

# The New Criterion <sup>35<sup>th</sup></sup> anniversary

February 2017

A monthly review *edited by Roger Kimball*

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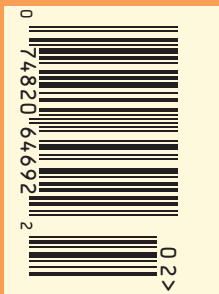
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# The New Criterion *February 2017*

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# Notes & Comments: February 2017

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## *Cultural backwash*

Politics, the late Andrew Breitbart remarked, is downstream of culture. In other words, the nature of a society's culture influences the nature of its politics. So if you care about politics—those communal arrangements that, in Aristotle's summary, conduce to the good for man—you will also care about culture.

What should we think about the state of our culture? Should we be happy about the state of those institutions that we have entrusted to preserve and transmit the cultural aspirations of our society?

Human beings are creatures who exist in perpetual tension between what they are and what they would be. Which means that the answer to that second question will always be No. The imperfection, the longing, that is at the heart of the human condition bequeaths us perpetual dissatisfaction. Still, there are differences to be noted, distinctions to be made, and it is clear that some eras enjoy a healthier, more vibrant cultural life than others.

When we look around at the institutions that define our culture—our families, our schools and colleges, those communities devoted to the arts and entertainment, those that are devoted to formulating our public self-understanding—what do we see?

A full analysis or phenomenology of our cultural institutions would fill a book, or many books. But the yeasty political environment we inhabit is mirrored by a curious (to speak softly) cultural environment. Here are a few snapshots.

On January 19, Mary Katherine Ham reported in *The Federalist* on a cultural hall of mirrors. Back in 2014, Ivanka Trump, now the new First Daughter, had posted on Instagram a picture of herself getting ready for an event. She sits in a white robe, iPhone in hand, in front of a mirror while a stylist does her hair.

Enter Richard Prince, an Artist™ whose medium is “appropriation art,” i.e., other people make the stuff, he “appropriates” it, exhibits it, and gets paid for it. An exhibition of work (it would not be quite accurate to say “his work”) in 2014 consisted mostly of enlarged versions of other people's Instagram pictures. If you are wondering how appropriation—Communist regimes call it “expropriation”—differs from simple theft, you are not alone. As Ms. Ham notes, Prince, a certified “Controversial Artist,” has been sued by artists whose work he has stolen, er, appropriated.

But if Prince displays an imperfect appreciation for the distinction between *meum* and

*tuum*, he seems to have a lively appetite for *lucrum*. For a fee of \$36,000, Ivanka Trump commissioned Prince to make an enlarged version of her own Instagram selfie. She then posed in front of the picture and posted it on Instagram. “There’s post-modern and poster-modern,” Ms. Ham observes, “and then there’s postest-modern.”

You might think that \$36,000 was rather a steep price for printing an enlarged copy of an iPhone photo, but *de gustibus non disputandum* etc. Artist finds patron. Patron pays artist. The world continues to revolve.

We now move to Chapter Two. It was a dark and stormy night. It was, in fact, the night of November 8, 2016. Then it was the early morning of November 9. Donald John Trump confounded all the clever people and won the U.S. presidential election. The clever people, as we’ve had occasion to note, were very unhappy about this. Richard Prince, being an Artist™, is *ex officio* a clever person, so he, too, was unhappy. Richard Prince does not like Donald Trump, so he officially expropriated his appropriation. He tweeted a picture of his picture with the declaration “This is not my work. I did not make it. I deny. I denounce. This fake art.” In another tweet, he noted that “The money has been returned. SheNowOwnsAfake.”

Back in the 1950s, W. K. Wimsatt and Monroe Beardsley inveighed against what they called “the intentional fallacy,” the idea that the meaning of a work inheres in its author’s intention. Most observers agreed that their argument was conclusive, but they hadn’t bargained on the brazen declaratory sabotage of Richard Prince. Humpty Dumpty famously told Alice that a word means just what he wants it to mean, neither more nor less. “The question is,” said Alice, “whether you can make words mean so many different things.” “The question is,” said Humpty Dumpty, “which is to be master—that’s all.”

Even Humpty Dumpty might be taken aback by Richard Prince’s prestidigitation. He proposes not merely to bend the meaning of words to his will, but the ontological status of objects. This selfie is just a selfie. But that one, indistinguishable from the first, is accorded the magical status of art. A token of that status is the 36,000 smackeroos that someone paid for it. But the money is not essential to its identity.

But how about an artist’s moods? What if he decides he doesn’t like a customer? Can he utter a spell, like a character from a Harry Potter tale, and rob an object of its status as art and, consequently, its monetary value? I suspect that Mary Katherine Ham is correct in speculating that Ivanka Trump is not too concerned about this contingency, and I agree that it would be splendid indeed if Richard Prince’s intended ontological demotion had the opposite effect, according the photograph super-artistic status as one of the very rare works that has undergone the double magic of appropriation and (pardon the neologism) unappropriation. Like Ms. Ham, we “would enjoy it very much if Prince’s disowning added to the value.”

If the value of his art is its meta-commentary on modernity and pop culture, then didn’t he just add another layer of art by commenting yet again in the context of the biggest confluence of pop culture and politics the country has ever seen?

An excellent question, and we await the opinion of the judges.

Meanwhile, it is worth savoring some of the entrepreneurial possibilities that this artistic poseur has opened up. Apparently, Prince has disowned his work from the 1970s. It’s not, he has declared, part of the canon of Richard Prince. For the most part, Ms. Ham reports, galleries keep his early work out of their exhibition announcements in order “to avoid copyright entanglements with an artist whose oeuvre is a web of intentional copyright entanglements.”

This is where the possibilities get delicious. Ms. Ham asks us to imagine a post-post-modern artist (or, between us, just a *méchant* prankster) who gets hold of some of Prince's disowned work and decides to host an exhibition of "Richard Prince Works That Annoy Richard Prince." It's a recognized category, and, as Ms. Ham notes, Ivanka's portrait should be front and center. Of course, she adds, "someone would have to have access to hip Manhattan digs to host such a thing, a lot of money, and a dedication to vengeful trolling necessary to spend it on this. I can't for the life of me think of anyone like that." Ha!

So where are we? "This is a tale of a celebrity selfie," Ms. Ham writes, "which became an artist's copy of a selfie, which became a valuable piece of art before it became an artist's political comment on the copy of a selfie of a celebrity who is now a political figure, who has yet to comment on his comment." And here's the punch line, or part of it: "[W]e are asked to believe this is all very important and powerful. Who can blame the American public for having trouble knowing real from fake anymore?"

Another good question, and one that brings us to our second snapshot, a scene from the much-heralded "Women's March" last month. It's not only in the art world that fakes, untrammelled narcissism, and silly political posturing are out of control. The tendency of revolutions to devour their own is a well-documented phe-

nomenon. And the hypertrophy of identity politics seems to accelerate the disease. So it is that a cadre of disgruntled "transgender activists" objected to the anatomical composition of the Women's March. Things were pretty simple for the author of *Genesis*—"male and female created He them"—but our self- and sex-obsessed age has rendered that handiwork provisional. The issue, you see, is "biological men who identify as women." This cheery group objected to the abundance of "white cis women" who paraded "too many pictures of female reproductive organs and pink hats." We, too, objected to the display, but for a decidedly different reason. For us, the issue was not that the multitude of females who assembled to protest had created a "dangerous space" and sent the "dangerous message" that "having a vagina is essential to womanhood." No, for us it was another triumph of coddled self-obsession. It's a vertiginous world, full of "non-binary" individuals who do not "identify" as either male or female. "For 20-year-old Sam Forrey," for example, "a nonbinary student in Ohio, and their [*sic*] girlfriend Lilian McDaniel, who is trans, there had been other warning signs that the Women's March might be a dangerous space for them." The world is such a dangerous place, full of "genital-based womanhood" and other signs of oppression.

Andrew Breitbart was surely right that politics is "downstream from culture." We'd only add that the composition of that stream has become positively toxic in recent years.

# Populism versus populism

*by Andrew C. McCarthy*

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The West is abuzz with reports of a populist wave: rolling through Europe, sweeping across the Atlantic, and crashing into Gomorrah-by-the-Potomac. Donald Trump's election as president of the United States—a watershed event as unthinkable as it was improbable to many across the ideological spectrum of American punditry—followed hard on the British people's vote to exit the European Union, a cognate popular rejection of bipartisan elite opinion.

In short order, Matteo Renzi was the next shoe to drop. Italy's now-former prime minister, a young, attractive, politically “progressive” technocrat, darling of the European cognoscenti, had been hailed—it seemed like only yesterday—as Rome's (or is it Brussels's?) answer to Barack Obama. He resigned in November, though, after the Italian people resoundingly defeated his proposed constitutional “reform.” The scare-quotes are offered advisedly: Italy having been virtually ungovernable since Garibaldi forced what passes for its unification, Sig. Renzi's reform was a scheme to end the paralysis by accreting power to himself at the expense of the legislature. Think of it as a gambit to codify U.S. President Barack Obama's “I've got a pen and I've got a phone” style of centralized rule.

The victorious Trump had the populist wind at his back. Thus, efforts to caricature the real-estate mogul and reality-television star as a budding Hitler fell flat. Renzi, by contrast, ran into the teeth of that wind. The hyperbole casting him as a would-be Mussolini took its toll.

Renzi's fall is the continental aftershock of the Brexit earthquake. The “Remain” camp's failure ushered out David Cameron of the Europhile center-right. He is succeeded by Theresa May, who has promised to carry out the public will despite her (understated) support for “Remain.”

But that's not all, not by a long shot.

In France, the socialist President François Hollande's favorability rating is so infinitesimal—well under 10 percent in some polls—that a reelection bid was inconceivable. The two viable candidates to succeed him are both riding the populist wave: the virulently anti-Islamist Marine Le Pen of the Nationalist Front, and the intriguing François Fillon, the former prime minister. As Fred Siegel incisively details in *City Journal*, Fillon is a social conservative whose economic program is Thatcherite (*sacré bleu!*) and has its sights trained on Paris's bloated public sector. One way or another, dramatic change is coming.

Meanwhile in Germany, Angela Merkel, who set Europe's tinderbox ablaze by rolling out the red carpet for millions of Muslim migrants from North Africa and the Middle East, is suddenly advocating strict anti-Islamist measures—such as banning Muslim women from donning the full veil in public. These eleventh-hour concerns over Islamic resistance to assimilation in the West arise as she campaigns to seek a fourth term amid poll numbers that, while still fairly good (57 percent in November), have sagged. The principal beneficiary has been the nationalist, anti-Islamist Alternative für Deutschland

party, whose popularity has risen steadily, coincident with a surge of domestic jihadist attacks.

Certainly, change of some potentially transformative kind is gripping the West. But is “populism” the right diagnosis for it? Count me a skeptic. Oh, it is not that the populist impulse is to be doubted; the question is whether attaching the label “populism” to the dynamic helps us comprehend the multi-layered, internally contradictory angst behind it. In recent years, the misdiagnosis of the complex grassroots surge in the Middle East, the so-called Arab Spring, led to disastrous policy choices. Oversimplifying such a phenomenon has consequences.

For one thing, turning our attention back to the American election, one might think a victorious populist candidate would win the popular vote. Fully 54 percent of Americans cast their ballots against Donald Trump. His principal rival, Hillary Clinton, outpaced him by nearly 3 million votes, slightly over 2 percent of the 137 million votes cast—about the same amount as Jimmy Carter beat Gerald Ford by in 1976. In fact, though she did not win a majority of the electorate (she garnered about 48 percent), the percentage edge by which Mrs. Clinton’s popular-vote plurality exceeds Trump’s is greater than that of ten elected presidents, five of whom won the popular vote (Nixon in 1968, Kennedy, Cleveland, Garfield and Polk), and four—in addition to Trump—who won electoral majorities despite losing the popular vote (George W. Bush in 2000, Harrison, Hayes, and John Quincy Adams).

Yes, the story of the election *is* a popular surge, but it is less a rush to Trump than a stampede away from Democrats. Trump performed impressively in attracting 2 million more voters than the 61 million the Republican standard-bearer Mitt Romney had in 2012. But Democrats have now hemorrhaged over 4 million voters since Obama’s high-water mark of nearly 70 million in 2008. In that same eight-year time frame, the U.S. population has *grown* by about 18 million.

All that said, had just 80,000 votes (roughly half a percentage point) shifted to Clinton in three tightly contested battleground states

(Michigan, Pennsylvania, and Wisconsin), we would not be talking about a populist revolt in the United States. We would be talking about how Americans elected a former First Lady and twice-elected U.S. senator who has been a pillar of the political establishment for a generation. Trump won by a hair, so the pillar is now a relic.

There is, in addition, more than a little irony in the fact that Trump, the populist, was rejected in the “direct democracy” sense but nonetheless prevailed thanks to the Electoral College, one of the most anti-democratic institutions created by the U.S. Constitution.

At the start of the Republic, the Framers frowned, at least for public consumption, on political parties and the notion of national campaigns. “The office,” it was said, “should seek the man,” not vice versa. The Electoral College was the constitutional contrivance by which the states, through carefully chosen electors (rather than the populace), would exercise patriotic good judgment in picking the right man—it would surely be a man back then—to lead a far more modest federal government. The functioning of the College changed in short order, and drastically over time, as the societal shift toward direct democracy made the electors more beholden to the voters. Yet the College still performs its essential role of ensuring that the presidential election is decided by the states, not by a national popular vote that would render small states irrelevant. (Note that California, a single huge state that Clinton won by a staggering margin of 4.3 million, accounts for her entire popular-vote edge over Trump.) That is as it should be. George Will sums matters up with characteristic clarity: “[T]he Electoral College shapes the character of majorities by helping to generate those that are neither geographically nor ideologically narrow, and that depict, more than the popular vote does, national decisiveness.”

Still, it is not the mechanism on which one would expect a populist to rely.

It cannot be gainsaid, though, that populism, at a certain elevated level of generality, is a significant factor in the West’s electoral tumult. The question is whether it is a quantifi-

able factor because the populism has evolved into a single, identifiable movement. I do not believe so.

As the prior essays in this series have eloquently related, populism is a grass-roots phenomenon oriented against the establishment. But “establishment” is an amorphous term that means different things in different places, and thus the reasons for resistance to it vary widely. As has become increasingly obvious, moreover, a single establishment can meet resistance for divergent reasons because the grass-roots are not monolithic.

The populist urge is no stranger to envy and scapegoating; it is thus comfortably at home on the political left, fueling dark narratives of exploitation, colonialism, mercantilism, and income equality when the establishment to be opposed is private wealth. It has found a home on the right, particularly in the era of Reagan and Thatcher, when the targeted establishment was statist government and its incursions into the shrinking realm of individual liberty.

What does that tell us, though, in our own age of crony socialism, an expanding combination of statist governance and private wealth, often unabashedly allied in their euphonious “private-public partnerships”?

