museum of Art and the Philadelphia Museum of Art illuminating the contributions of the influential art dealers Paul Durand-Ruel, Ambroise Vollard, and Alfred Stieglitz. These examinations of the history of taste assembled exemplary works by the artists these pioneering gallerists espoused, including many that were actually exhibited or personally owned by the dealers. But what if the proposed subject, unlike Durand-Ruel or Vollard or Stieglitz, had no obvious connection with the painters and sculptors of his day? What if he was known chiefly for writing a racy memoir recounting an extremely colorful, peripatetic life, a disarmingly frank account that made his name synonymous with "hedonist," "libertine," and "sexual adventurer"? What, that is to say, if the subject were Giacomo Casanova? Could a major museum exhibition focusing on the paradigmatic rake be created—not by the Museum of Sex?

The answer is a resounding "Yes." Witness the delicious "Casanova: The Seduction of Europe," a witty, multivalent celebration of the arts, culture, and social mores of high-end eighteenth-century Europe, as seen, experienced, and commented upon by the man himself.<sup>1</sup> It turns out that Casanova, despite

his name's current associations mainly with the erotic, is an excellent, all-purpose guide. He was not only, as we learn from his own account, an irresistible seducer, adventurer, gambler, con man, convict, escapee, spy, and social climber, but also, according to everyone he encountered as he moved across Europe, a glittering conversationalist in several languages and a trenchant observer who charmed men and women alike. He was also an inexhaustible traveler who zigzagged across Europe for most of his life, starting from his native Northern Italy and reaching, among many other places, Constantinople, Saint Petersburg, Moscow, Riga, and Dresden, with extended sojourns in Spain, Paris, and London, often changing identities and occupations, both real and assumed, when he changed locations. (An obsessed graduate student who charted Casanova's journeys calculated that he logged forty thousand miles—in an era of horse-drawn coaches and river barges.)

The exhibition evokes the era in which all this took place with a dazzling selection of paintings, prints, drawings, and sculptures, sumptuous furniture and decorative objects, costumes, porcelain, silver, *commedia dell'arte* figurines, a slightly sinister boar's head tureen, books, and, since Casanova was Casanova, a section of X-rated miniature "how-to" drawings, accompanied by a warning for fragile sensibilities and magnifying glasses for the adventurous. There's literally something for everyone. Each of the two hundred or so outstanding inclusions, from snuff boxes

<sup>1</sup> "Casanova: The Seduction of Europe," opened at the Kimbell Art Museum, Fort Worth, on August 27 and remains on view through December 31, 2017.

and toiletry sets to enormous paintings and over-the-top furniture, was made between 1725, when Casanova was born, and 1798, when he died. We are delighted, absorbed, intrigued, and occasionally titillated by the works on view. But we are also instructed and informed. There are subtexts on theater, performance, masking, identity, travel, dining, and class structure, among other things. We learn a great deal about the period and we have a wonderful time as we do.

“Casanova: The Seduction of Europe,” on view at the Kimbell Art Museum, Fort Worth, through December 2017, will be seen in 2018 at the Fine Arts Museums of San Francisco, Legion of Honor, and the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, with minor differences in the selection of exhibited works at each museum. Not surprisingly, the enormous, complex, lavish show required the combined efforts of a team of specialist curators, a list almost as complicated and wide-ranging as Casanova’s twelve-volume *History of My Life*. It includes: C. D. Dickerson, who initially conceived the project, the head of sculpture and decorative arts at the National Gallery, Washington, D.C.; Esther Bell, the senior curator of the Clark Art Institute, Williamstown; and, all from the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, Frederick Ilchman, the chair of the art of Europe, Thomas Michie, the senior curator of decorative arts, and Pamela Parmal, the chair of textile and fashion arts, among other collaborators. The list of contributors to the lively, generously illustrated, extremely entertaining catalogue is even longer.

While the exhibition is not, strictly speaking, a biography of Casanova, it uses the salient and sometimes salacious events recounted in *History of My Life* as an organizing principle. As beautifully installed at the Kimbell by the museum’s deputy director, George T. M. Shackelford, the story begins with a section titled “Venice,” which includes an impressive group of large *vedute* paintings of Casanova’s birthplace by Giovanni Antonio Canal, called Canaletto. The ensemble conjures up the moist shifting light of the magical city and the boat traffic on the Grand Canal,

from luxurious private gondole to robust wine barrel transports, against backgrounds of monumental domed churches and handsome palazzi. For those who know Venice, one view is a sly reminder that just out of sight, round a bend of the depicted scene, is the San Samuele neighborhood of narrow canals and narrower streets where Casanova was born to an actress. But there are no images of this more workaday side of *La Serenissima* in the exhibition, perhaps because Casanova soon left it. A ravishing, somewhat atypical Canaletto of the outskirts of Padua, on the mainland, more landscape than canal scene, signals the brilliant, precocious adolescent’s studies at the university there.

The next gallery, “Inside Venice,” introduces us to the elegant world Casanova quickly became part of, after receiving a Doctorate in Law from the University of Padua at the improbable age of sixteen. The story is told, in part, by Pietro Longhi’s intimate paintings of shadowy interiors populated by smartly dressed young women, musicians, suitors, and equivocal older men. At first, they seem to be straightforward genre scenes, but closer scrutiny suggests that subtle negotiations are taking place. An eminent art history professor of mine once said that he always thought the people in Longhi’s paintings were listening to Mozart. If so, it might be the parts of *The Marriage of Figaro* dealing with concealment and subterfuge. (In this context, it’s worth remembering that Casanova and Lorenzo da Ponte, the librettist of *The Marriage of Figaro*, were friends.) Casanova’s rapid ascent within Venetian society is embodied by opulent gilded furniture, all sinuous curves, richly worked surfaces, and fabulous upholstery, contextualized by studies for ceiling decorations by Giovanni Battista Tiepolo. Together, the paintings and furniture serve as capsule evocations of the grand rooms that the ambitious young man now frequented. At the Kimbell, the contrast between these elaborate Rococo furnishings and the austere high modernism of the iconic Louis Kahn building intensifies the impact of the objects on view, allowing us to savor fully their concentrated doses of eighteenth-century luxury. At inter-

vals, black-and-white enlargements of period prints become economical backgrounds, mediating between the Kimbell's pure geometry and stripped-down surfaces, and the character of the exhibited works.

The next section, "Amorous Pursuits," presents the type of images we might expect in connection with someone whose memoir the art historian Susan M. Wager describes, in her enlightening and engaging catalogue essay, as an account of "a six-decade, transcontinental succession of sexual conquests, assignations, and affairs with well over a hundred partners: married women, men, prostitutes, nuns, and even his own family members." Since Casanova spent a great deal of time in Paris, which was famous for that sort of thing, this section includes works by such French masters of amorous themes as François Boucher and Jean-Honoré Fragonard, as well as the British social satirist William Hogarth, and some of their lesser-known but accomplished colleagues. The subjects range from the high-minded (the loves of the classical gods) to the pastoral (flirtatious, well-dressed shepherds and shepherdesses) to the lascivious (two girls in shifts playing with their lapdogs in bed) to the obliquely graphic (Hogarth's *Before and After*, both 1736, a pair of canvases that force us to imagine what happened in between). None of this is gratuitous. Libertinage and sexual license were hallmarks of Casanova's day, especially in France, Wager reminds us, part of a revolution in ideas about love, sex, and family, including women's appetites, that foreshadowed modern attitudes. Wager persuasively ties this to concepts that seem wholly bound up with Enlightenment ideals, noting that "These alterations in intimate behavior reflected the growing cultural and philosophical value placed on selfhood, personal liberty, privacy, and the individual's right to pursue happiness." (See Thomas Jefferson.)

In Venice, Casanova's pursuit of happiness included an extra-conventual arrangement with a couple of nuns, which also involved the French ambassador. To help us envision how this might have been accomplished, a section titled "The Troublemaker" includes a

superb, dashing painted Francesco Guardi, *The Parlatorio* (1745–50), a large canvas showing the room where convent visitors, including suitors, could converse with nuns and resident young ladies who were not members of the order, through ample screened openings. On the visitors' side, Guardi includes well-dressed men and women, a lapdog, and children watching a puppet show. Behind the very large grilles, we see bejeweled, fashionable young women; the nuns are just as youthful and fetching, but wear black and don fine, sheer wimples. Nearby, a tableau of costumed mannequins, the first of a series that punctuates the show, brings a visit to the *parlatorio* to life. Despite the permissive atmosphere of the day, this time Casanova's behavior attracted the attention of the Inquisition and he was sentenced, at age thirty, to five years' imprisonment in the unpleasant attic cells of the Doge's Palace known as *i piombi*—the leads. In one of the best-known passages of his book, he describes his escape, after a little more than a year, with a fellow prisoner. In the exhibition, a selection of Giovanni Battista Piranesi's fantastic prints of imaginary prisons, *Carceri d'invenzione* (begun 1745), embodies this event, with a brooding Canaletto of the island of Murano doing triple duty as an image of the moonless night of the escape and of the site of both the nuns' convent and the trysting place the French ambassador arranged for the complicated affair.

We follow Casanova's prudent, post-escape relocation to Paris in a gallery devoted to six gorgeous wall panels with mythological scenes by Boucher. Normally divided between the Kimbell and the J. Paul Getty Museum, Los Angeles, the ensemble is reunited to splendid effect, anchored at one end by a group of costumed figures plotting hanky-panky amid fine furniture, and at the other by a pair of spectacular, oversized gilded bronze wall lights with volutes and prakeets, and a vast gilded bronze clock surmounting what is said to be the largest *bombé commode* in captivity. Casanova's sojourn in London is conjured up by images of the era's notorious pleasure gardens and scenes of gambling,

most notably Hogarth's *The Lady's Last Stake* (1759), an interior where an elegant woman, who has clearly risked all her tangible assets, ponders whether to offer herself to the importunate fellow she is gaming with. Another costume tableau dramatizes the discovery that a simply dressed card player has been cheating; his richly clad opponent knocks over a fine mahogany chair in his rage.

Casanova's ambitious wanderings are evoked by a pair of meticulous, near-panoramic views of Dresden by Bernardo Bellotto, a hobnail-studded trunk, and a rare, ferociously refined canvas of women in Turkey by Jean-Étienne Liotard, better known for his pastel portraits. The discomforts and perils of travel are made vivid by two immense canvases by Francesco Casanova, the painter-brother of the writer. Intended to provoke shudders of terror, *Collapse of the Bridge* and *Travelers in a Storm* (both ca. 1770) present scenes of inescapable horror; in one, a horse-drawn carriage and its occupants plunge into a rocky chasm, while in the other, the occupants of a cart are struck by lightning. (Apparently there are two more narratives, equally grim, in the series.) The paintings make the thought of Casanova's having covered an estimated forty thousand miles not only exhausting, but also terrifying.

At the Kimbell, exhaustion and terror are soothed by a gallery of superb objects associated with dining—the kind that Casanova would have encountered at the fashionable dinners and aristocratic soirées he attended across Europe or that he would have rented in order to convey an impression of wealth when he entertained the people he wished to cultivate. The selection includes fine examples of Sèvres and Meissen porcelain, exquisitely wrought silver pieces by some of the most celebrated makers of the era, and that leering earthenware boar's head tureen, tusks and all, with his ears at a jaunty angle.

Throughout the installation, we encounter portraits of people significant to Casanova, including women he loved and described, disguising their names, in his memoir, as well as such public figures as the celebrated *castrato* known as Farinelli, the most acclaimed

and highest paid singer of his day. The last gallery emphasizes just how rich and varied Casanova's connections were—from royalty and revolutionaries to artists, writers, and intellectuals. We are surrounded by paintings and sculptures of such luminaries as Louis XV and his mistress Madame de Pompadour, their portrait busts reunited after long separation, along with Benjamin Franklin and Pope Clement XIII, and other memorable portraits including Joshua Reynolds's imposing life-size image of a seated Samuel Johnson; Jean-Antoine Houdon's incisive marble bust of Voltaire, with a wry smile; Anton Raphael Mengs's self-portrait, with its virtuoso paint-handling; and the Scottish painter Allan Ramsay's sensitive head of Jean-Jacques Rousseau, painted when the Enlightenment hero visited London. It's an impressive pantheon. Apparently, most were not casual acquaintances, but people with whom Casanova spent substantial amounts of time.

This crowd of notables concludes "Casanova: The Seduction of Europe" with a crescendo, but the life of the notorious writer, traveler, and womanizer in fact ended *diminuendo*. Pardoned by the city of Venice in 1744, he returned there, after eighteen years of exile, for almost a decade, before taking a post in Vienna with the Venetian ambassador. Improbably, Casanova spent his last years as a librarian in Waldstein Castle, in a small duchy in what is now the Czech Republic. The most exciting thing we learn about the end of his life is that he attended the first performance of Mozart's *Don Giovanni* in Prague and consulted with Da Ponte on the libretto at the time of the premiere. It's impossible not to wonder if that included vetting the servant Leporello's catalogue of the Don's international liaisons, although Casanova didn't spend enough time in Spain to account for the aria's claim of one-thousand-and-three conquests. "Casanova: The Seduction of Europe" provides no details about that. But it does offer a visually and intellectually stimulating, deeply pleasurable introduction to the world that Casanova (and Don Giovanni) inhabited. And the catalogue, with its lush pink, peekaboo cover, is a great read.