As the administrative state grows ever more intrusive, favored business interests extend the chasm between haves and have-nots. Small competitors, unable to keep up with the costs of regulatory compliance, are crowded out. The behemoths meanwhile bask in the glow of too-big-to-fail status, battenning on the profits while their losses are socialized. The objections to these cozy arrangements between big government and big business are surely popular. Yet, they are often antithetical to each other: the left clamoring for more regulation to cut the tycoons down to size; the right demanding the dismantling of Washington’s metastasizing bureaucracy.

In today’s populism, globalization is frequently cited as the lightning rod that harmonizes the diverse populist strands. But putting aside whether a global anti-globalism can be viable, here again we encounter as much division as unity.

Crusading to save the planet from the scourges of industrialization, fossil-fuel production, and climate change, the left’s post-nationalist populists seek more muscular global governance to rein in international commerce—heedless of the stubborn fact that the welfare state, already on an unsustainable cost-benefit trajectory, is dependent on economic growth. The right’s populists see the transfer of national sovereignty to supranational tribunals as a peril to be opposed; they want the evisceration of multi-lateral arrangements in the hope that the benefits of commerce (rising employment and wages) can be hoarded at home—heedless of the stubborn fact that international trade provides millions of domestic jobs while lowering consumer costs.

Clearly, wrath against the established order is bubbling up. To bumper-sticker it as “populism” may be technically accurate, but it is not very edifying. Whether as a weathervane or in search of a villain to blame, a bumper-sticker tells us what we seem to believe or want to believe, not why or whether we should believe it. In *Liberal Fascism*, his magnificent “Secret History of the American Left from Mussolini to the Politics of Meaning,” Jonah Goldberg recalls a proclamation by America’s proto-populist. “The people of Nebraska are for free silver,” thundered William Jennings Bryan, “and I am for free silver.” Okay, but why? On that core question, Bryan could only burble, “I will look up the arguments later.” That, in a nutshell, is populism. As a lawyer, I think it would be unseemly to look too far down my nose at the facility to argue whatever side of the question expedience (or “Mr. Green”) dictates. That facility, however, is a professional skill, not a philosophical position.

Like fascism, populism is a term often bandied about with little or no consensus about its meaning or direction. It is the callow voice of a culture that gushes about its *values* while its *principles* fade from memory. To be sure, in a democratic society, a politician who loses touch with what the public is thinking, with the angst it is feeling in threatening times, is apt to have an aborted career. One remains mindful, though, of the Burkean wisdom



that “your representative owes you, not his industry only, but his judgment; and he betrays instead of serving you if he sacrifices it to your opinion.”

Donald Trump’s judgment has been an issue throughout his four-plus decades in the public spotlight. He has dramatically changed his business model (after multiple bankruptcies), his political affiliation (five times since the late 1980s), and even his view of “crooked” Hillary Clinton (until recently, a “terrific person,” a “great senator,” and “a great wife to . . . a great president”). Similarly elastic have been his positions on such matters as protection of the unborn (he says he is now pro-life but continues to support government funding for the rabidly pro-abortion Planned Parenthood), socialized medicine (he now says Obamacare must be repealed and replaced, but he has applauded the Canadian and British government-run healthcare systems), and the war in Iraq (he claims to have opposed it from the start, though he is on record offering tepid support before the U.S. invasion and scathingly condemns Obama’s premature pull-out).

Even on his signature campaign issues of immigration, trade, and national security, Trump has not exactly been a model of clarity—a distinct asset for the successful populist, who must never plant his feet too firmly. His quest for the Republican nomination in a talented seventeen-candidate field caught fire when he called for mass deportations and border security. “Make America Great Again” was the campaign’s slogan but “Build that Wall!” was its battle cry. Indeed, the Left’s tireless narrative, that Trump is a racist, is built on a melding of these two messages into a smear that Trump’s idea of American greatness is the absence of Mexican immigrants.

Once the GOP nomination was secured, however, and the campaign shifted to the more centrist general electorate, Trump’s rhetoric softened, with traces of his history as a supporter of amnesty detectable in promises to “bring back” many of the aliens he has committed to deport—with legal status. Mark it down: there being neither the public will nor enforcement resources necessary to deport

upwards of 11 million people, Trump’s actual immigration enforcement program will look much like the Mitt Romney “self-deportation” plan he once ridiculed. He will step up border security, deport aliens with serious criminal records, prosecute businesses that knowingly hire the “undocumented,” and rely on the aliens themselves to draw the conclusion that leaving—or not coming in the first place—is the best option. Simultaneously, expect to find the new president working with the dreaded political establishment to give legal status (likely, citizenship) to sympathetic categories of aliens—such as the “dreamers,” immigrants brought into the country illegally as children, through no fault of their own.

Trump professes himself a free-trader who nonetheless sees America being taken for a ride by “bad trade deals” and greedy American corporations that move operations to friendlier overseas business climes. This toxic combination, in which China and Mexico are the main culprits, has in Trump’s telling robbed the American middle class of tens of millions of manufacturing jobs, which he promises to reclaim by renegotiating the North American Free Trade Agreement (“the single worst trade deal ever approved in this country”); torpedoing the Trans-Pacific Partnership (a multilateral agreement signed by Obama—a cornerstone of the ballyhooed but unachieved “pivot to Asia”—that has no chance of Senate approval); and slapping punitive tariffs, upwards of 35 percent, on companies that transfer divisions to foreign countries and then seek to sell their (consequently cheaper) products in American markets.

The narrative clearly resonated in rust-belt states like Michigan and Pennsylvania, which voted for the Republican presidential candidate for the first time since 1988—back when blue-collar workers were known as “Reagan Democrats.” Still, the anti-trade rhetoric sounded the Manichean wiles of left-wing populists from Bryan to Saul Alinsky, whose *Rules for Radicals* (Rule 12) instructed aspiring “community-organizers” to “pick the target, freeze it, personalize it, and polarize it.”

Contrary to popular belief, American manufacturing is up. It is manufacturing *employ-*

ment that has suffered. That is the fallout of robotics and other technological innovation, not trade. In recently rehearsing Economics 101 at *National Review*, Kevin D. Williamson illustrated that the putatively negative side of a trade imbalance reflects not a budgetary deficit but a *surplus in capital*—i.e., foreigner vendors, rather than using the dollars they make to buy American goods, invest in American assets. As the reality of potential ruin from tariff and trade wars sets in, Trump in the Oval Office may bear little resemblance to Trump on the hustings.

Trump's national security positions are similarly Delphic. He has been unfairly pegged as an isolationist for rebuking Bush's Islamic democracy project and Obama's war on Qaddafi's regime in Libya. In fact, Trump's objection has been to what he regards as ill-conceived interventions, not interventions in furtherance of America's vital interests. Nevertheless, his perception of those vital interests is not clear. He has promised to "wipe out" the Islamic State jihadist network with a commitment of "very few" U.S. troops by working closely with friendly Arab states—though he has also threatened to halt oil purchases from some of those states due to their reluctance to commit ground troops to the fight. The new president says NATO will also be a key component in this effort, a departure from his campaign's depiction of the alliance as a senescent remora, filled with fading powers that divert military dues to fund lavish welfare states while American taxpayers foot the bill for their security.

Trump has also variously vowed to rip up, rework, or strictly enforce Obama's Iran nuclear deal (the "Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action" between the jihadist regime in Tehran and the United States, plus its negotiating partners—Russia, China, Britain, France, and Germany). His rhetoric has been alarmingly admiring of Russian dictator Vladimir Putin, a "strong leader" who has "very strong control over his country"—characterizations that, while accurate, were jarring to hear from a would-be American president. The fear is that these rose petals reflect naiveté rather than vapid diplo-banter: On the one hand, Trump appears to envision a strategic alliance with

Russia to fight ISIS and other Islamic terrorists . . . notwithstanding Russia's ongoing, operational alliance with Iran, the world's leading state sponsor of jihadist terror.

On the other hand (with populists, there are always many hands), Trump's latent interest in invigorating NATO and commitment to reverse Obama's hollowing out of the armed forces would put him at loggerheads with Putin soon enough. And while vilifying Obama and Hillary Clinton for their skittishness in identifying "radical Islamic terrorism" as America's enemy, Trump has been oddly complimentary toward Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, the Islamist strongman who has moved Turkey away from the West. If Trump follows through on a more hardheaded approach to jihadism, he will quickly find Turkey—a sharia-supremacist NATO ally that notoriously supports jihadist organizations—to be part of the problem, not the solution.

It is in the nature of populism that neither supporters nor detractors can predict with confidence what Trump will actually do as president. It should come as no surprise, then, that Trump's victory has spurred efforts to give content to his populism. Most notable of these from conservative Republican circles has been a plea by Mike Lee, the stellar senator from Utah, for the pursuit of "principled populism"—an exercise in cognitive dissonance over which I caused a minor stir (at *National Review*) by likening it to a call for "a sober Bacchanalia."

The senator's brief strangled in its own illogic, as odes to populism inevitably do. The "characteristic weakness" of populism, he conceded, is the lack of "a coherent philosophy," which inevitably makes its "proposals" (I'd have said "careenings") "inconsistent" and "unserious." Well, yes . . . that is because populism is inherently unprincipled, inconsistent, and unserious, such that arguing for "principled populism" is a fool's errand. Lee is anything but a fool. His is a clever effort to appeal to Trump—who will need cooperation from the Republican-controlled Congress—by exploiting this supposed populist moment for conservative ends. As he dilated on the subject, Lee's "principled populism" emerged as a menu of conservative

proposals “focused on solving the problems that face working Americans in a fracturing society and global economy.” The menu is highly appealing, but it is not “principled populism”; it is conservatism—or, as Lee modified it, “authentic conservatism” (the modifier seems a subtle rebuke of the progressive-lite “compassionate conservatism” of the Bush-43 years).

As I observed at the time, Lee’s entrée into the trendy populist brand was his critique of the “chief political weakness of conservatism,” which he took to be the failure to perceive problems. This is a misdiagnosis. Conservatives are quite good at perceiving problems—especially problems demagogically manufactured into crises for the purpose of rationalizing populist solutions, which historically run in the statist direction. In reality, the chief political “weakness” of conservatism—it is better to think of it as a *challenge*—is that modern Americans are conditioned to expect that government can solve all our problems, or must at least try to solve them. It is the lot of conservatives to resist solutions that are popular but barmy. Populism cannot change the fact that government is incapable of solving problems upstream of government—problems of culture and complexity that government amelioration efforts, however well-intentioned, often exacerbate.

There is obvious incompatibility between conservatism’s “don’t just do something, stand there” nature and populism’s demands for action that is forceful even if rash. Yet Lee managed to convince himself that populism is capable not only of ratcheting up limited-government approaches but even “anchor[ing] conservatism to the Constitution and radically decentraliz[ing] Washington’s policymaking power.” Again, these are worthy conservative objectives. They are rooted, however, in a deep understanding of why the Constitution’s separation-of-powers framework and promotion of individual liberty are, in the long run, good for society. That is not an understanding populism is wont to help along. Populism is more mood than theory, and is thus notoriously content to have big-government preening overrun limited-government caution.

Senator Lee deserves credit nonetheless for trying to wage conservatism by defining

populism in a manner that might be enticing to Trump. The new president simply is not ideological. Neither is he a conventional politician, much less a technician steeped in policy wonkery. His learning curve will be steep.

On the positive side, Trump’s learning curve, like the America he envisions leading, is open for business. His exhilarating victory paved the way for a ritual pilgrimage to Trump Tower in midtown Manhattan by political heavyweights and those who crave that lofty status, all vying for the new president’s heart and mind.

The parade gave conservatives no shortage of appointments to celebrate. Senator Jeff Sessions from Alabama, a highly accomplished former prosecutor and Senate scourge of illegal immigration, is slated to be attorney general. A triumvirate of battle-tested former generals—Michael Flynn, James Mattis, and John Kelly—will lead crucial national-security agencies (the National Security Council and the Departments of Defense and Homeland Security). Congressman Mike Pompeo, first in his class at West Point and a Harvard Law School graduate after distinguished military service, will head the CIA. Scott Pruitt, the excellent Oklahoma state attorney general who made a habit of suing the Environmental Protection Agency over its economically ruinous, Obama-driven excesses, has now been nominated to run that very agency. Rick Perry, the extraordinarily successful former governor of Texas, has been nominated to run the Energy Department, despite once famously forgetting its name in a 2012 presidential debate—which seemed forgivable since it was then an entity he hoped to abolish. Tom Price, the longtime Georgia congressman and medical doctor who has vigorously opposed Obamacare, will, if confirmed, be charged with administering it—and managing the transition away from it—as Secretary of Health and Human Services. A passionate school-choice advocate, Betsy DeVos has been nominated to run the Education Department. And so on.

But yet another “on the other hand”: For a populist who thrilled his base with promises to “Drain the Swamp”—a chant that rivaled the intensity of “Build that Wall” during Trump

rallies in the campaign's closing weeks—the new President is installing many political establishment honchos in key administration posts. Reince Priebus, the former chairman of the Republican National Committee, will be chief-of-staff, responsible for who and what the President sees. At the helm of the Labor Department will be Elaine Chao, the former Bush Labor Secretary and the wife of the Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell, the D.C. establishment personified. The administration hopes to feature at least three alumni of Goldman Sachs, the investment bank nestled at the intersection of government and finance that Trump disparaged throughout the campaign: the senior adviser Stephen K. Bannon (who is actually an anti-establishment firebrand); the Goldman president Gary Cohn as chief economic adviser; and, for Treasury secretary, Steven Mnuchin, Trump's campaign finance chairman, whom the left, in grand populist hyperbole, has accused of once foreclosing on a ninety-year-old widow over a twenty-seven-cent payment error.

In what promises to prompt a tough confirmation fight, Trump has nominated another “master of the universe,” Exxon Mobil CEO Rex Tillerson, to serve as Secretary of State. A corporate titan whose diplomatic experience was earned not on the chancellery cocktail circuit but by making hardnosed international business deals, Tillerson is a self-proclaimed close friend of Vladimir Putin. He accepted Russia's Order of Friendship medal in 2013. The following year, he opposed sanctions against Russia after Putin's annexation of Crimea, and—against the Obama administration's wishes—attended a petroleum conference in Moscow at which he shared a stage with a Putin crony under sanctions. At a juncture when the Democrat-media complex is aggressively pushing a storyline that Putin “hacked the election” on Trump's behalf—an overwrought claim based on the WikiLeaks publication of embarrassing emails stolen from Clinton allies, absent any indication of tampering with the actual voting process—the Tillerson nomination risks playing into the opposition's hands.

Another curiosity: Tillerson is also a climate-change enthusiast who supports imposition of a carbon tax and has praised the Paris Agreement on climate change. In campaign mode, Trump railed against corporate taxes and pledged to retract America's signature from the Paris Agreement.

Trump's position was that climate change is essentially a hoax peddled by China to saddle the U.S. with stifling restrictions on commerce. Since his election, however, the new president has told *The New York Times* his mind is “totally open” on this “very complex subject.” His post-election guest list included enviro-zealots Al Gore and Leonardo DiCaprio. There was also the Tesla CEO Elon Musk, who agreed to join Trump's business advisory council. Though dismissive of Trump during the campaign, Musk hopes to persuade him to lead on the Paris Agreement rather than abandon it. So, evidently, do hundreds of major American corporations, 360 of which—including such heavyweights as General Mills, Hewlett Packard, Nike, DuPont, and Unilever—have co-signed a letter urging Trump to reaffirm Obama's Paris pledge.