## Exhibition note

“World War I and The Visual Arts”  
The Metropolitan Museum of Art,  
New York.  
July 31, 2017–January 7, 2018

Propaganda elides subtlety. Bluntness is the point: to make expressly clear the message its makers—whether it be a government, political party, or individual—want to impart to the viewer. Which isn’t to suggest that sophistication and craft, often of a high level, don’t figure into propaganda. At the entrance to “World War I and the Visual Arts,” museum visitors encounter *Destroy This Mad Brute* (1917), a recruitment poster for the U.S. Army designed by Harry Ryle Hopps. As a means of instilling patriotic fervor, Hopps’s image is a far cry from the stern gravitas of Uncle Sam. A slaver-gorilla wearing a Kaiser hat charges onto the American shoreline. In its right arm, this proto-King Kong wields a bloodied club that reads “Kultur”; in its left, it holds a writhing, topless woman. The latter is an allusion to Germany’s 1914 invasion—or, as it came to be known, “rape”—of Belgium. One doesn’t have to be a student of history to glean the intent of Hopps’s image: *aggression is monstrous*. As an argument, it doesn’t carry a lot of nuance, but the flair with which it is embodied is effective and, testament to a job well done, memorable.

Dramatics for the sake of political import is par for the course when it comes to propaganda, particularly during wartime. Jennifer Farrell, an Associate Curator in the Met’s Department of Drawings and Prints, lines the hallway directly outside the exhibition with a run of additional posters from the United States, Russia, France, Italy, and the “mad brute” itself, Germany. Fritz Erler, a painter and designer with Symbolist tendencies, worked on behalf of the German Empire in creating *Help us win—buy war bonds!* (1916), a stoic portrayal of a soldier surrounded by arabesques of barbed wire. History has bestowed its own ironies on this decidedly non-Aryan visage, especially given that Erler became an artist favored by the Third Reich. (He would, in fact, paint a portrait of the Führer some

fifteen years later.) One of the discomfiting aspects of the exhibition is how vividly it encapsulates history, bringing along with it a concomitant sense of fervor, confusion, and righteousness. That it does so with compelling understatement is a credit to Farrell’s selectivity and focus.

The Met is playing up the stellar array of artists featured in “World War I and the Visual Arts,” most of whom are inextricably linked with *The War To End All Wars*. Expressionism was, after all, bolstered and *Die Neue Sachlichkeit* (The New Objectivity) born of its catastrophes. An exhibition such as this is inconceivable without the work of Kathe Kollwitz, Max Beckmann, George Grosz, and Otto Dix, all of whom make plain their disaffection. Fernand Léger, who served in the Engineer Corps of the French army, may have observed that “trench warfare is full of small murders,” but he was impressed by the “dazzling” efficiency of high-tech warfare. The Italian Futurist Gino Severini was similarly taken with “the marvelous mechanical forms” of modern arms, as was the more equivocal Wyndham Lewis, the British Vorticist, who, unlike Severini, served in the war. There are artists whose inclusion is less expected. George Bellows is known for many things, but *War Series* (1918), a suite of often gruesome lithographs, isn’t one of them. Then there’s John Singer Sargent, Pierre Bonnard, and the perpetually sunny Raoul Dufy, the latter of whom celebrated the end of hostilities with a lithograph done for *Le Mot*, a journal published by a friend, the novelist and filmmaker Jean Cocteau.

The “visual” nature of the exhibition extends considerably beyond the Fine Arts. Commercial artists figure significantly at the Met; so do, to a lesser extent, industrial designers. Three-dimensional objects are in short supply; those that are included—an assortment of helmets that channel medieval precedent and a tattered gas mask from France—are arresting, not least because they seem alarmingly primitive. An array of medals commemorating the sinking of the *Lusitania* (Germany), *America the Avenger* (France), and the barbarism of Kaiser Wilhelm (the United States) are the lone sculptural inclusions. Pictures predominate.

Documentary photos pepper “World War I and the Visual Arts” with terse clarity, whether they be aerial views of war-torn France by Edward Steichen (who pioneered surveillance techniques as the Chief of the Photographic Section of the American Expeditionary) or the haunting image by an unknown photographer of Londoners observing two minutes of silence on Armistice Day, 1919. Additional items include textiles, periodicals, montages, a pop-up children’s book (*After the Victory*), and trading cards published by the American Tobacco Company. A series of Russian postcards stand out for their starkly contrived imagery and subject matter: women in wartime, seen embodying such virtues as “iron discipline” and “precision, accuracy, and prompt fulfillment of order.”

Otto Dix’s *The War* (1924), a series of fifty-one etchings, occupies an entire wall of the show and is the rare occasion when a minor artist earns a star turn. Seen on a piecemeal basis, Dix’s paintings provide a chilly dissection of life during the Weimar Republic; seen

en masse, their neurasthenia wears quickly. As a printmaker, however, Dix is on more solid footing because his skills as a draftsman and tonalist evince more grit and imagination than when putting brush to canvas. Taking clear inspiration from Goya’s *The Disasters of War*, Dix’s etchings embrace the grotesque, sometimes to cartoonish extremes, and indulge in a moral rage that glints with bilious black humor. Dix’s masterful handling of the medium brings unseemly beauty to depictions of bodies—whether they be dead, exploited, or disfigured. George Grosz’s drawings, typically the standard-bearer for bitterness of this sort, are tinker-toys in comparison. Dix’s misanthropy is both his gift and greatest liability, but *The War* occasionally admits to the elegiac. *Evening on the Wijtschaete Plain* (November 1917), a depiction of innumerable corpses lying in disarray on the battlefield, is both a mockery of the surrounding landscape and its cruel apotheosis. It’s an image very much in sync with the strong emotions spurred by “World War I and The Visual Arts.”

—Mario Naves

# Gallery chronicle

by James Panero

Following its summer aestivation, the New York gallery scene returned with strong openings all September. Galleries are the new museums—places where art can still speak for itself. But galleries are also a dying breed—dying not for our sins but our distractions. These days any gallery that finds a way to survive into another season seems like a triumph in adversity. Some still triumph mightily.

Consider the three-show, three-venue lineup at Chelsea's Paul Kasmin, which continues through October. At the gallery's 293 Tenth Avenue location, "Robert Motherwell: Early Paintings" examines the lesser-known, experimental abstractions of the artist's pre-"Elegy" years.<sup>1</sup> Around the corner at Kasmin's 515 West Twenty-seventh Street venue, "Caro & Olitski: 1965–1968, Painted Sculptures and the Bennington Sprays" looks to the personal friendship and creative dialogue between sculptor and painter.<sup>2</sup> And finally, up the block at the gallery's 297 Tenth Avenue address, in "The Enormity of the Possible," the independent curator Priscilla Vail Caldwell brings the first generation of American modernists together with some

of the later Abstract Expressionists—Milton Avery, Oscar Bluemner, Charles Burchfield, Stuart Davis, John Marin, Elie Nadelman, and Helen Torr, among others, with Lee Krasner, Jackson Pollock, and Mark Rothko.<sup>3</sup>

Judging from the examples in "Early Paintings," Robert Motherwell displayed graphic confidence and innovative range from the very start. In the early 1940s, Motherwell was encouraged out of the classroom and into the studio by Meyer Schapiro, his doctoral advisor at Columbia University. He visited the painter Roberto Matta in Mexico City and, back in New York, saw Piet Mondrian's first solo exhibition at the Valentine Gallery. Both were influential. By his mid-twenties, where this exhibition begins, a dual sense for narrative mood and pictorial space already infused his work, with geometry often concealing and imprisoning the forms underneath.

*The Spanish Prison (Window)*, from 1943–44, explores the ominous undertones of abstract line and form, in a work that Motherwell later said was the first of his "Spanish Elegies." The paintings that follow here, through the early 1950s, further distill this abstract mood, with formal structure evolving into ever-more-expressive deployments of color and paint-handling—the siren flash of *Orange Personage* (1947), the blood and bones of *The Hotel Corridor* (1950).

"Caro & Olitski: 1965–1968, Painted Sculptures and the Bennington Sprays" is a revela-

1 "Robert Motherwell: Early Paintings" opened at Paul Kasmin Gallery, 293 Tenth Avenue, New York, on September 7 and remains on view through October 28, 2017.

2 "Caro & Olitski: 1965–1968, Painted Sculptures and the Bennington Sprays" opened at Paul Kasmin Gallery, 515 West 27th Street, New York, on September 7 and remains on view through October 25, 2017.

3 "The Enormity of the Possible" opened at Paul Kasmin Gallery, 297 Tenth Avenue, New York, on September 7 and remains on view through October 28, 2017.

tory exhibition for the many resonances it finds between the British sculptor and the American painter, who each joined the art department of Vermont's Bennington College in 1963.

Both artists famously explored the abstract potential of industrial tools and materials—Caro's oxyacetylene welding equipment; Olitski's spray guns. They also thought similarly of color and line, exploring not only new materials but also the new shapes they found in their painted and sculpted forms. The lines at the edges of Olitski's paintings frame the airy voids of his sprays, while the welded metal of Caro's sculptures traces out shapes in space. Their shared sense for seamless industrial texture, with Caro's toothy enamels and Olitski's cloud-like sprays, makes this a perfectly paired show.

There may be no greater joy than seeing the first generation of American modernists in Chelsea, where anything made before 1945 is pre-history, and the American modernists are the neglected Old Masters. "The Enormity of the Possible" gathers the best of them—the haunted forms of Elie Nadelman, the jazz syncopations of Stuart Davis, the moody mountainscapes of Milton Avery.

Charles Burchfield never painted a bad picture, and *Lilacs No. 2* (ca. 1939–63) must rank among the best of them, as flowers, trees, and house all reveal animating forces in a living, breathing verdure.

Many of the individual works here sing, but as a whole the exhibition is overhung and overthought, taking on more than the storefront space might allow with a show that wants to spread out, and with fewer lines than one might wish drawn between the generations. The installation feels like the booth at an art fair, and perhaps in a way it is—a cubicle of American art history on display, for too short a time, on a corner of contemporary Chelsea.

Mel Kendrick has staked his career on exploring the positive and the negative in drawing, printmaking, photography, and sculpture. With the eye of a photographic plate, he finds the black in the white, the projection in the emulsion, the print in the press, and the shape in the void. Most known for his sculptures carved out of blocks that form their own pedestals,

Kendrick has a varied studio practice that may find his stamps turned into sculptures turned into photographs, all in a flipping, tumbling performance of process and materials.

Now at Chelsea's David Nolan Gallery, "Mel Kendrick: Woodblock Drawings" reassembles a series of large-scale woodblock prints created in 1992 and 1993 along with a single spidery wooden construction.<sup>4</sup> What from far away resemble surrealist drawings are revealed, upon closer inspection, to be enormous paper sheets printed with equally enormous plywood stamps. Closer still and the manufacturing of these stamped objects becomes apparent, with the swirling jigsaw cuts and metal hardware, down to the Phillips-head screws, that must have held the stamps together. In the paper print of this wooden matrix, cuts become lines and woodgrain becomes shading, with the wood's textural variations now transformed into the stark contrast of a black print on white paper. Kendrick calls these prints "drawings," and in the silky lines of the woodgrain they draw out a startling impression.

In his long and remarkably productive life, Nicolas Carone (1917–2010) worked through the full history of American modernism. In the 1940s and '50s, as a young man he painted and sculpted on the cusp of modernist invention. In the 2000s, into his nineties, he created some of the most striking pictures of his career. This amazing range is now on display at the gallery of the New York Studio School, where he was a founding member of the faculty, in "The Thing Unseen: A Centennial Celebration of Nicolas Carone."<sup>5</sup>

A classically trained artist who studied at age eleven in the Leonardo da Vinci Art School, the same atelier that Isamu Noguchi attended, which was created for New York's working poor in Alphabet City, Carone went on to become a member of the first generation of Abstract Expressionists. Along the way Carone never gave

4 "Mel Kendrick: Woodblock Drawings" opened at David Nolan Gallery, New York, on September 7 and remains on view through October 28, 2017.

5 "The Thing Unseen: A Centennial Celebration of Nicolas Carone" opened at the New York Studio School Gallery, New York, on September 5 and remains on view through October 15, 2017.



up on the figure. His work oscillated between abstraction and figuration, drawing equally on the push-pull lessons of Hans Hofmann and the classical faces he found in Italy while painting there on a Fulbright after the war.

Curated by Ro Lohin, “The Thing Unseen” itself oscillates between periods and styles. The exhibition shows the breadth of Carone’s work while also revealing his non-linear progression, with classical charcoal studies and fragmentary portraiture mixed in among abstract lines and forms. Most arresting, and illuminating, are the large black-and-white paintings that face each other across the show’s two rooms. *Shadow Dance* and *Sound of Blue Light* are each aggressive confrontations of marks and drips—paintings that belong in major museums—in which fugitive figures emerge and disappear in an abstract fog. Separated by fifty years, these two paintings, from 2007 and 1957, remain unified in Carone’s timeless vision.

Don’t be surprised if you walk into Betty Cuninghams Lower East Side gallery, looking for the sculptures of Christopher Wilmarth, and find Tibor de Nagy’s exhibition of Larry Rivers instead. I expect we will see much more consolidation of New York galleries—especially the best ones—as the serious business of art gives way to name brands and celebrity culture. Midtown’s historic Tibor de Nagy has now joined Betty Cuninghams downtown to share resources on Rivington Street, alternating between Cuninghams main gallery and the project space next door. It is here that we find Wilmarth (1943–1987), the minimalist sculptor of the maximal.<sup>6</sup>

It was Wilmarth’s great innovation to find the spiritual dimension in metal’s hard edge. In the 1970s, using etched glass, he filled the spaces of his metal sculptures with an ineffable, cloudy mist. Wilmarth set out to “make sculptures that evoke a spiritual disembodied state close to that of reverie; the kind of perfection that I have found during my ‘revelations’ or ‘epiphanies,’” as he said in 1980. In the early 1980s, inspired by seven poems by Mallarmé, in a translation by Frederick Morgan,

6 “Christopher Wilmarth” opened at Betty Cuninghams Gallery, New York, on September 6 and remains on view through October 29, 2017.

Wilmarth furthered this exploration of glass and air in a series called “Breath.” The minimalist angles of the 1970s and the breath-filled curves of the 1980s are both on display at Cuninghams in sculptural maquettes and works on paper. The artist’s suicide in 1987, at the age of forty-four, still haunts the show, as it does all of Wilmarth’s somber and emotive work.

Finally, a word on Bushwick, Brooklyn. The neighborhood hosted its eleventh Open Studios weekend in late September. It also continues to display a vital energy in the face of Manhattan’s retrenchment. I suspect the fifteen-month shutdown of the L Train in 2019 may put an end to that, but for now the galleries of 56 Borgia Street alone, off the Morgan Street stop, continue to outdo themselves.

At Theodore:Art, Eric Brown, in “Punctuate,” examines the tension of figure and ground in paintings that are fun and funny—caprices of 1960s Color Field art.<sup>7</sup> At David&Schweitzer, the esteemed Brenda Goodman finds expression in the working and reworking of her materials, with etched-over abstractions that read as psychological portraiture.<sup>8</sup>

Meanwhile, in “10,000 Mantras,” at Studio 10, Meg Hitchcock continues to use collage as a meditative practice through the reformulation of cut letters taken from holy (and not-so-holy) books.<sup>9</sup> Here, the flat shapes of earlier work give way to increasingly complex stacks of letters. Incense sticks are used to burn holes in grids, ten thousand at a time, increasing the dimensions of her works on paper. Undoubtedly, the MOMA crowd would prefer to see Dadaist nonsense in such recombinations, not spiritual yearning. But the intensity of the work speaks to the intensity of her pursuit. Here is art that is serious and unabashed, finding a way to exist.

7 “Eric Brown: Punctuate” opened at Theodore:Art, Brooklyn, on September 8 and remains on view through October 22, 2017.

8 “Brenda Goodman: In a New Space” opened at David&Schweitzer Contemporary, Brooklyn, on September 8 and remains on view through October 1, 2017.

9 “Meg Hitchcock: 10,000 Mantras” opened at Studio 10, Brooklyn, on September 8 and remains on view through October 8, 2017.

## Music

# Salzburg chronicle

by Jay Nordlinger

---

Marianne Crebassa is a French mezzo-soprano, well-known in Europe, not well-known in the United States. Before long, she will be known everywhere. At the Salzburg Festival, Crebassa gave a recital in the Grosser Saal of the Mozarteum. For her pianist, she had a star: Fazil Say. The pianist is also a composer, and was featured as a composer on this evening.

The program consisted of songs by Ravel, Fauré, Debussy, and Duparc—also some solo piano music. That was a couple of preludes by Debussy and the *Trois Gnossiennes* of Satie. There was another piano piece, too: a sonata by Say himself. The program ended with more Say, a vocalise that he calls a “ballade.” More about that in a moment.

Crebassa came out looking like a movie star and sang even better. She has a beautiful, smoky voice—the voice of a classic French mezzo. Her breathing is easy. Her singing is even, poised, and unforced. Her French songs were understated and emotional at the same time. (Emotional *because* understated?) She was cool as a cucumber and yet strangely hot. And the French language, of course, was a pleasure out of the mouth of this native singer.

Some star pianists don’t make good accompanists. Say is not one of them. He is an excellent accompanist, or collaborator, if you like. Say is best known for Mozart, but he proved himself a master colorist, a master Impressionist. He created the right atmosphere in everything he touched. The *Gnossiennes* were especially interesting. Say played them as though they were just occurring to him. Yet he did not rob Satie of his own pieces.

The last French song on the program was “Au pays où se fait la guerre,” that little masterpiece by Duparc. Like everyone else in or around the music world, I have heard it sung and played many, many times—never more intelligently, powerfully, and movingly than by Crebassa and Say. Have they recorded this and other French songs? They ought to.

A few years ago, Say composed three pieces in response to political unrest in his home country, Turkey. These are his *Gezi Park* pieces. The first of them is a concerto for two pianos. The second is the aforementioned piano sonata. The third is that vocalise, the ballade. Originally, Say composed it for mezzo-soprano, piano, and string orchestra. He made an arrangement of it for mezzo and piano alone, and that is what we heard, of course, in the Mozarteum.

The sonata is an example of program music—music meant to depict a story and make a point. It is in four movements, which have headings such as “Nights of resistance in the streets of Istanbul.” The fourth movement has a heading, and a nature, that is perhaps unexpected: “Hope is always in our hearts.” All the way through, the music is vivid—often rawly so. Could a person enjoy or appreciate the music without knowing the “backstory”? Could he take it in simply as music? I think so. As for the ballade, the wordless song, it expresses a horrible anguish. And Crebassa was unsparing in it.

For an encore, she sang something surprising—although I should not have been surprised, given the affinity of the French for Gershwin, and for jazz. With her jazz-minded

pianist, Crebassa gave us a bluesy, jazzy version of “Summertime.” It must have put a smile on every face, not just the American ones. The evening ended with “Voi che sapete,” Mozart’s aria, the birthright of every mezzo, or at least *lyric* mezzos such as Marianne Crebassa. Earlier, I mentioned recording. I hope that someone—maybe even the Salzburg Festival itself, officially—was recording this recital.

Perhaps the most sensational performer at the festival was Teodor Currentzis, the Greek-born conductor. He studied in Russia and has spent his career there. He was one of the last students of Ilya Musin, the legendary conducting teacher born in 1904. (He died in 1999.) In 2004, Currentzis founded an orchestra, and one with an unusual name: musicAeterna. (Yes, the name is rendered that way.) According to official literature, the musicAeterna Orchestra is outstanding in “the field of historically informed performance practice.”

Currentzis is a treat to look at. He is tall and thin and goes without a baton. He is sometimes balletic on the podium. As a personality—and as a visual performer, if you will—he reminds me a bit of Stoki (Leopold Stokowski). Currentzis looks like a Hirschfeld drawing.

In his music-making, Currentzis is individualistic and iconoclastic. “Visionary,” many people would say. So is Patricia Kopatchinskaja, the violinist. She was born in Moldova to a family of folk musicians. Eventually, the family immigrated to Vienna, where “PatKo,” as she is sometimes known, was trained. Currentzis and Kopatchinskaja seem a natural match, musically. And they appeared with musicAeterna in the Felsenreitschule at the Salzburg Festival.

There were two works on the program: a concerto and a symphony. The concerto was that for violin by Berg, an imaginative, otherworldly piece. PatKo played it that way. Her conductor was of essentially the same mind. The symphony was the First of Mahler, A.K.A. the Titan. “Historically informed performance practice” is not for everyone, especially in Mahler. There were many things about this account that you or I could not endorse. But it was *Currentzis* on the podium—and he has strong, clear views. The second movement was imbued with more than the usual charm. The third was beautifully

“ethnic.” In the finale, the music bogged down in slow sections, simply not moving—or at least I thought so. And the closing, climactic pages did not provide their maximum thrill. But why Currentzis is a sensation, I can tell.

I think he has some Celibidache in him. “Celi” was individualistic, idiosyncratic, and “visionary.” You did not always like what he did—but you always wanted to hear him, and you could learn from him.

By the way, Currentzis has the musicians of his orchestra stand rather than sit. I mean, those who can stand, do. Years ago, the Emerson String Quartet started to stand. (All except the cellist, whose chair was placed on a podium, so that he could be closer to his now-much-taller partners.) That was radical, I thought—musicAeterna, more so.

For going on twenty years, I have referred to Plácido Domingo as “the ageless Spaniard.” He is now seventy-six (although some contend that he is even older). The great tenor has sung baritone roles for many years now, and he sang one in Salzburg’s Grosses Festspielhaus: Francesco Foscari, Doge of Venice, in Verdi’s *Due Foscari*. (The other Foscari is Jacopo, the Doge’s son. That is the tenor role.) The festival staged a concert performance, rather than the opera proper. Domingo did a fair amount of acting anyway. He always does.

Let me issue the usual caveats and complaints: Domingo is not a real baritone, the high notes sound like the middle notes of a tenor, the voice is somewhat reduced in volume, he is “taking away” work from real baritones, etc. But. But. Domingo’s singing was beautiful, strong, and striking. When he was onstage, the opera had true intensity. Domingo’s authority is unquestionable. He is well-nigh sovereign. What he has done—what he is doing now—is almost unbelievable. The day after this *Foscari*, one of Domingo’s fellow singers said to me, “He has no wobble in his voice. None. Do you realize how rare that is, for an old singer? He has a freshness in the voice—a freshness in the register that he is now using. Do you realize how incredible that is?”

Moreover, Domingo tends to play characters who are aged—who are weary or raging or both at the same time. Why he shouldn’t

continue to do this, I don't know. Those who are tired of seeing him — can simply stay away.

Igor Levit had the honor of giving not one but two recitals at the festival. Those who heard him had an honor as well. Levit is a pianist, usually described as “Russian-German.” (He was born in the Soviet Union, during its last years, and moved with his family to Germany as a boy.) Both of his recitals took place in the Grosser Saal of the Mozarteum. The first was a marathon, presenting all the preludes and fugues of Shostakovich. I wrote about this recital for the website of this magazine. Here and now, I will concentrate on the second.

It began with a work by Schoenberg—a rarity, even a novelty. This was the *Ode to Napoleon Bonaparte* for string quartet, piano, and speaker, composed in 1942. Schoenberg used Byron's ode—which is an ironic comment on Napoleon—as a comment on Hitler. Did Levit and Salzburg program this piece as a comment on President Trump, and perhaps other national leaders? I suspect so, but, blessedly, there is no talking from the stage in Salzburg (in stark contrast with America).

Yet there was talking from the stage in this sense: Dörte Lyssewski, a German actress, recited Byron's ode as Levit and the string quartet played. She did it musically, theatrically, and superbly.

For the rest of the evening, Levit had the stage to himself. He played Beethoven's *Eroica Variations*, and you may recall that Beethoven originally dedicated his “Eroica” Symphony to Napoleon. Disgusted with the little-big Corsican, Beethoven struck out the dedication. In any event, the piano variations are marvelous—they are Beethoven—but seldom programmed, for reasons I know not. Levit is a top-notch advocate of them. He was crisp and incisive. Occasionally, I found him too punchy and blunt, but only occasionally. His tempos were fast, but not too fast. He knew just how to calibrate the music. He trilled beautifully. The whole piece was alive, pungent, and thrilling. Levit played with both rigor and joy. And, in my experience, he always plays as if what he is doing were the most important thing in the world.

He has recorded some of the Beethoven sonatas. He would do the world a favor if he recorded all thirty-two.

In the second half of the recital, he played one work, and a very long one: the magnum opus of Frederic Rzewski, an American born in 1938. (To my knowledge, that name is pronounced “ZHEV-ski.”) In 1976, the composer seized upon a new anthem of the Latin American Left: “¡El pueblo unido jamás será vencido!” (“The People United Will Never Be Defeated!”) He composed thirty-six variations on it. For good measure, he added other anthems of the Left—the general Left—including “Solidarity Song,” that ditty by Brecht and Eisler. (Hanns Eisler had the distinction of composing the national anthem of the German Democratic Republic, i.e., East Germany, i.e., Communist Germany, one of those police states that crush real artists.)

Igor Levit is a champion of Rzewski, and indeed he has recorded the *People United* variations alongside the *Goldberg Variations* (Bach) and the *Diabelli Variations* (Beethoven). In Salzburg, he was brilliant. He was sensitive, bold, and utterly devoted. He took care to unify the variations in this long, long work. Rzewski is lucky to have such a champion, but I must say this: the *People United* variations—whatever the politics behind them—are an impressive work. Far too long, I believe, but impressive, formidable. Also, compositionally speaking, they are—will Mr. Rzewski excuse me?—rather conservative.

In the middle of Levit's performance, a man sitting in the first row—shaggy-haired, bearded—shook his fist. In solidarity, I believe. Was “Solidarity Song” being played? I'm not sure. I *am* sure that Levit is a great pianist. I thought so when he played the *Diabelli Variations* in New York earlier this year, and his Salzburg recitals did nothing to dissuade me.

The following night, also in the Mozarteum, Sonya Yoncheva appeared in concert with the Academia Montis Regalis, an Italian period band. Yoncheva is a Bulgarian soprano, one in a great tradition (Dimitrova, Stoyanova). She sang a program of Baroque music: arias from operas by Handel, Rameau, and Purcell. She began with “V'adoro, pupille” (from Handel's *Julius Caesar*) and ended with Dido's Lament (from Purcell's *Dido and Aeneas*, of course). Yoncheva is a curvy, juicy woman, and she came out in a clinging, plunging gown, all va-va-voom. Now, why do I mention this?

First, because it's true, and second, because she sang essentially the same way. She is an opera star, and she sang her Baroque music like an opera star—but very, very well. She reminded me of Leontyne Price in this repertoire. She was unapologetic, accurate, and thoroughly musical. She did nothing—nothing—violative of taste. And I would take her singing of this music over most specialists' any day.

Further, what a contrast she made with the period band! They scratched and tooted their way through the music as Yoncheva delivered her lushness. It was like pouring cream over wheat germ. While she was at it, Yoncheva prowled and pranced around, doing such things as playing the tambourine and flirting with the conductor, an earnest, bald-pated man. She was having a ball, and so was the audience.

I should not tease the band and its leader too much, for they evinced a clear love of music, as did Yoncheva, and they all gave us a wonderfully satisfying concert. (Short, too.) You felt an elation.