The Paris Agreement, which President Obama formally signed in September 2016, is a useful measure of populism's weaknesses as a diagnosis of, and prescription for, the current political moment. We really do not know what Trump will do about it.

The pact regards the climate as a global corporate asset that must be preserved by a supra-national institution, the United Nations, to which nation-states make commitments to reduce greenhouse gas emissions (including such ubiquitous substances as water vapor and carbon dioxide). Of course, the U.N. has no means of compelling its members to honor their commitments. Thus, the point of the multilateral instrument is to make these aspirational reduction targets politically viable and, ultimately, legally enforceable.

In theory, an international agreement may not be legally enforced in the United States absent compliance with the Constitution's treaty process. In addition, legislation is often necessary because treaties are presumed to be understandings between nations that do not

create rights and obligations for individual citizens. That means the people's representatives are supposed to weigh in. Popular opinion is supposed to matter.

So, what does public opinion tell us? Well, the airy notion of "saving the planet" is undeniably popular. In polling touted by the *Washington Post*, the Chicago Council on Global Affairs maintains that 71 percent of Americans (including 57 percent of Republicans) favor the Paris Agreement goal of cutting carbon emissions, although the paper concedes that many Americans are unaware of the agreement's terms. It is not to be doubted that support is significant among younger people educated in our universities. The Bernie Sanders populists do not engage in much economically productive activity but have been reared on green activism as a substitute for religious devotion.

Inconveniently, though, the green cause has decidedly less appeal when consideration shifts from its elusive goals to the concrete, painful means of their achievement. Notwithstanding the absence of any assurance that compliance would meaningfully decrease temperatures, the Paris Agreement calls for the United States to reduce emissions by over 25 percent by 2025. That would necessarily cause a spike in energy prices, significantly driving up the cost of consumer goods and, in turn, gutting employment as producers struggle to cut expenses.

There is a conceptual debate about global warming—the degrees to which it exists and to which human activity is a material cause—despite the alarmist left's best efforts to marginalize climate-change skeptics as "deniers." Still, the practical political debate, as ever, is about costs and benefits. A society that eschews the pain of balancing its budget, regardless of the obvious damage mounting debt will do to future generations, is not about to volunteer for painful economic contractions in order to achieve speculative climate benefits to be realized decades from now. Consequently, there is no way the Senate would approve the Paris Agreement—even even by a bare majority, much less the two-thirds supermajority required by the Constitution's Treaty Clause. Nor would Congress

as a whole enact legislation that would implement the agreement's terms.

So why is the Paris Agreement an issue for Trump? Because, knowing all of this, Obama signed it anyway. He calculated that climate-change pain could be imposed without Congress's consent—just as he unilaterally subjected the nation to the security risks of the Iran nuclear deal, another multilateral agreement that was never ratified under U.S. law but was "endorsed" by the United Nations (specifically, by the Security Council).

Alas, Obama's calculation was shrewd. Transnational progressives have developed cagey ways to circumvent democratic obstacles to their globalist agenda. International agreements are drafted to include terms purporting that they "enter into force" when a certain modest number of nations sign them, regardless of whether this is sufficient to bind any particular signatory nation under its domestic law. The Paris Agreement, for example, is said to have "entered into force" on November 4, 2016, on the strength of acceptance by a mere fifty-five nations (out of 197 that are "parties to the convention"). Once an agreement is "in force," international lawyers and bureaucrats begin claiming that it has created "norms" with which even non-signatory nations must comply under "customary international law."

Moreover, another international agreement, the 1969 Vienna Convention on Treaties, holds that a nation's signature on a treaty, even if not adequate for ratification under that nation's law, obliges that nation to refrain from any action that could undermine the treaty's objectives. Since the United States has never ratified the Convention on Treaties, you might think its provisions are irrelevant to our consideration. But the post-World War II web of multilateral conventions is the maddening thicket of transnational progressivism, where "the law" is whatever end progressives seek to achieve—and the principle of democratic consent is a quaint oddity. The U.S. State Department, a devotee of international legal structures despite their erosions of American sovereignty, tells us that because several other nations have ratified the Convention on Trea-

ties, “many” of its provisions are now binding customary international law even if the treaty remains unratified. Thus—voilà!—the conceit that presidents (progressive ones, anyway) may unilaterally subject the nation to international obligations, even ruinous burdens, without any input, much less approval, by the people’s elected representatives.

It thus falls to the new populist president: Does he placate the “Save the Planet” enthusiasts and “evolve” into a climate-change leader? Does he indulge the “Drain the Swamp” advocates and remove America’s signature from another statist power grab? Or is the populist’s Art of the Deal all things to all people—does he tell Americans, “We’ll always have Paris,” but he’s going to make the agreement work better and smarter?

My wager is on option three. The populist is a follower of public opinion, not the shaper of it: a reflection, not a compass. The stubborn truth is that there is no “the people” in the sense of one mind. The people may think they want the swamp drained, but few of them actually want the swamp to disappear—they just want a better breed of swamp creature. On climate change, as on much else, what they want is contradictory: a pristine earth and its exploitation for their benefit—*sustainably*, of course.

Though he feared pure democracy’s tendency toward tyranny of the mob, Hamilton probably did not say that the “people is a great beast.” However apocryphal the attribution, there is much to be said for the sentiment, and for de Tocqueville’s wisdom: “The will of the nation is one of those phrases most widely abused by schemers and tyrants of all ages.” The “Arab Spring” is case in point.

Legend has it that a democratic uprising erupted on January 4, 2011, when a fruit vendor named Mohamed Bouazizi set himself ablaze outside the offices of Tunisian klepto-cops who had seized his wares. According to Western lore, the suicide protest ignited a sweeping revolt against the corruption and caprices of Arab despots by repressed populations desperate to determine their own destinies—desperate to actuate the “desire for freedom” that, in

President George W. Bush’s telling, “resides in every human heart.”

It was a tragic misreading, transmogrifying a complex phenomenon in an anti-democratic culture into a relentless wave of democratic populism. This is not to say that the Arab Spring was bereft of young, tech-savvy, secular democrats. It was delusional, though, to showcase them as the face of the revolution. The claim that democracy had animated the Muslim masses was sheer projection by Western analysts, an elevation of hope over experience regarding a region whose authoritarian culture of voluntarism (conception of Allah as pure will) and hostility to non-Muslims rejects liberty, equality, and the unity of faith and reason. Looking back now at Turkey, Egypt, Syria, Libya, Iraq, and so on, it is obvious—as some of us maintained at the time—that the Arab Spring was better understood as a populist ascendancy of sharia supremacism. Its Islamist leaders were quite content to exploit democratic means (particularly, popular elections) for an end that was the antithesis of democracy’s liberty culture: the installation of authoritarian sharia governance.

By interpreting the revolt as democratic populism, Western leaders rationalized the provision of aid and encouragement to anti-Western Islamists. Support for Islamists inexorably empowered their jihadist soul mates. Inevitably, the region exploded in conflict, causing massive population dislocations. Yet, unwilling to let go of the Arab Spring illusion, Germany’s Chancellor Merkel and her allied Euro-progressives laid out the welcome-mat for millions of Muslim refugees, even though it was well known—though studiously unmentioned—that influential Islamist leaders have instructed the diaspora to migrate into Western societies but resist assimilation, to pressure the host countries to accede to demands that swelling enclaves govern themselves under Islamic law and mores. The result: European nations are under jihadist siege, and their citizens are rebelling against not only their political establishments but against a modern conception of “Europe” that bears little resemblance to a West once worth fighting for.

Over-interpreting the latest wave of American populism would also be a mistake. It is freely conceded that the 2016 campaign elucidated a nation's rage against the political establishment. But it is a deeply divided nation that rebels for different reasons.

Progressive populists indict the capitalist system for wage stagnation, under-employment, and the explosion of education and healthcare costs. They demand a more robust safety net (i.e., ever more redistribution of wealth) and an even more extensive, aggressive administrative state (i.e., ever less democratic choice) to tame the tumult of market cycles, "save the planet," and impose their anti-bourgeois pieties. As much as I'd like it to be, this is not a fringe position. So stunning was Trump's narrow victory that we've quickly forgotten what preceded it. Nevertheless, the other major story line of 2016 was how close the populist candidacy of Bernie Sanders, an avowed socialist, came to prying the Democratic nomination away from Hillary Clinton. It failed only because the party establishment rigged the contest for its preferred epigone. Sanders's shock troops have not gone away; today, they are the dynamic faction on the American left.

Trump's populist following is more difficult to read. It is dead set against big government . . . except when it's not. It wants its wall built, but with a big door through which legal immigrants will stream in. It wants government regulation pared back, but with more tariffs and restrictions against foreign manufacturing and currency manipulation. It wants ISIS

destroyed, but without committing American troops. There are, however, several things on which it is clear: It is proudly pro-American, ostentatiously patriotic, pro-military (without being adventurous), pro-law enforcement, and opposed to an open-door for Muslim immigration in the absence of "extreme vetting" to weed out potential terrorists and anti-Western agitators.

The left and several of Trump's detractors on the right imputed to his "America First" rhetoric the pre-Pearl Harbor isolationists of that name, who sought to appease Hitler and refrain from war in Europe. It is unlikely, though, that Trump was even aware of the connection. His "movement," as he came to call it, was an unapologetic blowback against the Obama left. It is because he accurately read this mood and became its vehicle that Trump emerged victorious. But the nearly implausible narrowness of his triumph and the enduring strength of progressive populism caution against construing the 2016 election as a wholesale rejection of Obama's transformative program. For that to happen, Trump will have to govern well.

Deep dissatisfaction with the established order is convulsing the West. It is plainly fueled in part by dimming hopes for upward mobility in society's lower economic rungs and by the aggression of sharia-supremacist Islam. The environment is a fertile one for competing strains of populism. They illuminate our unease, but they tell us precious little about how to rectify it.

# Dantan jeune: sculptor of musicians

by James F. Penrose

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*The best portraits are perhaps those in which there is a slight mixture of caricature. . . . Something is lost in accuracy; but much is gained in effect.*

—Lord Macaulay, *Machiavelli* (1828)

One of the more unusual items in the Bibliothèque Nationale’s manuscript collection is an autograph album containing a number of songs, tiny piano pieces, or musical themes, all dedicated to the album’s owner.

Its first few pages have autographs from several famous composers, Rossini, Berlioz, and Donizetti among them. The remaining ninety-some items were contributed by violinists like Paganini and Vieuxtemps, pianists like Chopin and Liszt, and singers like Pauline Viardot and Maria Malibran. While some of the dedications are friendly and personal, others are more formal, suggesting that their authors took a little care with what they wrote. Given the formidable personality of their recipient, this was perhaps unsurprising. “Make no mistake,” warned the dandy Roger de Beauvoir, “this is a man not to be treated lightly.”

The owner of the album, Jean-Pierre Dantan, better known as Dantan jeune (“the younger”), invented the *statuette charge*—the “caricature sculpture”—and created dozens and dozens of them parodying some of the most famous figures of the day. One could buy them in a few galleries, but it was much more fun to shop in Dantan’s sunlit studio-shop in the Cité d’Orléans, right by Chopin’s apartment, where they and his more serious sculptures were displayed in macabre fashion under

stuffed crocodiles, snakes, predatory birds, and death masks suspended from the skylight.

Though Dantan sculpted his famous personalities from all walks of life—medicine, literature, the stage, industrialists and savants, and prominent English—his musical *charges* are the most delightful of his work. These days we may not often recognize the names of many of Dantan’s subjects; nonetheless their *charges* never fail to make us smile—and even laugh out loud.

His early career was aimless but lively. At nine, he was apprenticed to his father, who earned his living by wood carving for churches; he also played the violin to accompany dance classes. By sixteen he was restoring stonework in the basilica of Saint-Denis, the ancient burial-place of French kings. In his early twenties he was helping ornament various churches and public buildings in northern France, absorbing their baroque detail and intricacies. By 1825 he was working under the direction of Pierre-Luc Ciceri, the chief set designer for the Paris Opéra and Peintre du Roi. In carrying out his duties as a supervisor of Charles X’s coronation ceremonies, Ciceri had the young Dantan help ornament the royal carriage.

While these projects helped build his technique and reputation, they were a bit more *artisanal* than *artiste* for Dantan’s liking. “For a long time,” he wrote, “I worked in marble, leaving me a little time each day to do some figure modeling.” These models got him admitted to the École des Beaux Arts, where he briefly studied with Baron Bosio, a famous



public sculptor. While studying at the Beaux Arts, Dantan and his more seriously inclined older brother lived at La Childebert, a decrepit old dump in Saint-Germain-des-Prés that had housed generations of art students and which was as much of a hothouse for Romantic art as the Bateau-Lavoir would be for Picasso and Braque seventy years later. An amusing and gregarious student, Dantan was quite the *vi-veur*. He belonged to a famous drinking club whose initiation rites, for starters, included a three-day qualifying binge, and he was one of the students—maybe *the* student—who created the *nez de Bouginier*, a caricature of a fellow student’s enormous nose that Dantan and his friends drew on buildings all over Paris and on roads and buildings every few miles down to southern France and the Pyramids. (Until quite recently, an example of the *nez* could still be seen in the Passage du Caire in the second arrondissement.)

Though he had received a certain amount of official recognition (he exhibited at the 1826 Salon and won a medal for sculpture at the Beaux Arts), Dantan found it hard to make a living. The market for public commemorative sculpture, though lucrative, was hard to break into, particularly for one without political connections and lacking favorable press reviews. Disappointed with his lack of success, Dantan decided in 1828 to accompany his brother to Italy (tracing the *nez* on roadside buildings all the way) when the latter won the *Prix de Rome*, the annual prize given by the French Academy to its most promising artists, sculptors, architects, and musicians. The brothers stayed at the Villa Medici, whose *patron* was the popular portraitist and landscape painter, Horace Vernet. Horace’s father, Carle, himself a famous painter, also lived in the Villa. (Amusingly, Sherlock Holmes in “The Adventure of the Greek Interpreter” claimed to be a grandson of one of the Vernet daughters.)

This was all red meat for Dantan. Not the least intimidated by the fact that he wasn’t the laureate, or by the reputation of the Vernets and the Villa’s other *pensionnaires* (among them Antoine Etex, the sculptor of bas reliefs on the Arc de Triomphe, and Hector Berlioz), he charmed them all

with his witty and punning conversation. He so delighted the Vernets that they introduced him to Pius VIII, who agreed to sit for a full-length sculpture. In his time at the Villa, he also created a clever *charge* of Carle Vernet (whose painting specialty was horses and racetrack scenes), with a long horsey neck and mane.