Probably the marquee event in the Salzburg Festival of 2017 was an *Aida*, conducted by Riccardo Muti, the veteran Italian, the veteran Verdian. (*Aida* is one of Verdi's, as you know.) The production was in the care of Shirin Neshat, an Iranian-born visual artist who has lived her adult life in the United States. This was not a traditional *Aida*: it did not have elephants and grandeur. It was clean and spare, chiefly in black and white. And it employed video. I believe the production was trying to make points about political oppression and refugees. Whatever the case, the production was effective, letting *Aida* be *Aida*, with twists or not.

In the title role was the starriest soprano in the world today, and probably the starriest singer (along with Domingo). I am speaking of Anna Netrebko. She proved a first-rate *Aida*. She was technically sound, musically smart, and theatrically convincing. Her dark soprano was well suited to the role. She did almost none of the sharpening that can be expected of her (especially when she is singing in languages other than Russian). She sang with discipline, more than her usual amount. For this, I credit Riccardo Muti. The combination

of Netrebko's instincts and Muti's discipline was a fantastic combination indeed.

The secondary role is the mezzo role, Amneris—but on this night, Amneris was barely secondary. She was sung and acted by Ekaterina Semenchuk, who was as good as Netrebko. She was deft and overpowering, as necessary. Rarely has Amneris been portrayed with such sympathy.

Neither Netrebko nor Semenchuk is Italian, obviously, but both were plenty Italianate. The tenor in the cast was a proper Italian, Francesco Meli. He made a worthy Radamès, often singing beautifully. He was especially praiseworthy—in his groove—at the end of the opera, in the Tomb Scene. At the beginning of the opera, he gave us a good “Celeste *Aida*”—even a brave one, I would say. His final note was bad, very bad. But at least it wasn't belted. A belted note is easy to do there, but Meli tried a softer one, as the composer asks, and was noble in the effort.

Good as Netrebko was, good as Semenchuk was, the No. 1 star of the evening—besides Verdi, of course—was Riccardo Muti, and the instrument sitting before him, the Vienna Philharmonic Orchestra. The VPO played with all the skill, brains, and heart it could summon. And that is a considerable amount. Everyone involved in the opera—on the stage or in the pit—performed as though something very important was going on. Muti was never better. Never more alive. In his hands, *Aida* was not a stereotype, not a cartoon. It was fresh and masterly—indeed, a masterpiece. *Aida* was both subtle and exciting. *Terribly* exciting. There was no bombast allowed—only pure operatic genius.

As I left the Grosses Festspielhaus, I thought, “This is one of the best performances of an opera I have ever attended.” I also thought of a story, told to me by a friend, a veteran of the Metropolitan Opera. An old conductor—Viennese, I believe—was working at the Met. And he paid a high compliment to the youngish music director, James Levine. “They talk about the good old days,” he said. “Well, I was *there*, during the good old days. And let me tell you, Jimmy: *these* are the good old days.” This Muti *Aida* was one to remember, and to tell the grandkids about.

# Bayreuth diary

by Paul du Quenoy

---

Controversy cannot diminish the appeal of the world's most elite cultural event, the annual festival devoted to Richard Wagner. Founded by the composer himself in 1876, it still takes place under family leadership in the Bavarian town of Bayreuth, deliberately chosen for its remoteness from the urban modernity Wagner despised. Little has changed. The Festspielhaus retains its covered orchestra pit, lacks serious air conditioning, offers no supertitles in any language, and still imposes low-backed wooden seats on spectators. Since 2015, Wagner's great-granddaughter Katharina has run the festival, amid rumors that her half-sister Eva was forced out in a tense test of wills. Wagnerians around the world still slavishly line up to attend. Ticket demand rests at around ten times availability. Despite calls to democratize access, most tickets remain available only to aspirants who can wait up to a decade before being granted entry.

This summer's festival opened with the Australian director Barrie Kosky's new production of the only comedy among Wagner's mature works, *Die Meistersinger von Nürnberg*. Much has been made of the fact that Kosky, a self-described "gay Jewish kangaroo," is the first Jewish director to stage an opera in Bayreuth. He introduces Wagner's paean to the sanctity of German art amusingly enough. The first act is set in the spacious library of Wagner's Villa Wahnfried, the Bayreuth residence gifted to him by the mad King Ludwig II of Bavaria. Instead of the opera's literal characters, we see a home reading of the opera performed by a mature Wagner as the noble cobbler Hans

Sachs. Wagner's devoted wife Cosima plays the role of Eva, whose hand in marriage is the prize of the opera's grand song contest. The composer Franz Liszt, Cosima's father and frequent Wahnfried visitor, performs as Eva's operatic father Veit Pogner, with household servants and others filling the smaller parts of Sachs's apprentice David, Eva's maid Magdalena, and the corps of Mastersingers. A younger version of Wagner himself performs as the knight Walther von Stolzing, who, with Sachs's selfless help, will transcend the stale pedantry of artistic convention and devise a winning song to claim Eva as his bride.

Notably for our age of relentless identity politics, the role of Walther's rival, Beckmesser, often interpreted as an anti-Semitic stereotype, is represented by the conductor Hermann Levi, a Jew who famously resisted baptism when engaged to conduct Wagner's final opera, *Parsifal*. As the first act unfolds in an atmosphere of saccharine bourgeois *Gemütlichkeit*, we realize that just as Beckmesser's designs on Eva are problematic in the opera, so, too, is Levi's faith in the production's nineteenth-century milieu. Wagner-as-Sachs, voiced throughout the evening with unflagging effort by the excellent baritone Michael Volle, captured all of the composer's frenetic narcissism by forcing Levi-as-Beckmesser into an uneasy prayer during the hymn that grows out of the opera's prelude. As the first act ends, a moving *coup de théâtre* retracts the Wahnfried library set to reveal a very different impression of Nuremberg, the courtroom where the post-World War

II war crimes trials were held. Left alone to contemplate Walther's innate talent, Wagner-as-Sachs takes the witness stand as the curtain falls.

Back in Wahnfried's bucolic environs, Kosky's interpretation darkens as Beckmesser's advances toward Eva become bolder. Act II centers around his attempt to serenade her, which Sachs deliberately interrupts as Walther tries to pull off his own assignation. In Wagner's comedy, the noise ignites a melee among the townspeople that ends with Sachs sheltering Walther so that he can help him perfect his talent. Kosky recasts the brawl as a pogrom against Beckmesser. Now fitted with a mask that makes him resemble a Nazi anti-Semitic caricature, Beckmesser is roundly pummeled and—symbolically important—beaten with the same cobbler's hammer that Sachs used to disrupt his serenade. In case anyone missed the point, the injured Beckmesser is subsumed within a vast inflatable puppet version of the caricature, which deflates only slightly to leave the palpably discomforted audience contemplating a stage-dominating Star of David on the puppet's yarmulke.

Spirited intermission discussion speculated that Kosky was advancing a grinding condemnation of Germany's past and insisting that Nazism and the Holocaust were natural outgrowths of a violently anti-Semitic culture and society. But upon returning for the opera's long third act, his message suggested that—artistically speaking, at least—bygones can indeed be bygones. The pageantry of the song contest occurs within the same Nuremberg courtroom, but all of its elements except for the witness stand are removed to make way for Sachs's final monologue, in which he advocates the sanctity of German art and the need for its preservation. Alone on stage, he takes the stand to plead his case directly to the audience before turning to conduct the noble strains of the opera's finale at the head of a faux orchestra. It is for the spectator to decide whether the Germans can be forgiven, but the question is obviously Kosky's and not Wagner's. One missed the opera's deeply human element, but the director can at least be forgiven for leaving the message open for interpretation instead of imposing his own.

However one reacts to the production, the musical evening was marvelous. In addition to

Volle's strong and stentorian Sachs, Klaus Florian Vogt's Walther resounded with a mellifluous, velvety quality that made the character irresistible in any guise. Over the years, the voice has become more grounded in a way that may allow for deeper Wagner roles than Vogt's iconic Lohengrin. The bass Günther Groissböck sang an elegant Pogner, and Johannes Martin Kränzle's dramatic talents tackled the difficult challenge of Kosky's interpretation of Levi-as-Beckmesser. The normally solid soprano Anne Schwanewilms seemed to have an off night, without much verve in Eva's most exciting music, but performed well enough. Philippe Jordan led a brisk performance with more gravitas than I have ever heard him bring to Wagner. The chorus, selected from the finest ensembles for the special experience of Bayreuth, resounded with a perfection that almost makes one forget that Wagner aesthetically opposed choral music in opera.

This summer's revivals included last year's premiere, Uwe Eric Laufenberg's staging of *Parsifal*. Following Stefan Herheim's legendary production—a deeply moving symbolic meditation on the progression of German history set in and around a stylized depiction of Wahnfried—could only have been a daunting challenge. Laufenberg rose to it with a very current concept. Here the distressed order of Christian knights who guard the Holy Grail is not stuck in medieval obscuritism, but moved to Syria's desert war zone. The Grail temple is a sacked monastery that is beginning to be reclaimed by nature amid the ongoing conflict. By Act III, a verdant rainforest has overgrown its grounds and penetrated its walls. Parsifal steps off the proverbial Arab street to witness the Grail rite—a blood sacrifice in which the Grail King Amfortas's wounds make him into a lifelike Christ figure. His blood is shared in the sacred chalice to impart the life-giving salvation the knights need to continue an existence outside the mortal realm. Laufenberg's interpretation is bold—and deliciously accompanied by a vast projection that transports us into the remote reaches of outer space—but its claim to originality is shaky. Dmitry Tcherniakov's recent Berlin Staatsoper production employed the same symbolism in rougher form. More successful was the emergence of Klingsor, the villain who has used the depraved Kundry to seduce Amfortas

so that he could steal the Holy Spear and inflict the Grail king's unhealed wound, not as the traditional sorcerer but as a reluctant convert to radical Islam who maintains a covertly penitent appreciation of Christianity. Too disturbed to complete Muslim prayers, he repairs to a private room to flagellate himself before a collection of crucifixes. The Flower Maidens ooze on stage as a crowd of burqa-clad women who discard their coverings to reveal belly dance outfits. Parsifal wanders in sporting camouflage and a semi-automatic, but quickly loses his military stylings to a seductive bath.

The opera proceeds through Parsifal's resistance to Kundry, recovery of the Holy Spear, and triumphant return to the realm of the Grail, but these scenes were curiously uninspired. One had the impression that Laufenberg ran out of ideas as he took them on. The final restoration of order and harmony is not the reaffirmation of faith or salvation we are meant to see, but an embarrassingly feeble "Can't we all just get along?" moment in which people of many religions deposit their holy objects into the coffin of Amfortas's father, Titurel. Surely there was more to say than this tired restatement of the banality of good.

The brilliant tenor Andreas Schager resounded with bright, clarion tones to head a fine cast. The bass Georg Zeppenfeld's Gurnemanz got through all the narrations with a clarity that made them compelling. Derek Welton's Klingsor was tortured and affecting without losing the role's essential malevolence. The fine American baritone Ryan McKinny added a superb Amfortas. The only weak link was the Russian soprano Elena Pankratova. Her Kundry managed the top notes well enough but struggled to harmonize them with this difficult role's middle and lower registers. Dramatically she was also a bit of a dud whose seductive charms were questionable at best. The conductor Hartmut Haenchen's slower tempi will not appeal to everyone's taste, but many of the great moments emerged with vivid color and moving resonance.

Summer 2017 also saw the final outing of Frank Castorf's *Ring* Cycle, which premiered in honor of Wagner's bicentennial in 2013. A much reviled effort, its unpopularity is so

enduring that tickets to the performances I attended were reportedly still available at the box office up to curtain time, an unthinkable happenstance for anyone familiar with the art of attending Bayreuth. It is easy to see why. Castorf styles himself as an arch-provocateur, but in a world flooded with *Regietheater* productions—and *Ring* Cycles that are almost invariably set in some fractured industrial universe—virtually nothing about his *Ring* rises even to provocation. Drenched in empty posturing and dull incoherence, it consigns Wagner's four-part tetralogy of power, destruction, and redemption to a tacky twentieth-century universe that crawls with bland cliché, intrusive distractions, and impositions upon both music and drama that one can describe as little more than "busy." Very often the pointless visuals detracted from both the story and the music in a way that ranks this *Ring* on par with Robert Lepage's witless Metropolitan Opera production as the least enriching one I have ever seen. High on the long list of useless clutter were a Soviet propaganda film playing as Wotan puts Brünnhilde to sleep at the end of *Die Walküre*; copulating crocodiles that lurk about during the love scene that concludes *Siegfried*; a communist version of Mount Rushmore that replaces the honored American presidents with Marx, Lenin, Stalin, and Mao; and a simian mute character who needlessly pops up in all of the operas as an abused servant. Tarantino-esque sex and violence bordered on gratuitous but never really deserved even that adjective. Siegfried, for example, shags Gutrune upon their first meeting and beats up a homeless man during his confrontation with the Rhine Maidens. Wotan's silencing of Erda ends with her performing oral sex on him. Hagen kills Siegfried and Gunther by bludgeoning them with a baseball bat. "Who cares?" I asked myself every time. The most telling anecdote of the Cycle's sheer blandness arrived by accident. In an incident that may well have made operatic history, the production's Brünnhilde, Catherine Foster, injured herself during the violent confrontation with Siegfried that concludes Act I of *Götterdämmerung* and sang from the side of the stage for the rest of the performance. Her part was then mimed



by a male assistant director fully costumed in a glittering gold gown. If this trans-friendly expedient had not been announced before the curtain rose on Act II, I would probably have assumed it was just another trite feature of Castorf's insipid production.

The only intelligible theme that percolated through the four evenings was the specter of oil politics in the last century's defining power struggle—the geopolitical contest between the United States and the Soviet Union. The first installment, *Das Rheingold*, is set entirely at a Confederate flag-bedecked modern gas station/motel run on Route 66 in Texas. Wotan is its proprietor, with his archenemy Alberich a motel guest tormented by prostitute-like Rhine Maidens around an above-ground pool that stands in for the Rhine. The next evening's *Walküre* moves us to early Soviet Azerbaijan, where Wotan has gone back in time to become a state oil well manager. A red star blazes atop the well, and he reads *Pravda* before launching into his vicissitudes. *Siegfried* uses Bayreuth's rotating stage to split the action between the communist Mount Rushmore and a seedy depiction of East Berlin's Alexanderplatz. Cue the copulating crocodiles. By the time we reach *Götterdämmerung*, we are torn between a döner kebab stand in Cold-War Berlin and the almost refreshing (by this point) neoclassical façade of the New York Stock Exchange. Like the other sets, however, no comment on the action emerges from whatever symbols Castorf favors at a given moment. Indeed, *Götterdämmerung* reveals his frail concept at its weakest, for the Cold War turned out to be cold precisely because there was no apocalyptic catastrophe that destroyed the world. His Cycle ends with Brünnhilde lamely handing the cursed ring over to the Rhine Maidens, who then drop into a flaming barrel as the covetous Hagen impotently looks on. Nothing is destroyed, so nothing can be redeemed. And if the work's essential themes are discarded or ignored, then why should anyone bother to see it? Indeed, why did Castorf bother to stage it?

The only saving grace was the production's glorious music. No singer in the entire cast seemed overwhelmed or out of place. Foster's Brünnhilde

stood out as its greatest star, with ascents swelling in great clouds of sound and beaming B's and G's radiating at the expressive moments. Her study of the role may well be at its apogee after several years of this production (she was booed at its 2013 premiere) and stands as a marked improvement over her earlier essays in lesser European theaters (I first heard her in Budapest's Bayreuth-inspired Wagner festival in 2010).

The purist in me prefers consistent casting, but alas our Brünnhilde had three different Wotans. Iain Paterson handled the god's *Rheingold* incarnation with a solid baritone that may have been slightly too high for the later, more mature incarnations of the role. John Lundgren's *Walküre* Wotan added a deeper resonance and benefited from an excellent legato. Thomas J. Mayer was more muted in the role's *Siegfried* moments but did a credible job. The part of Siegfried is arguably the most difficult Wagner *Heldentenor* role—even just getting through it is often lauded as an accomplishment. Like his Brünnhilde, Stefan Vinke has never sounded better, particularly in the fresher *Siegfried* version. He had fine moments in *Götterdämmerung*, but the voice carried less well overall that evening. As his parents, Siegmund and Sieglinde, Christopher Ventris and Camilla Nylund gave moving performances. On the night before he went on as Gurnemanz in *Parsifal*, Georg Zeppenfeld's Hunding was equally adept at destroying fateful love with real menace. Stephen Milling's Hagen was as brutal as any I have heard. Albert Dohmen, a Wotan of great distinction in his time, admirably continued his engagement with the *Ring* as a snarling Alberich. Andreas Conrad's Mime, Markus Eiche's Gunther, and Günther Groissböck's Fasolt stood out among the supporting cast. Maestro Marek Janowski, now seventy-seven, made his Bayreuth debut with this production last year and recently recorded the whole work. He favored an even pace but judiciously reached into the score to draw out many of the most moving elements with deliberative intensity. The only pity was that such a worthwhile musical effort seemed so tragically underserved by what was happening on stage. It is anyone's guess how long Bayreuth can sustain nonsensical *Regie* productions, but for the first time in my life I saw empty seats in the Festspielhaus.

The media

## Right side vs. white side

by James Bowman

---

It's odd to be living, as I do, in Virginia, now that it has become the principal battleground in what Angelo Codevilla calls our "cold civil war"—as it once was in the hot one whose memory has lately become the cause of new strife. A few weeks ago, some local high school students decided to demonstrate against what, had any other president taken it, might have seemed the arcane but hardly controversial decision by President Trump to return the legal question raised by the Obama-era decree known as DACA (Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals) to our national law-making body for resolution. The demonstrators naturally picked up, among their signs and chants, what had become a favorite *topos* of the Obama administration, and only slightly less popular than "that's not who we are," which the ex-president trotted out yet again in response to the DACA decision. They denounced the current president, that is, for being "on the wrong side of history."

What a depressing thought, that the only thing these newly radicalized children know about history is that it has a right and a wrong side—and that their country has long been on the wrong one. For that is always the assumption behind the right-side-wrong-side conceit, an idea that would never have occurred to anyone who didn't believe to a certainty that he was on the right side. Nor, for that matter, would it have occurred to anyone who had studied history from a non-ideological perspective. But, then, the kids will also no doubt have learned that there is no such thing as a

non-ideological perspective. Those of us who simply wish to understand the past without, as we vainly imagine, any ideological preconceptions, are guilty of what has lately become the cardinal sin of *nostalgia*, which I guess counts as an ideology because it accepts those old-timey ideologues' imputed but obviously false claims not to have been ideologues.

But if so, what was their ideology? For that you may apply to black studies departments across the land who have in recent years outed it under the name of "whiteness." Building on the work of Edward Baptist (*The Half Has Never Been Told: Slavery and the Making of American Capitalism*) and others to delegitimize the American republic, its Constitution, and even its economy on account of the original sin of slavery, they have reduced slavery itself into a mere sub-category of the supposedly all-encompassing "whiteness" ideology. That is the real "system" that oppressed black people then and is still, supposedly, oppressing them now. "Whiteness is the most violent f\*\*\*ing system to ever breathe!" said an enlightened but not en-whitened protestor at Evergreen State College in May.

In fact, if Dorothy Kim, an Assistant Professor of English at Vassar College, is to be believed, the evil of whiteness even antedates the period in which people have been recorded as thinking of themselves as "white." Professor Kim, who is a medievalist, thinks she has located the *fons et origo* of all this historical wrongness in the European Middle Ages. Not that that gets America off the hook, of course.

“Medieval Studies,” she writes somewhat obscurely, “has become the historical belly of white nationalism and white supremacy.” By the magic of “intersectionality,” that is, she purports to find the vital and enduring connection between medieval concepts of differing sex roles, known to her jargon but no actual medieval person as “heteropatriarchy,” and the white supremacy that (as she fondly imagines) is everywhere in the ascendant in America today.

It’s not surprising, of course, that these academic hijinks have been going on for years in the institutions of higher learning which the Virginia high school students will shortly be invited to bankrupt themselves in order to attend. But the real news out of Charlottesville, the seat of the University of Virginia, is the extent to which this kind of ideological thinking has recently gone mainstream—with the help of the technique pioneered by communists in the 1930s of identifying anyone to the right of themselves as “fascists.” As the original believers in being (by way of Hegel and Marx) on the right side of history, the communists could not but feel the unassailability of their logic in identifying all those who were, *ex hypothesi*, on the wrong side with the unattractive faction who were their chief ideological opponents at the time and who were, not coincidentally, trying a similar technique against them.

Now such thinking has made one of its many comebacks with the self-described “antifa” brigades that showed up in Charlottesville in August, claiming the right to break up or shout down any political speech or meeting or demonstration by those with whom they disagree on the presumptive grounds that that disagreement must be tantamount to fascism. That’s what the “fa” in their name represents, after all. But it is no accident, comrades, that the media began to publicize these dubious activities only on an occasion when many of those whose demonstration they were trying to break up really *were* self-described white supremacists and neo-Nazis.

The latter had obtained by judicial order a permit for their march—as a demonstration of support for a Confederate monument in the

city whose removal had been mooted—against the wishes of the local authorities, and when the black-masked antifa brigades showed up, without a permit, the local police stood aside while they attacked the marchers. One of the wrong-siders, who was also, reportedly, a diagnosed schizophrenic, drove his car into a crowd, killing a young woman and injuring several others. “Fascism” had finally proven itself to be as deadly, if not so widespread, as the antifas had claimed and thus justified their own violence against it. The antifa brand had arrived.

Their violence against conservatives and Trump supporters since the election had not always been widely reported, but now the antifas and their media enablers could be more convincingly portrayed as being unambiguously on the right side of history. More importantly, given the media’s preoccupation over the past seven months, President Trump could be portrayed as being on the wrong side. Acting, perhaps, on the well-publicized discovery of Ta-Nehisi Coates that “his ideology is white supremacy,” the media then turned to the President for a ritual denunciation of his presumed white supremacist allies.

In the course of giving it, however, and of explicitly condemning those whom he didn’t scruple to call “neo-Nazis and white nationalists,” he also gave it as his opinion that both blame and “good people” were to be found on both sides—pretty obviously, I would have thought, intending “both sides” to refer to the statue-removal issue, not history. Needless to say, I suppose, the media didn’t see it that way. I thought at the time, as presumably did others interested in the media’s long-vanished sense of fair play, that the President might have avoided the volcanic eruption of moral outrage which ensued by a different form of words, a more careful description of the thread of nuance on which he was attempting to tread, like a tightrope stretched between the violently self-righteous to either side of him. Something like this, perhaps:

Of course, I’m not in favor of white supremacy, let alone Naziism. But I am in favor of free speech, even for those with whom I disagree.

Even for those whom I find repugnant. The Unite the Right protestors in Charlottesville were exercising their right to free speech and had a permit for their march. The left-wing protestors who set upon them with clubs and other weapons had no permit and were trying to deny them their right to speak. They shouldn't have been allowed to do that, and an inquiry into why the police did not stop them and protect the marchers is in order. There is obviously no excuse for the mentally unbalanced young man who killed a woman and injured others with his car, but that wicked act should not be allowed to blind us to the illegal attempts by others to deny free speech rights to those with whom they disagree.

On reflection, however, I doubt that it would have made any difference. The media would in any case have found a way to do what they always do and report his remarks, whatever they were, as if he had defended the “neo-Nazis and white nationalists” whom he had explicitly condemned. The media were already certain that Trump was a Nazi, or plausibly (to their own base) portrayable as one. They were therefore bound to take any opportunity to demonstrate it, whether he gave them one or not. They could cite no less an authority than the former Vice President Joe Biden in confirmation of the long-held antifa view, now seemingly adopted by the whole world, that “there is only one side”—presumably the same old “right side of history” that Mr. Trump and his supporters were, axiomatically, not on, along with the Nazis and the Klan.

This became the accepted view of the President's remarks in the weeks following the Charlottesville riot while media outrage still bubbled and simmered. When Ana Marie Cox interviewed Charlie Sykes, a long-time talk show host and newly celebrated Never-Trump conservative for *The New York Times Magazine*, her last question to him took the form of a statement: “I'm assuming you're not surprised by Trump's inability to condemn the white-supremacist march.” He readily accepted her premise that that was, in fact, what the President had done, or rather failed to do. “I'm shocked but not surprised,” he said. “Denounc-

ing Nazis is the easiest thing in the world . . .” So I would have thought too, but here we are: the Nazis are denounced and the denunciation is unrecorded and unrecognized. At the time of writing, three weeks later, the *Times* has still not printed a correction.

Once you have established that there is a right and a wrong side of history, it becomes progressively easier to sort every stripe of political friend or enemy into one category or the other on the principle of guilt-by-association. The same principle, apparently, applies to statues, since an ensuing spate of iconoclasm across the country seemed to make no distinction between Confederate and Union—attacks were either made or mooted on memorials to Abraham Lincoln and U. S. Grant along with many Confederate worthies—or even those who had no connection with either side in our great national struggle.

In Baltimore, the inscription, dating to 1792, on a memorial obelisk to the once-celebrated voyager of the ocean blue, Christopher Columbus, was destroyed by vandals less than a week after, as the *Baltimore Sun* reported, “city officials swiftly removed four controversial monuments: a statue of Confederate Generals Robert E. Lee and Stonewall Jackson, the Confederate Women's monument, the Confederate Soldiers and Sailors Monument, and a statue of Supreme Court Chief Justice Roger B. Taney, who authored the 1857 Dred Scott decision that upheld slavery.” Clearly, once the habit of destroying monuments to the past had been formed it was difficult to break, unlike the now-broken 225-year-old inscription. A monument to Francis Scott Key, the author of “The Star-Spangled Banner,” in the same city was also vandalized. The past itself, it seems, can now be safely assumed to have been fascist—not to mention racist and heteropatriarchal.

A few years ago, I wrote a book called *Honor: A History*, in which I attempted to chart the decline and ultimate collapse of the Western honor culture, now so far behind us in history's rear-view mirror that most people don't even remember that we ever had one, let alone what it was like—and what our parents and grand-

parents were like—when we did. As a quick *résumé* of the subject, allow me just to point out that honor, an ancient concept partially superseded by the ideas of universal morality that came in with the Enlightenment, nevertheless continued to exist alongside the newer concept of generalized “duty” (as opposed to duties owed to particular people through honorable obligation) and sometimes in conflict with it—as, for example, in the case of dueling. This dual track of obligation in general and in particular existed for a century or so and was more or less understood by everybody.

The axe was laid to the root of this venerable growth, however, just a century ago when the new and more horrible weaponry and scale of warfare during the First World War coincided with the new intellectual conceit that human nature to that point was only a product of social and economic circumstances and could be changed along with them. And that, with the change, social conflict could be abolished. There’s a lot more to it than that, of course, but for the rest you’ll have to read the book. My point here is merely to note that an implied condition of the destruction of the honor culture, perhaps beginning with the assertion that the First World War was “the war to end wars,” was that, in the brave new socially engineered world that was to have been, honor would no longer be necessary.