Even before arriving in Rome, however, Dantan had been working on a handful of *charges*, though several of these have disappeared. A surviving statuette was of the remarkable armless painter Louis Ducornet, showing him as a stumpy, snub-nosed figure wearing an empty-sleeved robe and a huge toothy grin. Though the gargoyle-like *charge* certainly displays Dantan’s caricatural gifts, its static quality has little in common with the grace and flow of his later efforts. His time in Rome changed that by showing him how to animate his figures with life and movement.

Returning to Paris in 1830, he was no richer or more successful than when he left. Nevertheless, the Vernets had been busy writing to their well-connected friends back home about the clever and amusing Dantan jeune. He made a *charge* of the tiny painter François Lépaulle showing him with frizzy hair and a huge mustache on a rat’s body. He began receiving invitations to Ciceri’s Sunday evening receptions and did his reputation no harm by keeping his fellow guests laughing with his running chatter and witty impromptu caricatures. One evening, as a host-gift, Dantan brought Ciceri a *charge* caricaturing his curly hair and prominent chin on a jovially scrunched-up face—which brought howls of laughter, not least (fortunately) from his host. A few days later Ciceri proudly carried his new gift over to the even more elevated salon of Cristina Trivulzio di Belgiojoso (she with the skull-and-crossbone ornamented chapel, the torch-lit bedroom catafalque, and—allegedly—the mummified former lover upstairs in her fabulous *bôtel particulier*) on the rue d’Anjou. Over the next few years, Countess Belgiojoso would indulge in a little light exercise with a number of Paris’s most famous intellectuals, several of whom were present when Ciceri unwrapped his *charge*. There



cotta). But he may have somehow stepped over the line in England as he had to make a hasty exit. He would not make that mistake again.

Adding to the *charges*' whimsy was how Dantan identified their subjects. On his formal busts, Dantan placed the subject's surname in traditional fashion on the base. But for his *charges* he invented an ingenious rebus-language (remember that he was a great punner). Some are complex and obscure and remain undeciphered. Others, though, are relatively straightforward. On the base of a *charge* of the pianist Franz Liszt, we see a bed (*un lit*) and the letters "t" and "z" (thus: li + T Z)—the French could never pronounce Liszt's name. On Berlioz's we see the letters BER, then a bed, this one high (*haut*) up the base (thus: BER + li + oh). Adolphe Jaime's (*j'aime*, "I like") *charge* bears the Latin "Amo."

Others were more complex. On Dantan's own self-*charge* we see a tooth (*dent*) and a figure of a young (*jeune*) Father Time (*temps*) (thus: dahn + tahn + *jeune*). The rebus on the *charge* of François Castil-Blaze (the Parisian music critic whom Dantan shows straddling Rossini's shoulders, picking through his hair as if searching for ideas) is xxx (as he signed his anonymous reviews). One of the neatest was created for the composer Fromental Halévy, who bet Dantan that his name was un-rebusable. Dantan used a seesaw with an "a" at one end raising up (*lever*) an "i" at the other (thus: ah + *lève* + ee). Or the *charge* of Louis Véron, the director of the Paris Opéra, with its rounded V, two crossed bones (*deux os*), a P, and a rat (thus: vay rond + des Os + pay + ra).

Some of his best *charges* are from the 1830s. His 1833 *charge* of Berlioz is a psychological study of the tortured Romantic with an enormous beak of a nose and hooded eyes in a brooding, pensive face, almost hidden under the weight of an enormous head of hair seething with snakes. Dantan captured the Zen-like style of the pianist Sigismond Thalberg by showing his impassive, upright posture at the keyboard, the only suggestion of Thalberg's prodigious sound production being his twenty blurred fingers. Seeing the popularity of the Thalberg piece, a lesser pia-

nist asked Dantan to create his own *charge*. Dantan smilingly agreed, but the order was withdrawn when the pianist discovered that Dantan's take was to have him play with only one finger per hand.

Liszt, Thalberg's great rival, was a favorite Dantan *victime*, being the subject of no less than five *charges*. One, a real beauty, shows Liszt in the ecstasy of performance; another shows him striking a chord at the top of a run, chin jutting away from his hands but with the corner of his eyes remaining on you, coolly observing your reaction. A third shows him swaying at the piano, skinny and bug-like, with his face hidden by his shoulder-length hair. A fourth is almost identical, but has Liszt wearing a sword bearing the word *peste* ("nuisance"? A reference to Liszt's Hungarian birth?). After Liszt complained about the hair, Dantan produced a fifth *charge*, almost an order of magnitude hairier. At that point, Liszt declared victory and retreated; in the autograph album he thanks Dantan for his latest *charge* and encloses a recital ticket in gratitude. But he gave the offending statuettes to his concierge.

Dantan shows Fromental Halévy as a jowly little boy in skirts with a huge head, sideburns, and glasses, a reference to his musical precocity. The Herz brothers (Henri and Jacques) are shown playing four hands with slick Henri as *primo*, head flung back and tilted to the right, left hand finishing a *glissando* run underneath the massive head of his brother, Jacques, bowed forward in concentration. Their rebus of two hearts (*Herz*, heart in German) is on the base. The disembodied head of the music critic Edouard Fétis is shown atop a long pole (where many musicians must have imagined their critics' heads belonged). The great cellist Auguste Franchomme, who performed with Chopin, is a diminutive figure astride the top of a huge cello, leaning down to bow while clinging to the fingerboard. The bodies of the violinists Jean-Baptiste Tolbecque and Théodore Haumann are the instruments themselves with their stark heads emerging from the violin's neck. The singers Adolphe Nourrit and Nicolas Levasseur are shown in the final scene of *Robert le Diable*, with the

devil (Levasseur) trying to persuade his son to come enjoy Hell with him, and the wide-eyed son (Nourrit) deliberating in anguish. Each *charge* is a psychological study of the role, and, together, the two statuettes makes the scene's dramatic power quite potent.

He had an amazingly quick eye. The Paganini *charge* was done despite the violinist's strenuous efforts to prevent it. The result, easily the most recognized of Dantan's statuettes, shows the violinist's characteristically sinuous form, rapt concentration, left hip bearing the weight of his upper body and his enormous spider-like left hand extending almost to the f-holes. It was achieved by Dantan hiding in the prompter's box at the Paris Opéra when Paganini was playing there. He executed a number of commissions surreptitiously, posing as a delivery man, a passenger on a bus, and a fellow customer to get the few precious moments he needed to capture and caricature a likeness. Some of his *charges* were made weeks and months after observation, the subject's details being perfectly remembered.

After his experiences with English political satire, Dantan largely avoided tickling the tails of French politicians. One reason could have been his wish to avoid the wrath visited by the French government on the likes of Philipon and Daumier for their political caricatures, but the more likely reason is he had little time for doctrinaire causes. His sense of the ridiculous extended to individuals in his *milieu*—and not to politics. Time and again he was called on to lend his talent to political ends, and time and again he remained silent. When he was awarded the *Légion d'honneur*, a magazine observed, "My dear, you weren't decorated as much for the caricatures that you did as you were for the ones that you didn't."

By the mid-1840s, Dantan's *charges* were appearing on curtains, napkins, lampshades, and on walking sticks and pipes. He was wealthy enough that he could afford to focus more on his formal sculpture which, his critics claimed,

had not nearly the interest of his *charges*. He kept a studio-showroom in the Cité d'Orléans next to Chopin's apartment that he populated with hundreds of his *charges* and busts. Dressed in a quilted robe and smoking hat, he entertained friends in extravagant parties and what he termed his *fumeries au milieu de mes plâtres*. He also began assembling a more private collection, that of *curiosa* for the amusement of his male friends. It was so large that, after Chopin died in 1849, Dantan took over his multi-roomed apartment for the express purpose of storing it there—a fact little mentioned in Chopin's biographies.

Late in life, he married a proper young lady, and the devilish humor so characteristic of his early *charges* almost completely disappeared. Much of his more academically styled work dates from this time. And, inevitably, the tastes of the Second Empire moved away from Dantan's grotesque view of his subjects. Gustave Flaubert brought the Goncourt brothers over to admire the *musée*, and they quickly dismissed it as "a Pantheon of the Ugly" and damned Dantan as a tired-out holdover from times past. The proper young lady he married may have taken a similarly dim view of his work as it appears that she destroyed all of the molds of his *charges*, his collection of *curiosa*, and other memorabilia, which partially explains the scarcity of material on Dantan.

But not everyone forgot how much hilarity he stirred, or how much new life he infused in an old art. His widow's heirs donated the contents of the *musée Dantan* to the Carnavalet Museum, which has published a catalogue raisonnée and where we can see them today. Averaging only about a foot or so high, they are loaded with character: funny, sly, occasionally malicious, and always clever. Viewed singly or in small groups, they give us a strong sense of their musician-subjects' personalities and, at their best, vividly show the concentration and intensity of musical performance. Dantan was clearly as much a virtuoso in his medium as his subjects were in theirs.

# A pattern of sound

by Paul Dean

Richard Burton's 2013 biography of Basil Bunting, *A Strong Song Tows Us* (reviewed in *The New Criterion*, April 2014), was a major event for admirers of this distinctive poet, and now Don Share—the editor of *Poetry*, to which Bunting frequently contributed—has given us the first authoritative edition of the poems, whose previous textual history was complicated by error and muddle as well as by the poet's changes of mind in successive printings.<sup>1</sup> Unfortunately—but unsurprisingly, given the scale of the project—there is a handful of misprints, the most eye-catching of which is the reading “Where are we” instead of “Where we are” in line 12 of the Coda to *Briggflatts*. In addition, the first line of the translation from the Emperor Hadrian is given as “Poor soul! Softly, whisperer” instead of “Poor soul! Softy, whisperer.” (I am grateful to Mr. Share for correspondence about these points.) Share's notes give copious details of publication, glosses, and explanations of allusions. He directs us to unsuspected byways of Bunting's reading as well as to obvious sources; thorough acquaintance with the classical epics, Lucretius, and Dante is expected, but also a knowledge of the architecture of mosques, the narrative of Eric Bloodaxe in Icelandic saga, and the history, geography, and dialect of Northumbria, among other matters. (“Perhaps it is superfluous,” Bunting himself notes of one poem, “to mention

Darwin's *Formation of Vegetable Mould*.” Well, quite.) A major bonus is the extensive quotations, helpfully printed in bold type, from Bunting's wonderfully vivid and engaging letters—a selection of which is apparently in preparation—lectures, interviews, and taped readings. Bunting's thematic, rather than chronological, arrangement of his work is preserved, so the volume divides into “Sonatas” (including his masterpiece *Briggflatts*), two books of “Odes,” and “Overdrafts” which was Bunting's term for his imitations of other poems. There are several uncollected and previously unpublished items, together with juvenilia and incomplete pieces.

Bunting was not part of the metropolitan literary establishment (he damned the Bloomsbury Group as “a dung heap believed to be a bed of lilies”), but it would be a patronizing error to call him “provincial” if by that is meant marginal; he belonged to the Europe of Bede, Aidan, Dante, and Chaucer. He practiced poetry as a craft, the verbal equivalent of masonry or manuscript illumination. His personal map of English poetry can be found in an invaluable book edited by Peter Makin, *Basil Bunting on Poetry* (1999), which prints the text of lectures given at Newcastle University in 1969–70 and 1974. Here he traces a tradition of artistic composition, dating back to the Lindisfarne Gospels and *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*, based on the underlying coherence and unity of what appears at first to be a bafflingly complex, diverse, and intricate pattern of interwoven

<sup>1</sup> *The Poems of Basil Bunting*, edited by Don Share; Faber & Faber, 571 pages, £30.

strands. Poetic rhythm, for Bunting, is about discerning such patterns through sound and the natural cadences of speech, not through the metrical schemes found in textbooks. He quotes with approval Pound's line "To break the pentameter, that was the first heave." The most vital poetry is that which keeps close to what William Empson used to call the singing line, and does not become too remote from music. There is a sense, according to Bunting, in which Wyatt is a more important poet than Chaucer, and in which the legacy of Spenser, with his love of elaborate decoration and linguistic and generic experimentation, can count for more than Shakespeare, who, Bunting remarks in terms which make us rub our eyes, "wrote very effective plays" but "did not add anything new to the methods of writing poetry"! (Elsewhere, Bunting judged Dickens to be "a far greater writer than Shakespeare." This comparative lack of enthusiasm for Shakespeare is one thing he has in common with Pound. Indeed, Bunting felt able to rewrite some of Shakespeare's sonnets, a piece of cheek which I assumed was unparalleled until I came across Philip Terry, whose rewritings are even called *Shakespeare's Sonnets* [2011].)

Bunting was forever planning, but never produced, his ideal anthology of poetry. Its contents can be surmised from the Newcastle lectures mentioned earlier, and from conversations reported by Richard Burton. There would be no Chaucer, Shakespeare, or Keats. Those admitted would include Dante, Wyatt, Malherbe, Spenser, Sidney, Wordsworth, Whitman, Hardy, and Kipling; a little Yeats; only Part I of *The Waste Land* to represent Eliot; Pound and Zukofsky; a bit of Charles Darwin's prose, for his rootedness in the world of concrete things . . . and the Beatles' "Yellow Submarine." Bunting could not have cared less what anyone else thought of these preferences. He was not interested in fluctuating reputations but in what endured, as when he rebuked detractors of Pound's *Cantos*: "There are the Alps,/ fools! Sit down and wait for them to crumble!" Share prints a longer variant of this celebrated tribute,

which Bunting sent Pound in a letter; characteristically, the published version tightens it up, cutting some lines which weaken the impact by too overt emotional expression.

Eliot mistook Bunting for a lesser Pound; their wary relationship is illuminated in a brilliant review of this edition by Mark Hutchinson in the London *Times Literary Supplement* of November 4, 2016. But Bunting's modernism was not that of Eliot or Pound. Both pointed the way to a fusion of the classical and the contemporary, but we have just seen that Bunting's sense of literary history was quite distinct from Eliot's, and Persian poetry played the same role for him that Chinese did for Pound. Share has an appendix on the Persian material, a necessary aid since this part of Bunting's output may intimidate some readers. The versions are full of praise of wine, agreeable sensuality, and acceptance of fleeting Time. They are often beautiful, but I still feel I am too remote from them; Bunting says himself that the intricate verbal texture of the originals, as ornate as Persian carpets, is unreproducible. To get some idea of the difficulty, imagine trying to translate the medieval English poem *Pearl* into a non-European language. It cannot even be done into modern English (though many have tried).

Bunting was sympathetic, however, to Eliot's view that analogies could be drawn between poetic and musical form; he credited Eliot with using sonata form in *The Waste Land* until the publication of the original manuscript showed that it was the accidental result of Pound's editing. He even specified sonatas by Scarlatti which, ideally, were to be interspersed, by live or recorded performance, among the five sections of *Briggflatts*. "I have set down words," he wrote in the preface to *Collected Poems* (1968), "as a musician pricks his score, not to be read in silence, but to trace in the air a pattern of sound that may sometimes, I hope, be pleasing." He avoided, however, the fallacy of thinking that words, which have to come successively, could be chords, which can come simultaneously. His debt to sonatas was less musicological than structural, "not rigid," as he explained, "but a kind of hidden continuity."