As the advent of that earthly paradise has been deferred, and deferred again, and as the honor culture whose destruction was its

condition has grown ever more irrecoverable, the urgency with which the institution of the progressive utopia is required and the bitterness towards those seen as standing in its glorious way have grown *pari passu*. That is what has magnified in retrospective importance that long-forgotten honor culture and generated the statue-hate (there really ought to be a German word for this) against such shards and fragments of it as are still treasured by those sad anachronisms who are now seen as the chief obstacle to the dream of human perfection, for want of any other.

I apologize for the recondite nature of this argument, but it is the only way, I believe, of accounting for the fact that, in the first summer of the Trump administration with all that that implies of political upheaval and change, the media’s *cause célèbre* and the furious energies it generated were statues of long-dead soldiers. To put it more simply, in the absence of an honor culture we can no more understand General Robert E. Lee, as his contemporaries on both sides did, as the very soul of honor. Unlike them, we have only morality with which to judge him. And if we must reduce his memory to the crude terms of good or evil, it has to be evil, since the cause on behalf of which he fought is now generally admitted to have been a bad one. Of course he didn’t know that he was on the wrong side of history. He didn’t even know that history had sides. But, in the age of antifa vs. “whiteness,” that can excuse him no more than medieval people can be excused because they didn’t yet know they were white.

## Books

# The prancing pen

by Brooke Allen

---

When I picked up John McPhee's *Draft No. 4: On the Writing Process*, I was a little surprised to hear that the old man was still plying his trade.<sup>1</sup> Not being a regular *New Yorker* reader, I hadn't seen his byline for quite some time. For me, his name is closely associated with my teenage years, the 1970s, when everybody's parents had a copy of *Oranges*, in its attractively contemporary FSG jacket, jazzing up their coffee table, and everybody's hippie big brothers and sisters were reading, or pretending to read, *Coming into the Country*. I also remembered with pleasure his brilliant *Levels of the Game*, the stroke-by-stroke analysis of the 1968 U.S. Open semi-final match between Arthur Ashe and Clark Graebner in which McPhee demonstrated the startling degree to which tennis is a game of the mind.

But when I began reading the first of the eight essays that make up *Draft No. 4*, a lot of less agreeable recollections came flooding back. I now remembered that in fact it had been McPhee's endless, digressive, self-indulgent pieces, rubber-stamped first by William Shawn and then by Robert Gottlieb, that finally made me cancel my subscription to the *New Yorker* in irritation. Each one seemed to be some three-part, book-length exegesis on gutting a fish, or something of that sort. The ultimate insult, I recall, was a 1993 piece, of about 20,000 words, on *tires*. Not that it was McPhee's longest, most boring, or most me-

---

<sup>1</sup> *Draft No. 4: On the Writing Process*, by John McPhee; Farrar, Straus & Giroux, 208 pages, \$25.

andering article, not by any means. From the beginning of his work for the magazine in the early Sixties (he came there after a stint writing celebrity profiles for *Time*) he was allowed, even encouraged, to spin out his works of "factual writing" (his formulation) to whatever he felt to be their natural length. "Looking for a Ship" (1990), about the U.S. Merchant Marine, totaled 60,000 words. So did "The Curse of Binding Energy" (1973), on weapons-grade nuclear material in private industry and the havoc that terrorists might create with it. During the 1980s and 1990s he produced several three-part pieces of similar length on geology. In 1973, "The Deltoid Pumpkin Seed" told, in 55,000 words, the story of the Aeron aircraft. His books *Oranges*, *Coming into the Country*, *Levels of the Game*, and *The Place de la Concorde Suisse* also first appeared as long, serialized *New Yorker* articles. And then there was the work of "some five thousand sentences"—five thousand!—on the Pine Barrens of southern New Jersey. He quotes with some pride his favorite maxim, "A Thousand Details Add Up to One Impression," but he might think about cutting that thousand down to five hundred. Or fewer.

If one wished to be cynical, one might draw a conclusion from the fact that throughout those years *The New Yorker* paid well, and it paid by the word.

Gottlieb, who took over from Shawn in 1987, continued his predecessor's policy of letting McPhee waffle on at whatever length he chose. Recent editors have proved less patient with their most verbose staff writer. McPhee's

last three-part piece was in 1992, the year that Tina Brown took the magazine's helm. Under her aegis, which lasted until 1998, he produced only single-issue articles; subsequently, under David Remnick, he has given us only one two-part piece. That was in 2005.

The eight more-recent essays that make up *Draft No. 4* are rather more streamlined, and they are intermittently useful both to aspiring and established writers. McPhee has been teaching writing at Princeton for more than forty years, and it shows; he has some good advice to give, yes, but he delivers it in a confident, almost hectoring tone that would seem to brook no argument. In the first and longest essay, for instance, "Structure," we learn that he gleaned his structural technique from his high school English teacher, Mrs. McKee, and has not substantially changed it since that time—the 1940s! The method involves making a structural outline, in any form, before beginning the writing process. That's all very well, as it seems to work for him, but is it imperative for everyone? I don't use the technique myself, and still I have written some things of which I'm proud. I imagine that there are plenty of first-rate nonfiction writers out there who don't use outlines, particularly now, in the age of word processing, when we can change and shape our work so easily as we go. McPhee's own use of the computer, which he relates in characteristically painstaking detail, is eccentric and will be useful to none of his readers, for he employs obsolete software, being in all likelihood the last person on earth to use a program called "Alpha" in a text editor called "Kedit."

Other dicta are just as questionable. How does one write a successful lead? "A lead," he tells us, "should not be cheap, flashy, meretricious, blaring." Really? Not ever? What if you're Tom Wolfe? Anyway, isn't this exactly the sort of thing that irked Wolfe into writing his famous, devastating attack on the finicky and too, too tasteful *New Yorker*? McPhee also says that his only real rule in choosing a subject is to write about what interests him. Well, yes; it's pretty hard to write well about something that doesn't interest you, but how do you com-

municate that interest to the reader? McPhee might think about that question a bit more critically in composing his own work.

The best and most helpful essay in this collection, as far as I'm concerned, is "Elicitation," in which McPhee discusses the art of interviewing.

Whatever you do, don't rely on memory. Don't even imagine that you will be able to remember verbatim in the evening what people said during the day. And don't squirrel notes in a bathroom—that is, run off to the john and write surreptitiously what someone said back there with the cocktails. From the start, make clear what you are doing and who will publish what you write. Display your notebook as if it were a fishing license. While the interview continues, the notebook may serve other purposes, surpassing the talents of a voice recorder. As you scribble away, the interviewee is, of course, watching you. Now, unaccountably, you slow down, and even stop writing, while the interviewee goes on talking. The interviewee becomes nervous, tries harder, and spills out the secrets of a secret life, or maybe just a clearer and more quotable version of what was said before. Conversely, if the interviewee is saying nothing of interest, you can pretend to be writing, just to keep the enterprise moving forward.

Admirable advice, surely. Interviewing is a delicate process, not only in the elicitation but also in the ultimate delivery of words to page. The writer, as McPhee points out, "has [a] responsibility to be fair to the subject, who trustingly and perhaps unwittingly delivers words and story into the writer's control." McPhee illustrates his principles with entertaining stories about interviews he conducted while at *Time*: the easiest subject (Woody Allen); the most difficult (Jackie Gleason); the most interesting (Richard Burton).

Many of McPhee's guidelines are sound, but surprisingly often he fails to follow his own tenets. Much is made, for instance, of the all-consuming "search for the *mot juste*," and he advises aspiring writers not "to choose a polysyllabic and fuzzy word when a simple and clear one is better." Standard ENWR 101

talk, but McPhee himself is addicted to the polysyllabic and the fuzzy, not to mention the attention-grabbing, and he favors confusing neologisms that often sent this reader to the dictionary in vain.

What about this: in a piece called “Farewell to the Nineteenth Century,”

I mentioned that the schooner *Hesperus* was built in Hallowell, Maine, downstream of Augusta. I said that the *Hesperus* had been “wrecked multiguously by Henry Wadsworth Longfellow.” The fact-checker looked into it. Then—in a tone that was a wee bit stern and adversarial, not to mention critical—she said to me: “Longfellow did not wreck the *Hesperus*!”

The fact-checker was concentrating on the wrong thing: it’s the word “multiguously” that ought to have been questioned. It’s not in Merriam-Webster. A website called Wordwizard says that it’s a made-up word that hasn’t yet made it into dictionaries and means “having several meanings.” I’m still not sure what McPhee’s own meaning was when he used it. Similarly, he writes of his editor having a “fluorescent mustache.” Doubting that the dignified Robert Bingham, who died in 1982, sported the rainbow look of today’s college students, I assumed that “fluorescent” could also mean “flourishing.” It can’t.

The examples go on and on. At a certain point in his career he felt “rutted.” Clearly he meant “in a rut,” but that’s not what the word means: it means “to be in or enter into a state of rut” (!) or “having long deep tracks made by the repeated passage of the wheels of vehicles.” Before he came to *The New Yorker*, he says that he thought, like many readers, that it “was put together by some sort of enlofted tribunal.” Enlofted? When *New Yorker* editors removed an expletive from an Alice Munro story, “the gap was ficused over.” Huh? Even legitimate words are often used in ways that are just a little bit off. He writes, for instance, of the “vector” of his Gleason assignment. A tennis ball served by Lew Hoad “hits the fence without first intersecting the ground.” Well, it couldn’t intersect the ground, could it, con-

sidering that “to intersect” means “to pierce or divide passing through or across” (Merriam-Webster)? Surely he could have contented himself with the simple “hitting”?

There’s a little too much preciosity, too much writerly preening in all this, and even when McPhee discusses the miseries and insecurities of the writing life we detect a note of self-congratulation: only *good* writers, after all, torment themselves over the *mot juste*. At the very end of the book, in the essay “Omission,” he offers a truly stellar word of caution: “When you are deciding what to leave out, begin with the author. If you see yourself prancing around between subject and reader, get lost.” If only he had followed his own counsel. For there’s much too much prancing around going on in this little volume.

## Charisma, routinized

*Patricia Gherovici and Manya Steinkoler, editors*

*Lacan, Psychoanalysis, and Comedy.* Cambridge University Press, 247 pages, \$99.99

*reviewed by Christie Davies*

*Lacan, Psychoanalysis, and Comedy* is more a book about the work of the rogue Parisian psychoanalyst Lacan than one about comedy. The last forty years have seen an explosion of excellent research into humor, particularly by psychologists, but there is no reference to any of it in the text. Even the work of that most distinguished and influential of Freudian humor scholars, Alan Dundes, does not get a mention. Psychoanalysis, a word that appears in the title, can be seen either as broad church or as a host of squabbling denominations, but all this richness has been lost. Here we find only the outpourings of the narrow sect founded by Lacan, though the founding scriptures of Freud are reverently mentioned, particularly his *Jokes and Their Relation to the Unconscious*.

It is a book written by and for the devotees of a guru. Lacan was a charismatic charlatan, widely derided in his time even by some of



his fellow “critical” theorists, but possessing a large band of followers. He died in 1981. What we see in this book is what Max Weber called the routinization of charisma keeping the movement alive after the cult leader is dead. In Dany Nobus’s essay “Psychoanalysis as *Gai Saber*: toward a new episteme of laughter,” there are seventeen references to the works of Lacan and only eleven to those of other writers, two of them commentaries on Lacan. Freud gets a single mention. Nobus’s chapter is a piece of hagiography, full of personal detail. The pleasing side of Lacan was that he was a joker who infused his lectures with mirth and enjoyed wearing a ginger wig. Perhaps this explains the pronounced comedic talents of his wonderfully funny Slovenian follower, Slavoj Žižek, who was analyzed by Lacan’s son-in-law Jacques-Alain Miller. Žižek is still amusing us with the Miller’s tale.

At times the authors’ worship of Lacan becomes a little difficult to follow, as when the editors write:

Like a joke, a successful psychoanalytic interpretation concerns not only a specific word’s meaning, but also its polysemy and its connotations. For Lacan, an analyst’s effective intervention is a kind of punctuation that operates on the analysand’s speech by what Flaubert called “*le mot juste*,” the “right word.” And, just as in the case of the punch line, the timing of the intervention is essential to its efficacy. Aaron Schuster has noted that good timing is indispensable to the production of laughter. . . . Lacan’s controversial practice of the variable-length session requires the same attention to timing in order to produce unconscious effects. If the session length is predictable, one misses an opportunity to be clinically effective; the cut (*scansion*) attempts to produce a punchline that will reveal a hidden truth and create new meaning. We see that Lacan’s interest in humor is not purely scholarly but also practical, it concerns a technical *savoir faire* regarding efficacious psychoanalytical technical interventions.

Utterly taumerdine. It is very difficult to see why the well-known phrase “*le mot juste*” should need to be referred back to Flaubert.

Why do we need to be told that good timing is indispensable for the production of laughter; will this come as a surprise to many readers? The editors make the meaning of the word “timing” shift around, and in this way a trick of language masquerades as an argument. Contrary to what the Lacanians think, there is no profundity in polysemy, only humorous possibilities. It is interesting that brain scans show that different parts of the brain are used for processing a joke in which we laugh at a logical or material error than in the case of jokes that play with an error depending on some arbitrary aspect of language.