Although an accomplished classicist and translator, in his idiosyncratic fashion, of Horace and Dante as well as Hafiz and Ferdosi, Bunting felt particularly close to the Germanic inheritance of English vocabulary, with its qualities of riddling brevity, concreteness, and hard finish. This comes out above all in *Briggflatts* but also in shorter poems such as Ode I.15, which sees composition as “the sharp tool paring away/ waste,” a struggle to pin down “thought’s intricate polyphonic/score.” Bunting’s own reciting (reading would be the wrong word) of his poems in his Northumbrian accent is the nearest approach we can make to how Wordsworth might have sounded—“one of those musical poets,” Bunting insisted, “if you will give his vowels full Northern strength.” He declaims, in the tradition of Yeats and Pound, but is less incantatory than the former and less arbitrary than the latter: his voice is both mellow and gritty, making room for the words to breathe. He was suspicious of poetry which was too musical in the wrong way, too smooth or mellifluous. Ode I.19 seems to allude to such uncongenial writing with its description of the conventional Elysium as a place of Latinate periodic sentences and “discourse interminably/uncontradicted.” “Where shall I hide?” reads the last line, as if in panic.

His first substantial work, *Villon* (written in 1925), shows him in tune with the medieval, yet employing an unmistakably modern idiom:

Worn hides that scarcely clothe the soul  
they are so rotten, old and thin,  
or firm and soft and warm and full—  
fellmonger Death gets every skin.

All that is piteous, all that’s fair,  
all that is fat and scant of breath,  
Elisha’s baldness, Helen’s hair,  
is Death’s collateral: . . .

Bunting reported that Pound had “scratched out about half the poem,” exercising the same clinical scrutiny he had used on *The Waste Land*. It is a rare example of a Poundian *persona* in Bunting’s work, modified by the fact

that Bunting had been arrested in Paris, for assaulting a policeman, and was awaiting examination in the same hall of justice in which Villon had sat four and a half centuries earlier when Pound arrived to bail him out. As Peter Makin says, in his essential book *Bunting: the Shaping of his Verse* (1992), the half-seriousness of “Villon” reminds one of Donne. Yet Bunting is dead serious about the durability of art and the mutability of the artist: “We are less permanent than thought.”

“Chomei at Toyama” (1932) looks like a counterpart to Pound’s “Homage to Sextus Propertius,” but its emphasis is different. Bunting worked from an Italian translation of the original Japanese, a brief autobiographical memoir by a twelfth-century government official in secluded retirement. The Buddhism of the original is played down in favor of a secular quietism more akin to Bunting’s Quaker roots:

Neither closed in one landscape  
nor in one season  
the mind moving in illimitable  
recollection.

I came here for a month  
five years ago.  
There’s moss on the roof.

And I hear Soanso’s dead  
back in Kyoto.  
I have as much room as I need.

I know myself and mankind.  
. . . . .  
I dont want to be bothered.

(The ellipsis and the punctuation of “dont” are Bunting’s; he was as scornful of apostrophes as George Bernard Shaw.) The attitude is far from apathetic; the poem voices delight in simple pleasures and the natural world. Yet it also has a philosophic detachment and a calm acceptance of coming death.

The first really brilliant achievement among the shorter poems, I feel, is number 3 of the “First Book of Odes” (“I am agog for foam”), written in 1926 and dedicated to Peggy Mul-

lett, a girlfriend. Yeats was so struck by this poem that he learned it off by heart, and indeed there are lines in it he might have written himself: “an anguished and exact sterility,” “the gay/ exuberance of unexplained desire.” Bunting himself claimed a debt, which I cannot see, to Mallarmé’s “Les Fenêtres”, but the movement is wholly his own. Its twenty-eight lines contain seven sentences, the last of them eleven lines long, enacting the rhythm of the flooding and ebbing tide which is also that of emotional (and sexual) excitement and exhaustion:

But when mad waves spring, braceletted with  
foam,  
towards us in the angriness of love  
crying a strange name, tossing as they come  
repeated invitations in the gay  
exuberance of unexplained desire,  
we can forget the sad splendour and play  
at wilfulness until the gods require  
renewed inevitable hopeless calm  
and the foam dies and we again subside  
into our catalepsy, dreaming foam,  
while the dry shore awaits another tide.

Equally arresting, in a different way, is Ode I.36 (1948), which, as Share notes, also harks back to Yeats, and celebrates verse which is built as solidly as stone and as gorgeously decorated as a frieze, gold mosaic, or lapis lazuli; verse with an architectural form, radiating

A glory neither of stone  
nor metal, neither of words  
nor verses, but of the light  
shining upon no substance;  
a glory not made  
for which all else was made.

This illustrates Bunting in an almost bardic mood, but the careful distribution of stresses prevents any sense of rhetorical grandiloquence. Beneath it there may lie memories of the silences of the Quaker meetings which he was to evoke nearly thirty years later in “At Briggflatts Meetinghouse” (in fact, the place has only one “t” but Bunting used two):

Yet for a little longer here  
stone and oak shelter

silence while we ask nothing  
but silence.

For Eliot too, we remember, in *The Waste Land*, at “the heart of light” there was “the silence.”

Before coming to *Briggflatts* itself, I should single out “A Song for Rustam,” about which more information is needed than Share’s note provides. As Burton explains, in 1937 Bunting’s first wife left him to return to her home in Wisconsin, taking their two daughters. She was pregnant with a boy, called Rustam after the character in Persian mythology. At the age of fifteen (Share says sixteen), Rustam died following an attack of polio. He and his father had never met. Noting the debt to Arnold’s “Sohrab and Rustum,” Share comments that “Arnold himself lost two sons,” but he had only recently married when he wrote “Sohrab and Rustum”; the losses came later, and at least he had seen the children. It was not until twelve years later that Bunting could bring himself to write about his bereavement, but when he did so, the result was overwhelming, as this extract shows:

Tears are for what can be mended,  
not for a voyage ended  
the day the schooner put out.  
Short fear and sudden quiet  
too deep for a diving thief.  
Tears are for easy grief.  
[ . . . ]  
Words slung to the gale  
stammer and fail:  
*‘Unseen is not unknown,  
unkissed is not unloved,  
unheard is not unsung;’*  
Words late, lost, dumb.

I cannot understand why “Song for Rustam” is not in every anthology of great elegiac poetry. The combination of flinty stoicism and deep tenderness is almost too much to bear. It cannot be read without weeping—I have just tried, and failed again.



*Briggflatts* (1965), inevitably, must occupy the bulk of my remaining space. It interrupts two twenty-year periods in each of which Bunting wrote little or no poetry. He always claimed that he had started up again just to show the new generation what could be done, and it is true that he had been encouraged by his meeting with a young poet and admirer, Tom Pickard, but this seems tongue-in-cheek when such a weighty composition is in question. Mark Hutchinson intriguingly speculates that the death of Eliot, in January 1965, freed Bunting from an uneasy awareness of what had always been a discouraging presence, although that might be one factor among many. Drafted, astonishingly, on train journeys to and from Bunting's work as a sub-editor on a provincial newspaper (the only work he could get despite his poor eyesight), *Briggflatts* can stand beside *The Waste Land* and the best parts of *The Cantos* but draws on quite different sources from either. It is dedicated to the evocatively named Peggy Greenbank, the daughter of a monumental mason in Briggflatts, who Bunting first met when he was twelve and she was eight. Romance blossomed, and is celebrated in the first part of *Briggflatts*, but the upheavals of the First World War separated them. Bunting left a letter from Peggy unanswered in 1919 and did not see her again for fifty years, a neglect of which he was deeply ashamed and for which he chastises himself repeatedly:

It is easier to die than to remember. (Part I)

. . . a reproached  
uneasy mason

shaping evasive  
ornament  
litters his yard  
with flawed fragments. (Part II)

Finger tips touched and were still  
fifty years ago.  
Sirius is too young to remember. [. . .]

Fifty years a letter unanswered;  
a visit postponed for fifty years. (Part V)

But, as the keynote line of the poem insists, "Then is Now." Eliot claimed that "What Tiresias sees, in fact, is the substance of" *The Waste Land*—that is disputable, whereas Bunting's consciousness really does hold together the different historical periods and geographical locations of *Briggflatts*. The poem is closer to the structure of *Four Quartets* even though worlds away from it in style and outlook; Bunting had no time for religious dogma, Christian or otherwise. It follows the seasons of the year except for the central section, Bunting's equivalent of Dante's *Commedia* but drawn from Persian mythology, in which Alexander the Great traverses a hellish landscape and leaves his reluctant troops, in order to climb a precipitous mountain and encounter the Angel Israfel, "whose sigh is cirrus," with the trumpet perpetually at his lips to sound the end of the world when God shall command him. Alexander falls to earth in a swoon and learns the lesson of the slow worm, a central presence in the poem, that awareness of mortality can be best met by humility, patience, and delight in small beauties. The murder of Bloodaxe (Part II) shows the vanity of seeking power, in verse as keen-edged as the axe which cut the king down:

What witnesses he had life,  
ravelled and worn past splice,  
yarns falling to staple? Rime  
on the bent, the beck ice,  
there will be nothing on Stainmore to hide  
void, no sable to disguise  
what he wore under the lies [. . .]

("Bent" is tough grass.) Bunting felt he had "lies" of his own to live with, his betrayal of Peggy, which had to be made good somehow before the mason was called in to carve his own tombstone. Yet at the same time he himself was the mason, taking "a chisel to write," making a poem that was both monument and reparation.

The beauty of natural and seasonal description in *Briggflatts* is a marvel. A whole world is condensed into short phrases, and complex thought into gnomic utterance: "stone white

as cheese”; “Riding silk, adrift on noon,/ a spider gleams like a berry”; “Grubs adhere even to stubble”; “quoits round the draped moon”; “frost spangles fleece”; “Silver blades of surf/ fall crisp on rustling grit”; “Starlight is almost flesh.” This man has lived the year, he is no armchair naturalist. Like the poet of the Old English *Seafarer* and *Wanderer* he has felt the hail on his face and known the loneliness of the open sea. He could justly say, “I take care not to write anything that I don’t bloody well know.” The point of the description is, as in Old English, to yoke together the loveliness of the world in all its moods, and the bittersweet knowledge that we must pass as the seasons but not return. The Coda says it all:

A strong song tows  
us, long earsick.  
Blind, we follow  
rain slant, spray flick  
to fields we do not know.

Night, float us.  
Offshore wind, shout,  
ask the sea  
what’s lost, what’s left,  
what horn sunk,  
what crown adrift.

Where we are who knows  
of kings who sup  
while day fails? Who,  
swinging his axe  
to fell kings, guesses  
where we go?

As Sister Victoria Forde notes, in her excellent study *The Poetry of Basil Bunting* (1991), which was written with Bunting’s co-operation, Bunting does indeed “shout,” on the recording of *Briggflatts*, at the appropriate place, with startling results. Share quotes Bunting’s reaction to Forde’s comment, in a letter, about what she described as this “expression of [. . .] the underlying pain of inevitable death”: “The pain, yes—not of death, but of wrong unrighted or unrightable.” It is consoling to know that he and Peggy did finally meet again, and go some way to fusing Then and Now.

One later piece must be mentioned. Bunting wrote to Forde in 1972 after a voyage through the Panama Canal, recounting his having seen the new moon emerging from the old moon (exactly as in *The Ancient Mariner*), then the next night Jupiter “like a drop of molten silver sliding down the flank of the new moon,” then immediately, on the deck of the boat, a beautiful young girl like the new moon personified, “and instantly many old themes began to assemble themselves as though this were the keystone enabling them to form an arch, themes of renewal, mainly, closely bound, though I had never perceived it.” A few months later he sent the first thirty lines of a new sonata (“Such syllables flicker out of grass”) inspired by this experience. It survives in more than one version, and the poem was never completed or published in Bunting’s lifetime, but its energy and power strike the reader with gale force:

Light pelts hard now my sun’s low,  
it carves my stone as hail mud  
till day’s net drapes the haugh,  
glaze crackled by flung drops.  
What use? Elegant hope, fever of tune,  
new now, next, in the fall, to be dust.

Wind shakes a blotch of sun,  
flatter and tattle willow and oak alike  
sly as a trout’s shadow on gravel.  
Light stots from stone, sets ridge and kerf quick  
as shot skims rust from steel.

Share explains that a “haugh” is a piece of alluvial land, “stot” means to rebound or bounce off, and gives several possibilities for “kerf” among which the strongest is a layer of earth cut by a spade. Apart from the work of Gerard Manley Hopkins—which Bunting, strangely, did no more than glance at—there had been nothing like this in English since *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* (in which “kerf” actually occurs). Share prints other drafts of the poem. In the section quoted above, Bunting originally wrote “the sun” rather than “my sun” and the third line read “Its net drapes the haugh, glaze crackled by drops flung.” The first alteration typically distrusts the abstract, while it is rhythmically better to break the second

line into two, and the sequence of sounds in “flung drops,” moving from the ringing nasal to the tight short “o,” is better than in “drops flung” (and neatly makes “drops” the last word in the line and the sentence).

Bunting had nearly fifteen years to live when he wrote this sadly unfinished piece, but only two later poems appear in Share’s volume (Odes II.11 and 12), the graceful miniature “At Briggflatts Meetinghouse,” already mentioned (1975), and “*Perche no spero*” (1978) which makes very different use of the Cavalcanti allusion from Eliot in “Ash-Wednesday” or Pound’s “Ballata XI,” which translates the original poem. Whereas in Pound the poet addresses his own poem, which is to carry the message of his soul’s devotion to his lady, Bun-

ting addresses a cutter (a small single-rigged sailing ship) coming to the end of its voyage, with a chart “stained,/ stiff, old, wrinkled and uncertain” like himself, the tide ebbing, no course to set, and nothing to do but “Wait,/ wait.” Bunting was stubborn although not tranquil; his life-craft, unlike Rustam’s, was long in getting to harbor.

His death was quick and without pain. Born in 1900, he was “The last of the Victorians,” said his friend Jonathan Williams—but only in date. His roots were far deeper and more ancient. He was quite unlike those contemporary poets who vaunt their cosmopolitanism, which actually means they belong nowhere. He became international by staying at home. If Pound is the Alps, Bunting is the Bewcastle Cross.

# Battle of battles

by Paul du Quenoy

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“*Pour nous, c’est très présent,*” remarked my octogenarian friend, a distinguished French scholar of English literature at the Sorbonne, when I told him of my plan to leave behind the delights of Paris for the somber battlefield at Verdun. A century ago his grandfather, a young subaltern, had served there and been incapacitated in a German gas attack. Today, and perhaps then as well, this defining struggle of World War I could not seem further from the oblivious *bobos* strolling below the aged academic’s worn but high-valued flat on the Rue des Beaux-Arts. Or could it? From Paris’s Gare de l’Est, Verdun and its surrounding combat zone lie less than two hours away via TGV. An early morning start delivers a visitor there in time for the standard 10 AM opening hours of all the major sites, most of which are accessible on foot, via taxi, or courtesy of special tour programs.

The town of Verdun, which straddles the river Meuse, is picturesque and well worth a visit without reference to the mournful martial lore that draws virtually all tourists. If one can get past the souvenir shops selling tasteless battle memorabilia (think candles in the shape of the signature French 75mm howitzer shell), the small city yields the undiscovered wonders so often found by surprise when roaming *la France profonde*.

Destiny itself seems to have predetermined Verdun’s fate. The strategic high ground around the city has served defensive purposes from time immemorial. The city’s very name derives from the Roman *Verodu-*

*num*, itself a Latin bastardization of the Gallic term for “fortified place.” Facing untamable Germanic tribes in the forests to the east of Gaul, the Romans quickly turned the locale into a strongpoint of their own. By the fourth century it had grown substantial enough to boast a Christian bishopric, a see that would in future centuries erect several prominent churches before settling on the town’s still impressive (if extensively renovated) cathedral. In 843 A.D., long after the Roman defensive line had become obsolete, Charlemagne’s fractious grandsons met there to sign a treaty dividing his inheritance into three portentously delineated realms. Roughly speaking, their independent domains constituted what we know today as France, Germany, and a geographically ill-defined buffer state called “Lotharingia,” so named for its first ruler, Lothar, who had claimed the whole of the imperial inheritance before his brothers fought him to the negotiating table. Running in a strip from the Low Countries to Northern Italy, the name of his realm is most recognizable to us today as “Lorraine,” as in Alsace-Lorraine, the eastern French region that was passed back and forth with Germany until 1945.

Verdun initially fell in this middle belt of territory, and its further history naturally condemned it to contention. Indeed, the city’s principal monument to the battle is a thick pillar supporting a stern-faced, helmeted statue of Charlemagne leaning down with both arms resting defiantly on the hilt of his sword. The mighty medieval Emperor could be posturing

to scold his offspring's disobedient nationalist descendants as easily as defying any foreign invader of a country that claimed him most directly as its founder. France did not take permanent, internationally recognized control of Verdun until the Treaty of Westphalia confirmed possession in 1648. Thereafter, Louis XIV's fortification of his realm's border zones turned the city over to the brilliant military engineer Sébastien Le Prestre de Vauban (whose first solo project was fortifying a more modest burgh in the northern part of France called Le Quenoy, but that is a separate story). Incomplete until the early nineteenth century, Vauban's starfish-shaped citadel quickly declined into military obsolescence. When the Prussians invaded revolutionary France in 1792, they easily occupied Verdun before continuing on to defeat farther along at Valmy, a riposte that emboldened the Jacobin regime in Paris to abolish the monarchy and proclaim France's First Republic (four other republics have followed—there may soon be a sixth, or something else). Napoleon employed Verdun's fortress to confine British prisoners of war. By the time of the next Franco-German War, in 1870–1871, Verdun could boast that it was the last French fortress to surrender to the Prussian invaders, though the siege was an afterthought to the massive open-field battle further north at Sedan and a definite sideshow compared to the much more devastating siege of Paris that was still ongoing at the time of the peace settlement.

Today the main part of Vauban's fortress is an active military installation closed to visitors, but its tunnels offer a fairly interesting museum of the First World War battle. Additional exhibits may be found in the town hall, which also dates from the seventeenth century. And now, running from June 2014 until November 11, 2018—the hundredth anniversary of the armistice that brought World War I combat to a halt—a special multimedia exhibition has been installed in the town's eighteenth-century Episcopal Palace, part of which houses a permanently operating World Peace Center. Immersive in ambition, the exhibit employs detailed video projections and 3-D “augmented reality” installations to impart impressions of

what the combatants faced. The effect is powerful and certainly represents an improvement over the standard stale exhibition displays that now seem so stultifyingly twentieth-century.

The specter of a new German invasion after the war of 1870–1871 convinced the French to move beyond the quaint walls of Vauban's citadel to batteries of “modern” fortifications radiating in a semicircle to the north and east of Verdun. Long before the Maginot Line placed an ultimately futile concrete barrier along the Franco-German frontier, these bastions dominated the rolling local landscape like so many grim Mordors. Elevation atop gentle slopes offered their defenders broad visibility to blast invaders with modern artillery from impressive distances. Tons of cement were laid and gigantic ditches dug to keep them safe in their gloomy redoubts.

The great irony of the World War I battle was that these fortresses had become quite meaningless by the time the first salvos were hurled. Facing a two-front conflict with France in the West and France's Russian ally in the East, the Germans planned to march through Belgium to envelop and defeat the French army quickly enough to transfer their army to the Eastern Front in order to meet the slower moving Russian hosts. As the autumn of 1914 set in, however, modern mechanized warfare and all its attendant horrors froze the Western Front into two opposing lines of improvised trenches that proved virtually impenetrable. Despite numerous tactical innovations and technical enhancements, neither side could achieve a breakthrough all through the next year.

Verdun thus came into the war on the Western Front almost by accident. Frustrated by their inability to break through the German lines, the Allied military leaders agreed to launch coordinated attacks on all fronts—Western, Eastern, and, since May 1915, Italian—in the summer of 1916. On the Western Front this coalesced into the other massive bloodletting of 1916, the Battle of the Somme. But the Germans had looked for their own opportunities after the dismal disappointments of 1915. By the turn of 1916, the fortified area around Verdun sat like an uncomfortable elbow right where

the fixed positions bent in a near 90-degree angle from the relatively ignored frontier zone into the German trenches deep inside northern France. Erich von Falkenhayn, the chief of the German general staff, wrote in his memoirs that his idea was to launch a massive assault that would force the French to defend the area and bleed their army to death in the process. In a “Christmas memorandum” he purportedly sent Kaiser Wilhelm in late 1915, the operation’s bleak goal was to start a duel of attrition. Since no copy of this “Christmas memorandum” has ever been found and no other evidence of it exists, historians have surmised that this was not Falkenhayn’s actual plan. Operational orders to the local commanders and preparations for an artillery bombardment of unprecedented power instead suggest that his real intention was to break through at Verdun and then roll up the French positions to the north and west. When this failed in a bloody stalemate, Falkenhayn likely invented the attrition plan after the fact to disguise the magnitude of his failure and justify his tremendous losses.

On February 21, 1916, before the Allies could even come close to launching their own offensive, 1,200 German guns roared at Verdun and the surrounding positions. Waves of troops commanded by Germany’s Crown Prince—with specially trained and ominously named units of elite “stormtroopers” in the lead—probed weaknesses in the French line and decimated their opposite numbers not only with the standard artillery, machine guns, and small arms, but with war’s latest adaptations: flamethrowers that could incinerate enemy soldiers inside their bunkers and deadly phosgene gas that was virtually undetectable until it started to choke its victims to painful death.

The imposing French fortresses stood silent, for the needs of more active sectors of the Western Front had claimed almost all of their artillery long before the stormtroopers started their march (in another terrible irony of war, the local commander who had advised against removing the guns was almost immediately killed by the German artillery barrage). The biggest and most important one, Fort Douaumont (only completed in 1913), fell to a small German patrol just four days into the attack.

Its young conquerors rocketed to international fame. The psychological blow devastated their opponents. More than twenty years later, Jean Renoir incorporated news of the event into his film *La Grande Illusion* (1937) to suggest the despair of the French prisoners whose demoralization leads to increasingly bold escape attempts. Charles de Gaulle, then an ambitious company commander, endured such frustration after he was wounded and captured in the early days of the battle as it raged around the lost fort. His own five failed escape attempts kept him out of the rest of the war; he compared his frustration (oddly in a letter to his parents) to being cuckolded. Only the steely determination of another officer whose lifelong fate would be interwoven with de Gaulle’s, General Philippe Pétain, enabled the front to hold—and then only just—after he assumed command of the French Second Army, a regional formation stationed around Verdun because the front was thought to be “quiet.” Cut off from the rail line, which ran through German-occupied territory, supplies had to be trucked in along a slender, serpentine road that the future fascist intellectual Maurice Barrès dubbed “*la voie sacrée*.” Under constant German artillery fire, one truck is believed to have passed along it every fourteen seconds to keep the beleaguered men at the front sufficiently supplied to continue their fight.

The battle dragged on for ten months. In the end the French line held around the last French forts before Verdun, preventing any breakthrough and effectively winning the battle after late-year counterattacks recovered lost ground (Fort Douaumont was recaptured on October 24, eight months after it had fallen). The rotation of about two-thirds of combat units in the entire French army through the Verdun sector ensured a steady supply of fresh troops who were thereafter imbued with an intense spirit of shared comradeship unparalleled by any other contest in the war. When Pétain’s successor Robert Nivelle (after the battle both men would, in reverse order, serve as the French Army’s commander-in-chief) declared in late June, “they will not pass,” he spoke for an entire nation.

The months of hard-fought battle turned the surrounding area into a devastated gray moonscape barely recognizable to the visitor today. A century of comparative peace (in World War II the Germans occupied Verdun without serious opposition; the Americans liberated it with relative ease as Patton's tanks careened into the region in September 1944) has restored a layer of verdant countryside and thickets of young forests. Nevertheless, some physical reminders jarringly recall what happened a century ago. Many of the small rural hamlets that dotted the battlefield were permanently destroyed and never rebuilt. Simple memorials mark the former locations of such places as Fleury, where a modest gravestone announces that "Fleury was here" and notes that the town was "destroyed in 1916." Improvised traffic signs glumly indicate the former positions of the church, the town hall, and other buildings that are gone forever. Yet another battle museum, thoroughly renovated and reopened in 2016, sprawls over the ruins of the town's train station. Out in the fields the topography is oddly distressed, with glades of grass undulating over unfilled indentures in the earth with the unapologetic look of a blanket hastily tossed over an unmade bed. Long stretches of trench dugouts have survived intact, if overgrown with vegetation. A forested "forbidden zone" marked in red on maps still blots the landscape to warn of unexploded artillery shells and other hazards left over from the battle. Levels of arsenic, lead, zinc, and mercury in the local soil may not return to normal for ten thousand years. Even ostensibly safer areas turn up an annual "harvest" of unexploded shells that have to be secured and removed to clearly marked receptacle sites for government disposal.

When it was all over, both sides combined had suffered some 700,000 casualties, about 230,000 of them fatalities. In their respective languages French and German soldiers alike referred to the zone of combat as "the Hell of Verdun." Many of the dead were never found

or accorded formal burial. In the intensity of the German bombardments, scores of French soldiers at a time found themselves buried alive in their bunkers or trenches without ever having fired a shot. At a memorial at the so-called Trench of the Bayonets, one can reflect on the story, perhaps apocryphal but nevertheless poignant, of thirty-nine French soldiers who seemed to have been buried alive before going over the top of their trench. Through some contortion of the laws of physics, their rifles remained in upright positions leaned up against the trench's wall, with only their bayonets sticking out of the ground to indicate where the men had breathed their last.

Many of the recovered dead of both sides rest in and around a vast burial complex about ten kilometers from the town and just down the road from the derelict remains of Fort Douaumont. A sprawling military cemetery—France's largest—stands at attention in the shadow of the massive Douaumont Ossuary, a house of bones where human remains taken from the battlefield are still interred upon discovery. Along with the Christian crosses that mark most of the cemetery graves, there is an appreciable number of Stars of David and Islamic Crescents (a separate memorial inaugurated in 2006 commemorates all 70,000 Muslim soldiers who died for France in the First World War; there is also a separate memorial for all Jewish soldiers who perished in the conflict). The Ossuary building itself shelters the skeletal remains of some 130,000 French as well as German soldiers, along with some remains from World War II and France's postwar colonial struggles in Indochina and Algeria. Plaques on the walls and ceiling commemorate individual soldiers who never returned. The bones are arranged visibly in alcoves on the ground level. An imposing tower rises in the middle of the building to house a giant brass bell (donated by an American heiress in the 1920s) and a red light that illuminates the surrounding area at night. The 6 PM train ride back to Paris was a somber one, indeed.

# New poems

*by George David Clark, Jason Gray & Al Basile*

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## Temporarily eternal

No more books or music  
for tonight,

and nothing new  
online, nothing to clean

or cook or suffer through.  
Just sighs between

the minutes as this white  
typhoon of moonlight

tries to shake the room  
and all that's right

within it. The clock face  
wears a sheen

of secrecy so rich  
I start to lean

into the breeze  
each second makes in flight.

In other words,  
I let the evening whet



my tired shoulders  
voluntarily.

I feel the hours spill,  
and carefully

remove my watch  
along with all its debts.

It isn't like me  
to be still, and yet

I'm still: eternal,  
temporarily.

—*George David Clark*

## *Relativity*

He took the watch apart. The snowflake gears,  
Too delicate for hands his size, bend and  
Entangle on the table. If only the metal  
Would melt then maybe so would time.

The leather band has faded to a pale urine.  
The watch had been his father's,  
Worn at the Bulge. The gears malfunctioned  
When he hurled the watch to slow

Time down—it only stopped. There are just  
So many revolutions. Telomeres clip  
And age us, but death is not a rabbit  
Pulled from your coat on a crowded subway.

—*Jason Gray*

*Sgt. Darden*

*Fort Leonard Wood, July 1970*

Sergeant Darden marched us to the range,  
fatigues starched blade-sharp even in the heat  
of a Missouri summer, shades correct,  
brim of his DI hat gently grinning.

No grin in Sergeant Darden as he taught us  
how to aim and fire our M-16s,  
most of us getting on a westbound plane  
in five more months, him trying to get us ready  
who wouldn't ever, couldn't ever be:  
try as he might, some of our names were still  
going to end up on a monument.  
He did the best job that we let him do,  
and took ten spoons of sugar in his coffee.

“Put your nose right up against the charging  
lever, make that rear sight big. You'll see—  
Expert,” he barked, exhorting us, “don't mind  
no kick, you be all right.”

I sprawled face down  
and stuck my nose up tight against the metal,  
the rear sight close as it could get, big as  
a clock face, the front pin like matching hands  
that pointed to six-thirty. It seemed like  
I couldn't miss that way, although my nose  
got red and powder lingered in my nostrils.

Weeks later, most of us days from the jungle,  
we saw him for the last time, his smooth face  
expressionless. He wished us luck, then fell  
us out, and headed off toward next week's crop  
of troops. But he walked by me close enough  
that I could smell the congolene above  
the heat, and said, resigned and quiet, “Son,  
you were the only one that paid attention.”

—*Al Basile*

Letter from Hungary

## Political polarization & private pleasures

by *Paul Hollander*

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I have been visiting Hungary (where I was born and grew up) almost every year since 1989 (when the communist system dissolved) as well as during the 1970s and '80s under the Kadar regime. I wrote of one such visit in these pages ten years ago (December 2006). Ten years ago the right-of-center party (Fidesz) was in the opposition, but since 2010 it has been in power, as a result of receiving 54 percent of the popular vote. At the same time, the Hungarian Socialist Party (MSzP) shrank dramatically, getting 28 percent of the votes in the same election. During the same period the liberal party (SzDSz) virtually disappeared, getting less than 3 percent of the popular vote. Far more ominous has been the rise of "Jobbik," which received 20 percent of the popular vote in 2014—an extreme or "radical right" party, highly nationalistic and openly anti-Semitic. To the best of my knowledge, it is the largest of such parties in the former Soviet Bloc countries of Eastern Europe.