What does “clinically effective” mean? Was Lacan clinically effective in the usual sense of the word “clinical,” or did his patients often get worse? His patients had a high suicide rate. Was his clinical effectiveness ever properly tested by independent observers? The obscurantist Marxist guru Althusser killed his wife by strangling her while being treated by Lacan. After killing his wife, Althusser wrote a long confessional book, *L’Avenir dure longtemps*—The future doesn’t ’alf go on—in which he admitted that his entire career as a Marxist theorist had been a complete fraud, for his writings had been based not on wide reading and profound understanding but on a recycling of the idle chat of his acquaintances. It says a lot about the gullibility of the fashionable that they had been taken in by Althusser’s impenetrable theorizing within an entirely closed system of causation. Rather like Lacan, in fact.

And of course Marx turns up again in the essay by Jean-Michel Rabaté, “Can you spare a laugh? Lacan, Freud and Marx on the economy of jokes.” M. Rabaté focuses on a passage in Karl Marx’s *Das Kapital* dealing with the theory of surplus value in which Marx describes how a capitalist suddenly laughs in a moment of sudden glory when he realizes how well he has done in life by getting something for nothing while the laborers have done all the work. There is, however, no intrinsic value in labor: without the capitalist, who alone can perceive opportunities, mobilize savings, harness innovations, and coordinate the different factors of production, all of which involve

work, the laborer's toil would produce very little. Besides, only the purchaser can decide value. Lacan deliberately reduced the length of his psychoanalytic sessions from the fifty minutes mandated by the International Psychoanalytical Association down to shorter and shorter time periods until the IPA felt obliged to chuck him out. There was no pro rata reduction in the fees he charged, and so people were paying as much for ten minutes as had previously been charged for fifty. When Lacan died, he was immensely rich. How does this mesh with the theory of surplus value? For the conventional economist, there is no problem. His patients were willing to pay out large sums for even a modest slice of Lacan's time. Value is subjective. Waffling about "use-value" does not get around this.

Yet what has this got to do with comedy? There *is* laughter in Marx, but it is a laughter of scorn, reminding us that most of the time when people laugh they are not amused (usually it is just a signal in a conversation to get the other party to go on recounting something). Marx and Engels loved scornful laughter, as we can see from Engels's letter to Marx celebrating the death of their rival Lasalle in a duel with a Wallachian who shot him in the testicles. It contains a bad German pun on Wallachia and a gelding and actually contains the phrase "Ha, ha, ha!" in the text. But is this kind of scorn comedy? The same question may be asked of Manya Steinkoler's essay "Sarah's Laughter," concerning the well-known story from Genesis of how Sarah laughed at the idea that she at her age might bear Abraham's child. It is a passage that has often been analyzed before, and I can imagine learned rabbis endlessly hurling arguments at each other as to what it means, but Lacanians should keep their torus out of the Torah. But is it comedy? Comedy is often scornful, but can it be said that these scornful items qualify as comedy?

Literary scholars are right to realize the necessity of looking outside their texts to the work of economists and psychologists, but why do they always pick bad or outmoded ones? *Freakonomics* or indeed the witty May-

nard Keynes and Milton Friedman provide better economics and are much funnier than Marx, and quantitative experimental psychology has opened new doors onto our understanding of humor often in alliance with linguistics. But this book contains no numbers other than the page numbers.

It is significant that the clearest and most valuable essays in this book are those that make least mention of Lacan, notably Simon Critchley's "Repetition, repetition, repetition: Richard Prince and the three R's." Molly Anne Rothenberg's "Jane Austen's wit-craft" is full of many useful insights, but ends in her strange Lacanian use of "Möbius" as an adjective. It is a reference to the familiar Moebius strip, which has been cut, twisted, and stuck together again so that it has no clear inside or outside. Lacan thought that this topological arrangement gave him a mystical insight into the unconscious mind. I cannot say what Jane Austen, a great detector of humbug, would have thought.

Still, at least there is hope. At the end of her chapter "Mother-Pumper and the analyst's donuts," Jamieson Webster writes: "There I am, up in that donut shop, with my hat and my apron, always selling the same thing—donuts. . . . The next time I have to confront Lacan with his donuts—those long, tedious, endlessly repetitive passages on the torus or the Klein Bottle (which from what I can tell is just a really weird donut) I will think of my patient and I will run away!" Well, at least she has weaned herself off that frustrating Klein Bottle, out of which you cannot drink because it is all surface, and onto donuts. Maybe she needs a Melanie Klein bottle.

For a man who did not know the difference between an irrational number and an imaginary number, Lacan was remarkably fond of using mathematical analogies. He thought that the erectile organ was the square root of minus one. No doubt it stood up at an angle measured in radians of  $\pi$  divided by "n" where n is a number less than 2 but greater than 1. An irrational number for an irrational member. In passing it is worth remarking that Viagra, a product of international-capitalist Big Pharma, does a lot more for it than years

of Lacanian analysis and at a fraction of the price. Material forces, comrades, material forces, not mere symbols.

These problems can be well seen in Patricia Gherovici's chapter "Laughter about Nothing: Democritus and Lacan." It begins as an extremely interesting and scholarly essay about the laughing philosopher, until the odd notions of the abderitic Lacan creep in together with a long description of her analysis of her patient, Mercedes, an anti-Semitic Hispanic immigrant obsessed with yoga. The story is only very tangentially related to Democritus, mainly through a disquisition on nothing and Nothing. I can see nothing in it. From Lacanae to lacunae. Is the Lacanic laconic? But there is nothing in word-play, neither in mine nor in Lacan's.

What is depressing is that, despite its high price, this book from a prestigious publisher will find a place on the shelf in the libraries of literature departments throughout North America. Students compelled to read it will find it as frustrating as I have done, but will not be permitted to say so. Let me be their voice.

## Heatstroke

*Rosemary Ashton*

One Hot Summer: Dickens, Darwin, Disraeli, and the Great Stink of 1858. Yale University Press, 352 pages, \$30

*reviewed by Henrik Bering*

For Londoners, the summer of 1858 was a scorcher: the mercury on Wednesday, June 16 reached 102 degrees Fahrenheit down at Greenwich—the hottest ever measured. But that was the least of it. The heat was compounded by the almighty stink emanating from "the once sweet and silver Thames," the result of a decision made in the previous decade to stop relying on the city's two hundred cesspools, and instead have the sewage from the city's new water closets flow directly into the river. If the old system was bad, the new system was worse: originally designed only to transport rainwater, London's sewers

now contained the raw sewage from its 2.5 million citizens.

The effect was overpowering. Two days earlier, the Lord Mayor delivered a speech to an audience at Mansion House following a steam boat passage from London Bridge to Westminster. *The Weekly Chronicle* reported: "Certainly, no stench that ever he had encountered was comparable with that which assailed the passengers on that occasion. He would not try the experiment again." The river was routinely compared to the Ganges, if not the Lethe and the Styx. Those who made their living from letting out boats found no customers.

After inspecting Isambard Kingdom Brunel's revolutionary steamship *Great Eastern* being fitted out at Deptford, Queen Victoria noted, "We were half poisoned by the dreadful smell of the Thames—which is such that I feel quite sick when I came home, and people cannot live in their houses."

To top it off, *The Times* reported on the premature breakup of a Commons' committee meeting on July 3 with Benjamin Disraeli, the Chancellor of the Exchequer, leading the exodus: "A sudden rush from the room took place, foremost among them being the Chancellor of the Exchequer, who, with a mass of papers in one hand and with his pocket handkerchief clutched in the other, and applied closely to his nose, with body half bent, hastened in dismay from the pestilential odour, followed closely by Sir James Graham, who seemed to be attacked by a sudden fit of expectoration; Mr. Gladstone also paid particular attention to his nose."

Not only was the stink unbearable, it represented an acute health risk to Londoners. John Snow, a perceptive doctor, had pinpointed the cause of 1854's outbreak of cholera as stemming from a pump in Broad Street, only to have his findings widely ignored. But though the general belief persisted for another quarter century that the illness was airborne, caused by miasma—a foulness of the air—it was clear to all that something had to be done about it. A *Punch* cartoon has Father Thames introducing his offspring: diphtheria, scrofula, and cholera.

Accordingly, on July 15, Disraeli took up the cause in Parliament presenting a bill for

cleaning up the Thames. With the Houses of Parliament situated right next to the river, the Chancellor saw the heat as his ally, as it forced the minds of its members to concentrate on the matter at hand, the long-ignored plans for an elaborate sewage system devised by the civil engineer Joseph Bazalgette. It was time to act.

As can be gathered from the above, the miasma of the Thames hangs heavy over Rosemary Ashton's strongly evocative *One Hot Summer*. Though 1858 is not considered an overly significant historical year, Ashton demonstrates its importance in the lives of three men in particular: Dickens, Darwin, and Disraeli. By focusing on just one year of her protagonists' lives, her aim is to evoke "a feel for the fabric and structure of daily life" and thus "provide insights a full biography is unable to, given the requirement to cover whole lives." In support of her method, she quotes Virginia Woolf's advice to the novelist in her essay "Modern Fiction" to "record the atoms as they fall." Her book also brings to mind William Powell Frith's teeming canvas *Derby Day*, which was shown at the Royal Academy exhibition that year, "the first since David Wilkie's *Chelsea Pensioners* of 1822 to require a railing for protection."

Regarding Dickens, the year was one of emotional turmoil. Sales were down, his writing had hit a dry spell, and so he had started giving public readings from his books. He was in the middle of a separation from Catherine, the mother of his nine children, and he feared that this and rumors of his affair with the nineteen-year-old actress Ellen Ternan would turn his readership against him. Ashton shows him thrashing about in a frantic public relations effort to limit the damage which only served to whet the public's curiosity. For a man whose rendition of the death of little Paul Dombey had tugged at the heartstrings of his audience, he could be remarkably hard-hearted in his private life.

Meanwhile, Darwin, living a short train ride from London, was reduced to a state of shock when, with no warning, he received a letter and a scientific paper from Malaysia from the naturalist Alfred Russel Wallace outlining much the same theory that he had worked on

for twenty years and expressed in much the same terms. Darwin was now under acute pressure to publish his findings or be overtaken, and, as he admits, coming first meant more to him than he had imagined. It did not help that he was plagued by chronic stomach problems, involving extreme flatulence, vomiting, and diarrhea, for which he sought remedy in bouts of hydropathy, or water treatment, offering only temporary relief.

In the case of Disraeli, the political stakes could not have been higher. As a young man, he had favored exotic get-ups such as "purple trousers with a scarlet waistcoat and white gloves with several rings worn on the outside." He had since moderated his style somewhat, notes Ashton, but still wore his hair, which his wife dyed black, in ringlets. Worse, he had engaged in homosexual affairs with young aristocrats, found himself in constant debt, and had contributed to the fall of the Peel government when not offered a position. Thus, "the year was crucial for him in that it provided him with a chance to prove that he was a man of real substance," she writes, and not just the "flashy, reckless, and disloyal" show-off Queen Victoria and his own colleagues had him down as.

Add to this a colorful supporting cast, who—as in a Dickens novel—sometimes steal the picture, notably Sir Edward Bulwer-Lytton, an ally of Disraeli and friend of Dickens, and by Disraeli's own admission "the vainest man that perhaps ever existed." In his choice of make-up, he was a *rouger*, whose shoes according to Tennyson had three-inch cork elevators and "pink chamois tips to them," and whose harridan wife Rosina hurled the epithet "sodomite" at him at every possible chance.

Ashton nicely blends in the news of the day: We read how, for a brief moment, President Buchanan and Victoria exchanged messages through the new transatlantic cable before the signal broke down. We see Big Ben moved by ten horses from a Whitechapel foundry and installed in its bell tower. We get clubland gossip from the Garrick, sports events, art exhibitions, plays and pantomimes, and fashion such as the craze for crinoline petticoats under skirts, which had caused the rebuilt Covent Garden Theatre to widen its seats and staircases.

And, let's not forget the personal minutiae—when Disraeli's feet are slowly melting away in his patent leather pumps, he asks his wife to send him a pair of boots, while Carlyle frets that his horse Fritz—named after Frederick the Great, the subject of his six-volume biography—is “not quite himself . . . owing to his hot stable.”

Of the three main characters, Dickens scraped through the year “just barely,” supported by the tremendous success of his public readings. He was soon back on track with *A Tale of Two Cities*, *Great Expectations*, and *Our Mutual Friend*, in which the river plays a major role.

Wallace's letter shook Darwin out of his slow work habits. The following year, he published *On the Origin of Species*. With a first print run of 1,250 copies and a second of 3,000, the book caused plenty of outrage, but Darwin had influential colleagues coming to his defense. Though it was originally planned as a much longer work, “an element in the success of the book was its moderate size,” Darwin noted, which meant that more people read it.

And Disraeli proved himself to be a resourceful legislator in Lord Derby's short-lived Conservative government: he rammed through the Thames Bill in eighteen days, and had similar success with the India Bill, which transferred the administration of India from the East India Company to the British government: “He gained both power and respect during the early summer of 1858, his first real chance to flourish as a minister and to show the qualities which would eventually see him become a successful prime minister in 1868, aged sixty-three.”

Thankfully, there were no cholera outbreaks that year, notes Ashton, presumably because Londoners could not bring themselves to drink anything coming out of the Thames. Joseph Bazalgette set about embanking the river and constructing his sewer system that would end well east of the city, so the filth would not return with the tide. Disraeli had calculated a five-and-a-half year time frame and an outlay of three million. It took ten years and cost four million, but was worth every penny.

## Fitzgerald found

*David S. Brown*

*Paradise Lost: A Life of F. Scott*

*Fitzgerald.*

Harvard University Press, 413 pages,

\$29.95

*reviewed by Carl Rollyson*

Sometimes when a historian turns to a literary figure the results are refreshing. Think of David Donald writing about Thomas Wolfe and now David S. Brown on Fitzgerald. I doubt that a literary critic could have written Brown's account of a masterpiece, “The Diamond as Big as the Ritz”: “Scott's critical account of the colonizing of the American West anticipates a school of historiography that would begin to gain influence in the 1970s and 1980s.” Brown calls the story a “powerful condemnation of greed, a direct rebuke to the speculative orgy that was already then coming to grip the 1920s.” The story was too much for *The Saturday Evening Post*, which regularly paid Fitzgerald \$1,500 per story, and he had to accept \$300 for its appearance in *Smart Set*, H. L. Mencken's bolder magazine unconcerned about ruffling Americans' good feelings about prosperity. The story is set on the Montana ranch and homestead of Percy Washington, a direct descendant of the president. It is also the home of that diamond, the size of a small mountain, or of the Ritz-Carlton Hotel. The “Washington compound,” as Brown calls it, is “distinguished by a grotesque luxury of jeweled, ivoryed, and furred elegance; a small army of slaves sees to every need.” This “state within a state,” built on killing and kidnapping, is ultimately no more than a redoubt that is destroyed when the secret shenanigans are exposed and the secluded empire is bombed into ruins even as Braddock Washington, Percy's father, attempts to lift the diamond heavenward to appease God. “Playing off various episodes in American history, Fitzgerald presents in ‘Diamond’ a nation in danger of losing its soul,” Brown concludes.

And so it is with F. Scott Fitzgerald in Brown's tragic biography, in which his sub-

ject is forever in danger of losing his soul, corrupted by the easy money proffered for his short stories, and all too prone to lavish his earnings on the luxurious lifestyle he came to regard as symptomatic of the country's lapse from its promising beginnings. The empire of liberty becomes the empire of wealth. An earlier generation of historians, led by Frederick Jackson Turner, who equated the settling of the West with the forging of liberty, is reproached in Fitzgerald's prose, which questions "the very idea of the American frontier as a source of democratic vitality." As Brown concludes, the "diamond rejected by God symbolizes the mining culture that placed ruthless extraction at the center of its enterprise."

In Brown's narrative, F. Scott Fitzgerald's life—all his successes, his excesses, his drinking, his fraught marriage to Zelda, his hatred of Hollywood, which was also his refuge—makes him an epic figure, one whose life and work seem destined to be told again and again because so much of him is the nation writ small but also large because he left

his work unfinished and his life on the verge of repair. Fitzgerald, in short, made himself into a symbol as suggestive as any character he created, and his life a plot worthy of a great novel, as Budd Schulberg, one of Fitzgerald's Hollywood collaborators, attempted in *The Disenchanted* (1950).

What sets this biography apart from the others is its emphasis on Fitzgerald's "historical sensibility." For all his reputation as a trendsetter and chronicler of the 1920s, living it up with Zelda in New York and Paris, Fitzgerald, Brown insists, "leaned towards the aristocratic, the premodern, and the romantic," embodied in his courtly if ineffectual father. Like Faulkner, Fitzgerald "never lost his boyish enthusiasm for the valor of Civil War generals." Fitzgerald made his alarm over the rise of corporations and labor unions the crux of the unfinished *The Last Tycoon*, featuring Monroe Stahr as a throwback to the founding generation of Americans who, Fitzgerald believed, were not so esurient as his contemporaries. Stahr believes in creating great art in motion

# The New Criterion

## CRITIC'S NOTEBOOK

Weekly emailed recommendations from the editors of *The New Criterion* on what to read, see, and hear in the world of culture.

Subscribe at [newcriterion.com/CN](http://newcriterion.com/CN)

pictures even if it means losing money. He says art is what the studio owes its audience while pocketing profits from formulaic pictures. Stahr, in other words, like Fitzgerald himself, sought some kind of *modus vivendi* between making money and masterpieces. Fitzgerald came to Hollywood to earn enough to settle his enormous debts, but he also came to redeem the industry by writing great films. His failure to make his mark as a screenwriter surely informs his portrait of the tragic Monroe Stahr battling the bankers, studio executives, and radicals.

The Fitzgerald–Faulkner comparison is not one that Brown makes but a student of their work is drawn to the parallels apparent in Brown’s narrative: their conservative modernism, alcoholism, obsession with Southern belles and the gentlemanly code—no matter how many times their belles let them down and they behaved in ungentlemanly fashion—and their creation of two defining works of the American imagination and history: *The Great Gatsby* and *Absalom, Absalom!* Both novels are dominated by great innocents: Jay Gatsby and Thomas Sutpen, who re-invent themselves into facsimiles of the governing class while also exposing that class’s moral bankruptcy. Curiously, Faulkner never seems to have acknowledged Fitzgerald’s work, and Fitzgerald had hardly more to say about Faulkner. And yet their sense of “living in history,” as Brown puts it, seems nearly the same, even though their subject matter is so dissimilar.

Faulkner would never have deemed Hollywood a serious enough subject for a novel, which is a pity because, like Fitzgerald, Faulkner’s time there—in the 1930s—is not only a crucial part of his biography but also the moment when the vectors of history converge, when the corporations and unions are

fighting it out while European refugee writers and filmmakers arrive, making the biographies of these two American novelists even more significant as the world heads toward war. If Brown misses any opportunities, it might be his parochial view of Fitzgerald as an American first, rather than as, again like Faulkner, a writer inspired by Keats and Swinburne— influences Brown acknowledges but does not trace deeply enough, perhaps, in Fitzgerald’s oeuvre.

As for the rest: Brown is in line with recent biographies that show how Fitzgerald diminished Zelda, although he also supported her, paying for her institutionalizations and honoring their early, happy, and productive days of married life. Brown’s coda, explaining what happened to Zelda after Scott’s death (she perished in a fire while under treatment for one of her periodic mental lapses), suggests that she remained loyal to her only husband and to his mission to become a great writer.

Brown shows how even friends like Edmund Wilson never quite understood Fitzgerald, branding him as unintellectual, when, in fact, Fitzgerald’s analytical powers accord well with the work of Thorstein Veblen, Charles Beard, and other important American historians and sociologists. Many writers deplored Fitzgerald’s self-revealing *Crack-up* essays about his struggles with his health and career which, arguably, are forerunners of the confessional nonfiction and poetry touched off by the work of Norman Mailer in the late 1950s and Robert Lowell and Sylvia Plath in the 1960s, although Brown does not dwell on these connections.

Brown knows no better way to end his biography than with Fitzgerald’s last lines in *The Great Gatsby*, still as magnificent as anything ever written by an American: “So we beat on, boats against the current, borne back ceaselessly into the past.”

# Christie Davies, 1941–2017

by *Anthony Daniels*

---

No one could be long in conversation with Christie Davies without realizing that he was in the presence of a powerful, individual, and original mind. He had something interesting to say about practically everything, almost always from an unusual and unexpected angle on whatever subject came up, and drawing from a vast stock of information and experience of every kind. What he said was often simultaneously startling and obvious (obvious, that is, once he had enunciated it): his thought had a why-didn't-I-think-of-that? quality about it. This is what gave a peculiar pleasure to talking to him. It was like going on a journey in which new vistas were likely to open up at any moment.

Readers of *The New Criterion* will be familiar with his art criticism, which was judicious, lucid, well informed, and properly opinionated. But art criticism was only a very small part of his protean activity and interest. If he was not a renaissance man, it was only because the expansion of human knowledge now makes the existence of such a person impossible. He could speak equally of cabbages and kings.

He started as an economist, obtaining a distinguished degree at Cambridge (he was also for a time the president of the Union there, as well as a member of the Cambridge Footlights, an amateur dramatic club famous at the time for its satirical spirit). After leaving university, he was a producer for the BBC Third Programme—the third national radio network of the BBC, dedicated to rigorous

cultural pursuits—at a time when it was still permissible for that august corporation to run a service that appealed to an intellectually elite audience without undue concern for audience figures. There was still confidence in the existence of the good in itself.

Christie Davies then turned to academic sociology: not, it must be admitted, a field that generally attracts minds as capable and well-furnished as his. He was for many years Professor of Sociology at Reading University, an appointment that did the university much honor, but which one feels might be impossible today for reasons that no reader of *The New Criterion* will need to be reminded of. He took a somewhat jaundiced view of modern academia, not entirely welcoming its constant expansion into pastures new. At the end of his *curriculum vitae*, he stated that he had been “external examiner at many British universities, including excellent universities, very good universities, good universities, and universities.”

He was perhaps best known for his writings on humor (his most celebrated book, perhaps, being *The Mirth of Nations*). Unlike many writers on this subject, he knew it from the inside as well as the out: he was not like a writer on cookery who has no sense of smell. Indeed, almost everything he said was suffused with humor, and he never succumbed to the simultaneously dismal and superficial view that what was funny was necessarily less serious than the solemn, earnestness without seriousness being one of his targets. He was an immensely learned man, but he wore his



learning not only lightly, but lightheartedly, which is a much rarer quality.

He was strongly opposed to the prevailing view that ethnic and national jokes told, almost universally, by neighbors about one another were but the prelude to conflict and war, if not genocide. This supposition is, of course, one of the pillars of political correctness: that if I joke about the tightfistedness of the Scots or the Dutch, I necessarily harbor a violent antipathy towards them that needs but a spark to ignite into full and uncontrolled hostility. Though Christie Davies clearly enjoyed the jokes that nations and ethnic groups told about one another (they are often very funny), his study of humor had a serious import. Christie Davies waged war on humorlessness, an ever-widening and deepening condition, as a brief survey of the contemporary world's politicians, who nowadays hardly ever dare make a joke for fear of offending someone (even if they were personally capable of making a joke), attests. Thus, Christie Davies described an important social and political development (for personal freedom cannot long survive humorlessness) from a typically unusual angle.

But though he was an editor of an international journal dedicated to the study of humor around the world, and the president of a society dedicated to the same end, humor (which cannot be left to the Bergsons and Freuds of the world) was far from his only concern. He was much exercised by the relationship between religious belief or practice and everyday morality and civility. Given that he was a native of Britain—he was Welsh, and never entirely lost his accent, or wanted to—this concern was hardly surprising. His book *The Strange Death of Moral Britain* (an echo of George Dangerfield's *The Strange Death of Liberal England*) recounts the transition of Britain during his lifetime from being a country of law-abiding civility to one of anarchic incivility, relating it to the terminal decline and near-total collapse of both the Church of England and what is known in Britain as nonconformist Christianity. No one would have predicted quite so swift a transformation of the myriad chapels of his native Wales into nightclubs and what the vendors of real estate insist on calling

*luxury apartments*. And I think it fair to say that Christie Davies was not much pleased by the growth and spread of Islam in Britain as the one religion with any self-confidence.

He had extensive experience and knowledge of what is loosely (*very* loosely) called the Third World. I first realized this when he and I corresponded about my little satire on Tanzania under the dictatorship of Julius Nyerere (*Saint* Julius, as Peter Bauer called him), which I published under the pseudonym of Thursday Msigwa. Ever afterwards, Christie Davies called me Thursday (I called him Tuesday). To my surprise, he was very well-informed about Nyerere's friend the Reverend Trevor Huddleston—Bishop Herbage, as he appears in my book—and his work in Africa. Huddleston was a doughty opponent of apartheid, but some of his other activities in Africa were perhaps less praiseworthy, and Christie Davies knew the arcana of Tanzanian politics, as well as those of many other Third World countries that seem obscure and unimportant to the general public, but are actually very interesting.

He loved gossip of a pointed, though not malicious, kind, and he had a very good supply of stories. He was the perfect exemplar of Horace Walpole's famous dictum that the world is a comedy to those who think, a tragedy to those who feel; and for him, amusement and morality were neither incompatible nor diametrically opposed.

He was a dedicated and prolific journalist who (so editors tell me) always handed in his copy on time. He did not despise descent into the public arena, but neither did he seek fame or even notoriety. He corrected his last article very shortly before he died.

As a sociologist, he never lost sight of the fact that it was human beings with whom he had to do. If there were generalizations to be made about large groups of people—he was never afraid of making them, some of them far from politically correct—he never forgot that it was their mentalities that counted. Not for him Man as a mere vector of forces or a feather on the wind of circumstance. For example, the rise of crime in Great Britain was for him certainly not caused by an abstraction (such

as relative inequality) so beloved of a certain type of criminologist; it was a change in culture and mentality that counted. Of course, there is no final cause; mentalities must change for reasons too, but reasons cannot be analyzed as if they were simply semi-occult physical forces like gamma radiation.

Christie Davies was a believer in the necessity of a strong moral code, without being himself moralistic. He was certainly not censorious or puritanical, and he cheerfully accepted that men never lived up to their moral code (the only way to do so was to have none). His descriptions of the wretched plight in Britain of some of the Muslim girls of Pakistani descent were heartfelt and personal: he investigated their stories himself. His first book, published in 1973, was about miscarriages of justice leading to wrongful imprisonment. If there was a comic dimension to his conception of life, there was also a tragic one. In other words, to return to Walpole's dictum, he both thought and felt.

When eminent persons die, it is a commonplace to say that we shall not see their like again. Since every human being is unique, this is in a certain sense true by definition. But in the case of Christie Davies it is no mere pious incantation. He was never afraid to say what he thought and (at least as important) what he thought was always worth saying. Such persons are ever fewer. George Orwell's great encomium to Charles Dickens was equally true of Christie Davies and might well serve as his epitaph:

He is laughing, with a touch of anger in his laughter, but no triumph, no malignity. [He is] a man who is always fighting against something, but who fights in the open and is not frightened, the face of a man who is *generously angry*—in other words, of a nineteenth-century liberal, a free intelligence, a type hated with equal hatred by all the smelly little orthodoxies which are now contending for our souls.