Ten years ago there was little concern in Hungary about immigrants from Muslim countries, whereas in the last two years Hungary has emerged as the most determined opponent of such migration. It has been the first country to build a barbed wire fence (over 100 miles long) along its southern border to deny entry to such migrants. It has also been the first and only European country that had a referendum (in last October) about the European Union plan to have its members take a specified number of the refugees. While less than half of the eligible voters turned out, 98 percent of those who did rejected the E.U. plan. In any event, the

referendum was largely symbolic without any legal force, its apparent purpose to demonstrate popular support for the government.

My recent visit to Hungary was preceded by a short vacation in Switzerland that inspired (as did similar occasions in the past) reflections about the stunning differences between ways of life in different parts of the world. How did Switzerland manage to become, and remain, peaceful, stable, prosperous, tolerant, and non-violent, and, with a population of three distinct ethnic groups speaking three languages, no less? I never ceased to marvel at the contrast between countries such as Switzerland (and a few others in Western Europe) and much of the rest of the world (and especially the Third), wallowing in misery, repression, and deprivations of every kind. Being small helps, but there are numerous small countries in the Third World which have nothing in common with Switzerland or Norway.

While conditions in Hungary are far superior to those in the Third World, it too had its large share of historical misfortunes. Still, the historical tragedies of Hungary don't quite measure up to the durable suffering, violence, and chaos we find at the present time in places like Syria, Iraq, Yemen, Somalia, or Haiti.

Hungary has made remarkable progress since 1989, when the communist system melted away without any violence. There have been a series of free elections establishing and maintaining a multi-party system, there has been a growing cultural, economic, and political Westernization, and the free movements of people and

ideas across the borders have been institutionalized. The Iron Curtain, not a figure of speech, disappeared, with its vast system of fortifications, observation posts, and mine fields. In its place, new forms of unsupervised border crossings proliferate, undertaken by various Hungarian professionals, especially medical doctors and nurses who migrate to Western Europe where they are far better paid.

The postcommunist process of democratization and Westernization came to a halt a few years ago under Fidesz and its leader, Mr. Orbán. Nevertheless, for the time being, Hungary remains quite unlike Russia under Putin or Turkey under Erdoğan: there are no political prisoners or political assassinations; people can, and do, demonstrate against the government; publications critical of the government still exist (although their numbers and circulation have diminished); and people don't seem to be intimidated. There is also little criminal violence—barely over two hundred homicides per year. Sporadic raids on Gypsies have occurred in rural areas, more political than criminal in inspiration. The latter raises the question of the connections between political and criminal violence that is close in some countries (for example Russia, Venezuela, and Zimbabwe) but not in others (such as the United States, which has a great deal of criminal violence but little political).

There are strong feelings and highly polarized attitudes about the political direction Hungary has taken since Fidesz has been in power. These feelings are captured by a recent letter a group of members of the Academy of Sciences addressed to its President as reported by the website Hungarian Spectrum. They expressed grave concern over the rise of “anti-democratic processes” including government policies seeking to curtail free expression (“nationalization of the public media” along with the liquidation of “the existing independent press”), as well as attempts to amend the constitution “to diminish the role of checks and balances.” They urged “scholarly investigations” as well as debates by the Academy about these issues.

Unlike the current political-cultural polarization in the United States, in Hungary the supporters of the Orbán government are not

limited to the less or least educated strata of the population. It is even more striking that Jobbik, the party of the extreme right, reportedly has some support among university students and some faculty.

Hungary's move toward the political right could be blamed on a multitude of circumstances: history, political culture, disappointed expectations simulated by the collapse of the communist system, the dynamics of the pursuit of (and hunger for) power, and the personality of Mr. Orbán. One of my Hungarian informants, a professor of history, brought to my attention the unusual fact that not only is Orbán's first name “Victor,” but both his father and younger brother were given the first name “Győző”—the Hungarian word for “Victor.” While this coincidence is no proof of an irrepressible and deeply rooted familial hunger for power, it does suggest the possibility of an uncommon familial interest in power and winning.

Prevailing political-social conditions in Hungary raise the venerable question about the connection between forms of government and the attitudes and beliefs of the governed. The Orbán government cannot be held solely responsible for xenophobia, anti-Semitism, and a longstanding sentimental nationalism that is part of a sense of identity, shaped and colored by feelings of collective victimhood. The latter is enshrined in the words of the Hungarian national anthem that refers to the Hungarian nation as one that had been “punished by history” for its past and future alike. According to Paul Lendvai in his book *The Hungarians*, the Hungarian national character has been characterized by a “deep-seated and historically determined feeling of being endangered” and a similarly “deep-rooted pessimism.” Hungarians often see themselves as “eternal loser[s].” I rediscover these attitudes on every visit in conversations with both taxi drivers and academic intellectuals.

A recent national survey of anti-Semitism commissioned by the Hungarian Jewish Action and Defense Foundation, as reported by Hungarian Spectrum, documents and sheds new light on some of these attitudes and their occasionally counterintuitive manifestations.

Thirty-two percent of those surveyed held strong or moderate antisemitic attitudes; 31 percent believed in a Jewish conspiracy and 20 percent thought that Hungarian Jews ought to emigrate or that their number should be restricted in certain professions. More remarkably it also emerged that Hungarians disliked, to various degrees, not only Jews and Gypsies, but also numerous other ethnic groups, as reflected in answers to the question “would you agree to having [a member of a certain group] move next door?” Seventy-six percent rejected “skinheads”—an aversion obviously based not on ethnicity but behavior and attitudes. Gypsies were the second most unpopular group: 73 percent did not wish them to be neighbors. Gays were rejected by 61 percent—again a prejudice based not on ethnicity but behavior or sexuality. Arabs and Chinese were considered undesirable neighbors by 59 percent. Somewhat surprisingly Jews had a lower rejection rate, by only 44 percent of those surveyed.

Even more counterintuitive is the finding (of the same survey) that when it “distinguished between groups according to income level, the financially best-off group had the greatest number of anti-Semites.” The survey also found that “there are relatively more anti-Semites in Budapest and other larger cities” than among “inhabitants of villages and small towns.” Less surprisingly the same study found that 54 percent of Jobbik party members were strongly anti-Semitic.

I should make clear that my visit was not dominated by information gathering about Hungarian politics or social problems, or discussions of the decline of civic morality, the authoritarian proclivities of Mr. Orban, or the corruption engulfing public life (of which I heard a lot). The main purpose of my visits to Hungary has always been to see my remaining relatives and friends. I also enjoy Hungarian food, and know and like Budapest, a very attractive city endowed with an excellent system of public transportation. Buses, streetcars, and subway trains go everywhere and often; many are new, clean, and comfortable. Public transportation is free of charge for people over sixty-five. An honor system prevails; inspectors are rarely seen, and

when they make an appearance they do not ask older passengers for their identification.

Reliance on public transportation also allowed me to observe the good manners of young people: on four occasions my wife and I were offered seats by young men or women. I am not sure how to account for such politeness, or how to compare it with attitudes of young people in this country since I hardly ever use public transportation in the United States. The most tempting explanation may be that Hungary remains in some ways a more traditional society in which old people command some respect and the young are supposed to be helpful toward them. If this is correct, it would be a striking contrast to American society where old age rarely inspires respect or sympathy and is seen as the ultimate affliction: something to be denied and concealed as long as possible.

In addition to the courtesy of young people noted above, I found the natives generally polite and friendly whenever I needed information or guidance—in shops, restaurants, or the street, or when trying to find certain hiking trails. This might be explained by their sensing that I was a foreigner, yet spoke fluent and unaccented Hungarian. When I revealed that I left in 1956, people invariably congratulated me on my good Hungarian and sometimes remarked that leaving the country was the smart thing to do. I should also note here that the Hungarian language is full of polite locutions and expressions that reflect and reinforce civility and good manners.

On this visit, as on others, I mulled over the difficulty of learning about matters of importance in the lives of the inhabitants of a foreign country and especially of the connections between private lives and the political environment. Even a visitor like myself, who knows the language and many natives, can remain ignorant of such matters. Thus I was greatly impressed by the multitudes of families and young couples picnicking and strolling on well-tended paths in the hills of Buda enjoying their weekend. It was hard to imagine what experiences or feelings they might have had about the authoritarian currents in their country. In such moments it was tempting to believe that simple personal pleasures and preoccupations may trump the afflictions and difficulties originating in the political realm.

# Why historians get it wrong

by *Jeremy Black*

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Communing with Clio and laying down rules for mankind, all too many historians appear to think that their views on the past are of direct relevance for the present. The full blast, or possibly dribble, of academic establishment power was directed very clearly during the Brexit debate, and there are instructive signs similarly for the United States. In the former case, articles and letters glittering with potent titles—for example, the President of the Royal Historical Society or a Regius Professor or two—made clear what the past presented and the future should follow. Destiny was decried and declared.

Why then did they get it wrong in misjudging the public mood? Was there more at stake than the expression of a view in public debate and the usual preference of a majority of academics for what are defined as left-wing causes? In fact, the stance publicly taken by so many was an aspect of culture wars and a product of the direction of academic history in recent years.

History as culture wars is not new, indeed far from it, but this context and content have been very much taken forward in recent years and with reference to current as well as past controversies. In its lead editorial on May 23, 2015, the *Guardian*, the repository of fashionable left-wing opinion in Britain, declared in its headline “Culture wars will be critical in the coming referendum. Historians are in the front line.” It referred in detail to a controversy among historians, attacked what it termed “standard-issue nationalism,” and closed with

criticism of historians who supported Brexit: “Historians do a disservice to cast their country as a place apart when it can only prosper as part of a greater whole.”

The subsequent controversy was bitterly waged up until the referendum in June 2016. Historians then played a prominent role in calling for another referendum clearly designed to reverse the result of the first. Meanwhile, other historians made very clear their views on the American election. The Trump victory was condemned on television by Simon Schama, who compared him variously, including to Hitler, and declared him a Chamberlain-like appeaser of Putin. Schama’s tone was completely intemperate and emotional. Other historians reacted with disbelief, shock, despair, anger, or a combination of some or all of these—possibly unsurprisingly so, given the 2008 bumper sticker “Historians for Obama.” Cool academic analysis was sadly lacking.

Why, apart from political partisanship, have these views been taken and pressed, and does it matter? First, very different as they are, Brexit and Trump come as part of a sequence in which left-wing views had been disabused. Eastern Europe, with the collapse of Marxism, the strong evidence of religious commitment, and the resilience of nationalism, was crucial to this process, but so also were the embrace of capitalism in China and Vietnam, the abandonment of Socialism by Labour in Britain as the price for victory in 1997, and a similar range of developments. All of these made the insights, analyses, and prescriptions offered in

a number of academic disciplines inaccurate and/or redundant.

The response was a mixture of despising the electorate, which was frequently criticized for that most serious of crimes: “false consciousness,” in other words failing to understand one’s duty in the historical dialectic, or, more simply, just disagreeing with the received wisdom of the angry observer. This, unfortunately, is all too reminiscent of revolutionaries decrying peasant conservatism and superstition and justifying oppression accordingly. Self-styled reformers have also repeatedly followed a similar tendency when ignoring different views. In the case of the E.U. referendum, critics of the result claimed that people were too stupid to have understood the issues or had been duped by simplistic figures or slogans. The fact that such Brexit figures and slogans had been endlessly attacked by Remain spokesmen actually meant that voters would really have had to have been asleep not to have understood the argument against them. Economic fear arguments were particularly to the fore.

There are specific nostrums for academic historians. The idea of false consciousness is more commonly directed by them not at religion but at nationalism, which is presented as an artifact, something imagined, constructed, and then pushed onto the population. This is the theme, for example, of Benedict Anderson in *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (1983) or of David Cannadine in *The Undivided Past: History Beyond Our Differences* (2013). In the latter, Cannadine called for the presentation of history “not to assist in constructing the artifice of discrete, self-constrained, self-regarding, and mutually exclusive groups,” but, instead, to focus on “humanity’s essential but understudied unity.” Anderson’s memoir was entitled *A Life Beyond Boundaries* (2016).

The focus on the part of many academic historians is on transnationalism, a term often used in book proposals, titles, conferences, course programs, lecture titles, and sales literature. Transnationalism is both a means of analysis and a value system, if not ideology. Transnationalism focuses on international communi-

ties, emphasizing supposedly universal values and institutions that are not contained within, or expressed in, national states, as well as on the extent to which communications, culture, trade, and, in particular, migration, all allegedly made and make and will make national criteria invalid.

Transnationalism is read back into the past and also read from the past to the present. It links with the so-called new cultural history, the study of multiple identities grounded in gender or sexuality or ethnicity, but not in nationalism.

A political edge is given with a demand for an “end of history” in the shape of removing the oxygen of attention and support from nationalist responses to globalization, responses in practice that are very much grounded in historical senses of identity and interest. Indeed, within the academic profession, and notably among historians, there can be a curious mismatch between the balance of popular views and that of academic preferences. It is certainly fashionable to underplay the degree to which people have generally not responded well to social engineering, to its goals, processes, personnel, costs, and outcomes.

A so-called love of unity and humanity can manifest itself in contempt for the individual and for individuality. Possibly those who are unsuccessful in directing the “project for modernity” have responded with particular anger, if not panic, because they overestimated their own influence and power. What Alan Kors in 2008 referred to as “regnant campus orthodoxies” appear particularly strident in the United States at present, and are clearly getting much worse. This plague is now spreading in Britain.

There are powerful personal and institutional interests and identities bound up in the transnational approach. More particularly, many scholars work in countries other than those of their birth and/or work on histories other than those of the countries in which they live and work. That situation has desirable consequences in terms of breaking down insularity, but also less attractive ones. For example, there can be a serious failure to offer sufficient attention to national history. In Britain, it should not inherently matter that



both Regius Professors are Australians working on German history, but such a situation can have unfortunate consequences for the engagement of academics with public history. Indeed, the quality of some of the engagement with national history at the time of the Brexit debate was parlous, which is unsurprising for people living in a bubble. Peter Hennessy, one of the relatively few perceptive public historians, summed up the problem Britain had with the European Union in a BBC Radio Four interview a few days after the vote: “Europe was set up by Catholic, left-wing, intellectual, French bureaucrats. Most Britons have a problem with at least three of those.” The “most,” however, did not include most British historians, nor indeed their American counterparts.

It is, to be sure, ultimately disappointing that many historians, like other commentators, prefer to respond with anger rather than to consider how best to understand the diversity of views and the unpredictability of developments. This too readily looks back to assumptions about a clear path of development and a spirit of the age, assumptions that reduce individuals and their choices to inconsequentiality. Such an approach is seriously mistaken and these responses to the present age cannot invite confidence about explanations of the past.

It ought to be part of the role of historians in an election or referendum, whether after the event or during it, to seek to understand and place in context the reasons people might vote (or have voted) one way or the other. Historians are entitled to disagree with those reasons like anyone else, but their distinctive contribution surely ought to be their understanding of the state of the nation, the attitudes of its constituent parts, and how these might link to the result of the vote. It is clearly a hindrance to their understanding if their cultural and social milieu is so detached from the generality of people that not only do they not share typical attitudes (which is hardly surprising) but that they also are incapable of detecting or comprehending them. When it comes to incomprehension, perhaps both Brexit and Trump (despite their many differences) show that there is no greater gulf than that between, on the one hand, those who identify primarily with their nation, and are concerned at what globalization might be doing to it and to them personally, and, on the other hand, those who identify with wider abstractions and are more concerned with retaining the benefits that globalization has brought them. That most academics instinctively and professionally identify with the latter helps explain why so many are poor guides to understanding developments.

## Immoral acts

by Kyle Smith

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Bertrand Russell is perhaps no better known for his theater criticism than Frank Rich is for his mathematical proofs, but nevertheless Russell did venture to share his thoughts, in *The Observer*, about Miles Malleon's 1933 play *Yours Unfaithfully* (through February 18 at the Beckett Theatre at Theatre Row), which at that time had been published but not produced. "The subject is treated delightfully, with humor and kindness and without any dogmatic conclusion," Russell wrote of the play. "The characters behave as real people do behave, and not according to some convention of the theatre." What Russell neglected to mention, however, is that the play appears to draw inspiration from the behavior of (among others) . . . Russell.

Malleon, sixteen years Russell's junior and like the older man a Cantabrigian, made something of a stir at Emmanuel College as an undergraduate, where a Conservative MP named G. B. Haddock was scheduled to appear to make a speech setting out the traditionalist case for women at a Cambridge Debating Society event. When Haddock unexpectedly canceled his appearance, Malleon told the event organizer not to fret: He would simply take the politician's place. Malleon got himself made up as a much older man and gave a speech in the MP's stead that was taken at face value by the local papers. So impressed by this episode were Malleon's parents that they gave their blessing when he announced he intended to continue his studies at drama school. Malleon would go on to have a lengthy if not particu-

larly distinguished career as a stage and screen actor and writer, appearing in such films as *Kind Hearts and Coronets* (1949) and *The Importance of Being Earnest* (1952).

After being invalidated out of the army in 1914, Malleon befriended Russell during the latter's series of anti-war lectures for the No-Conscription Fellowship. He turned out to be a friend with a benefit: the playwright didn't mind that his wife had an affair with the great logician. An associate member of the NCF was Malleon's wife Constance, an Irish actress better known under her stage name Colette O'Neil, who began with full spousal blessing to have an affair with Russell. At the time Russell was estranged from his first wife, Alys, but romantically entangled with the patron of the arts Ottoline Morrell and T. S. Eliot's then-wife, Vivienne.

Malleon seems to have been very much simpatico with Russell. According to the self-published memoir *Discovering the Family of Miles Malleon, 1888 to 1969* by his second son, Andrew, Miles spent "a year and a half" writing a book, apparently never published, entitled *Why I Am Not a Christian*. Russell's famously incendiary pamphlet of the same name appeared in 1927. Malleon and his second wife, Joan, sent their first son, Nicky, to the strange progressive boarding school Beacon Hill, which Russell and his second wife, Dora, founded and ran out of their country residence.

Malleon and Russell's view that open marriage was a satisfying rebuke to prevailing morality—healthy, non-hypocritical, modern,

rationalist—is one espoused by the play’s central figure, a restless young intellectual, Stephen (Max von Essen), who wins the approval of his wife of eight years, Anne (Elisabeth Gray), to have a soul-revivifying affair with her friend, a vivacious widow named Diana (Mikaela Izquierdo). Stephen isn’t quite proud enough of what he has done to inform his stern father, the Rev. Canon Meredith (John Hutton), but the canon finds out anyway.

The play must have been quite a lively number for its time, indeed entirely too lively, because despite its hard-won sagacity and its publication in an era when “free love” and “open marriage” were of much interest to the chattering classes in London and elsewhere, *Yours Unfaithfully* (not to be confused with the 1948 Preston Sturges film *Unfaithfully Yours*) has never been produced anywhere until now, by the noble revivalists at the Mint Theater Co., who make a specialty of exhuming forgotten plays.

Russell seems to have been as wrong about the play as he was about uncommitted marriages, world government, and capitalism. Far from being in any way delightful, the play is placid and staid on its surface—it mostly takes place in a well-appointed drawing room with birds chirping in the garden behind—but torments roil just beneath. The emotional pain grows lacerating, building to a shudder-inducing final line that sends one staggering out of the theater. Malleeson was by the time he wrote *Yours Unfaithfully* entirely undeceived about the toxicity of what he had done, and Stephen receives a fearsome education in the importance of fidelity.

Stephen, an unhappy sort who (like Russell) starts an experimental progressive school with his wife and who (like Russell) chafes at religion, persuades Anne that a love affair would be a tonic to treat his general despond. She agrees with little hesitation, but almost immediately begins to have misgivings. “I. Am. Jealous,” she plaintively admits to a doctor friend, Alan (Todd Cerveris) who turns out also to be her ex-lover, one of two she took with Stephen’s full approval before he ever strayed. His response when she first proposed adultery, she says, was “right-ho.”

But jealousy, she reasons, can simply be treated, even erased. What’s a little emotional suffering when such a grand, sophisticated principle is at stake? “There’s a certain satisfaction living up to what one believes,” she says. She never loved anyone but Stephen, she allows, but the affair seems to be perking him up a bit, and what is love if not the profound need to ensure the happiness of the loved one?

Anne sounds very much like Russell himself. In a letter to his second wife, Dora, written amid an American lecture tour in which he embarked on several casual affairs, he wrote, “I don’t feel I should be jealous about anything you did in my absence because I shouldn’t feel it showed a preference of others to me. And altogether when people are as secure as you & I are, jealousy is impossible.” Not long after writing these words, according to Russell’s biographer Ray Monk, Russell became impotent with Dora. Psychologically he was deeply wounded as he began to discover the strength of her affair with a writer named Roy Randall. Although Russell himself was having an affair with his children’s Swiss governess, Alice Stücki, he suggested a truce and begged for mutual fidelity: “It was all a folly,” Russell wrote. “And here we are landed each with a lover, & no possibility of happiness till that state of affairs is over . . . I should be infinitely happier if we could get back to having only each other.”

The sophistry used to defend open marriage was so common in the period that Malleeson’s play would have been bracing and essential at the time, though one imagines producers rejecting it on grounds of raciness or prurience. In fact it’s nothing of the sort but a corrective, a reminder that some notions are so fatuous that only intellectuals could possibly believe them. Stephen, who at the end of the second act of this three-act play is forced to defend himself after the canon finds out about the affair from a neighbor, gradually becomes convinced, strictly on utilitarian grounds, that he must forsake his girlfriend because the affair is causing undue sorrow to his wife. The canon, saluting this decision, congratulates his son and the men repair the rift, preparing to return to their shared passion of cricket-

ing. It is when the canon exclaims joyously that religion-based morality has carried the day that Stephen's brow darkens, marking a disquieting end to the act.

In Act III, set in a London flat that Stephen (it turns out) is continuing to use for assignations with Diana, Anne visits when he is absent but reveals to Alan (a thinly-drawn figure who stands as a surrogate for the audience, a listener to whom the principals can describe their thinking) that she is coming apart. With a flourish, she writes a note for Stephen informing him not to wait up for her. She met a man briefly at a social function and readily agreed to spend an evening with him, an evening she has determined in advance shall be extended into a night.

Malleson published *Yours Unfaithfully* at a particularly sordid moment, apparently one of profound reflection about what his blitheness toward marriage had done to his family. He had just walked away from his toddler, Andrew, born two years earlier, in 1931. In the years before that, Joan's "open marriage started to get to her. She did not really enjoy her own affairs, and Miles' affairs, much to her surprise, caused her intense distress," writes Andrew in his book, noting dryly that he was conceived when the couple tried to patch things up on a holiday in Rome. Halfway through the pregnancy, Miles announced that he was leaving Joan for another woman, and Joan fell into a deep depression. "She wanted to kill both herself and me," writes Andrew. In 1956, long after the play's publication, she completed the former goal. The official cause of death was listed as a heart attack while swimming in Fiji, but, Andrew writes, "not for one moment did I believe it. Joan had always told us that if her depression became unmanageable she would inject herself with a large dose of insulin and swim out to sea. The cause of her death would remain undiscovered."

Not having known any of this going in, I nevertheless found the play bleak, chilling, and pointed. Today, if anything, its truths are so self-evident that they hardly need restating. Who would make the case for open marriage now? No one who intends to stay married. It's a shame 1933 didn't get this play, because 1933

needed it. Malleson would go on to have a successful third marriage, but it appears that Russell never did learn his lesson and continued to treat marriage with the same boulevardier superficiality with which he seems to have approached this harrowing work. "Of course I am happy," he told reporters as he began his fourth marriage, the only non-disastrous one, at the age of eighty. "How can one fail to enjoy life so long as the glands are in good working order?" No wonder Russell's women were serially frustrated and angered. What must it have been like to be on the receiving end of his pillow talk? "Darling, you activate my glands."

Despite the reference to New York City's most-loathed borough in its title, *A Bronx Tale* (at the Longacre Theatre) is not a show for New Yorkers. It was evidently conceived and executed for visitors derisively known in the trade as "tourists" or "the bridge-and-tunnel crowd," otherwise known as "typical Americans." At the end of a press-night performance of the show, it seemed to me that nearly all of the patrons who had paid for their tickets (the ones in the rear and in the balconies) were on their feet, applauding wildly, whereas the privileged few who had free tickets struck an attitude of grudging politeness.

*A Bronx Tale*, directed by Robert De Niro and Jerry Zaks, is notably bereft of most of the elements that Broadway professionals find fascinating. It doesn't, for instance, offer anything much in the way of camp, a reflex of which I am particularly unfond, and though it does touch on a social issue (racism), it doesn't approach the matter in the schematic, virtue-signaling way you would expect. Its comic interludes are actually funny, derived from well-lathed punchlines and expert timing. "On warm summer nights," reflects one resident, "all through the neighborhood you would hear the sound of young Italian men romancing their women." The next line heard is this one: "Marie, get'n the f—ing car." The book strives not for "relevance" but for craftsmanship. In other words, it's an unapologetic throwback, and I loved it.

The title may sound familiar: the show is derived from the 1993 film, starring Chazz

Palminteri and De Niro and directed by the latter. The movie in turn was based on Palminteri's autobiographical one-man off-Broadway show, which debuted in 1989. Palminteri wrote the book and shares his real name, Calogero, with the protagonist, initially a nine-year-old boy (played with irrepressible pep worthy of Mickey Rooney by Hudson Loverro) who, in 1960, witnesses a shocking murder on the street but learns not to reveal the name of the murderer, a low-level Mafia figure known and feared throughout the neighborhood. The mobster, Sonny (Nick Cordero, who is merely adequate), takes a liking to the boy, whom he credits with bringing him good luck in crap games and rewards with his blessing as well as \$100 bills—C-notes. Calogero, now restyled as “C,” becomes a strutting young prince of the pavement, showered with favors and displays of respect by his terrorized neighbors. The fruit peddler has peaches for his mom, the Coke at the drugstore counter is free. To be a young adjunct hoodlum is bliss.

Yet there is a voice that warns that all of this is simply soul-coruscating corruption in its insidious early stage. C's father, Lorenzo (ably played by Richard H. Blake), is an honest bus driver so fastidious that he keeps the top button of his uniform fastened even when it's ninety-nine degrees. Though he was the one who steered Calogero away from (suicidally) identifying Sonny as the murderer on the street when his son was a little boy, he has otherwise kept his distance from the rackets and declined an opportunity to enrich himself by participating in numbers running for Sonny. This time, furious with his boy's increasingly insouciant attitude toward distinguishing right from wrong, Lorenzo confronts the mobster and tries to save his boy from the moral rot of association with crime. After innumerable mafia movies that broach the topic of gang-

sterism with breezy amorality, often turning mayhem into slapstick, Palminteri's insistence that mobsters are not pinstriped charmers but villains is inspiring. In his neighborhood, at that time, it took genuine moral courage simply not to become an associate wiseguy.

Matters are further complicated by the appearance of the race divisions that were just beginning to form in the Bronx, before the late-'60s urban meltdown triggered two decades of white flight to the suburbs. When Calogero falls for a black girl, Jane (a sweet Ariana DeBose), Palminteri designs Act II along the lines of *West Side Story* just as Act I hearkens back to *Jersey Boys* (with a soupçon of *Guys and Dolls*). Unusually for a Broadway show, though, *A Bronx Tale* doesn't commit moral anachronism by imposing twenty-first-century values on the early 1960s. Lorenzo strongly disapproves of the interracial relationship at a time when the vast majority of Americans agreed with him. I expected the book to rain fire and brimstone on Lorenzo, but he isn't treated with contempt. He is, Palminteri realizes, simply a flawed man of his generation: *autres temps, autres moeurs*. Not to insist on imposing today's views on the past requires a certain level of artistic maturity that is rather more admirable than the platitudinous sanctimony that mars so many Broadway productions.

In a flirtatious moment Jane asks Calogero, “Why do you always wear that?” “Every guy in my neighborhood wears a hat like this,” he replies. She says, “Here, try it like this,” and removes the hat. When he asks how he looks, she says, “Like you're different from every guy in the neighborhood.” *A Bronx Tale* may revisit well-trodden ground while cribbing motifs from Broadway classics, but there's just enough tweaking of convention that, like Calogero minus the hat, it's fresh and handsome.

## Medardo Rosso at the Pulitzer

by *Karen Wilkin*

Not long ago, saying “Medardo Rosso” (1858–1928) on this side of the Atlantic would usually provoke vague looks and noncommittal noises. Rosso is still not the most familiar name in the history of Modernism, yet today, at least in museum-going circles, there’s a good chance that he’ll be identified as a pioneering Italian Modernist sculptor. In part, this is because of the wide-ranging 2015 show of his work at New York’s Center for Italian Modern Art (CIMA) and this past spring’s exhibition of bronzes at Peter Freeman Gallery, Soho. Or we might hear “Wasn’t there something of his towards the end of ‘Unfinished’ at Met Breuer?” But artists almost always know who Rosso is and, for anyone engaged by the course of Modernism, he looms large. His sculptures, with their ambiguous images and richly inflected, light-responsive surfaces, are unlike anything made by even the most adventurous of his contemporaries. It’s not an overstatement to describe Rosso’s self-imposed mission as a paradoxical effort to make light dematerialize sculptural form. His deceptively casual, suggestive heads and (occasional) figures seem to emerge from inchoate matter under the pressure of our gaze, as if coming into being only temporarily, before dissolving into something unidentifiable once again. These remarkable works posit ideas about what sculpture could be, conceptually, formally, and technically, that were radically new in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries and remain compelling today. Yet while Rosso is increasingly acclaimed by initiates, he remains less familiar to the general

art-loving public than his striking originality would seem to warrant.

It can be argued, of course, that Rosso has always been problematic. His singular approach made him controversial in his own day—so much so that he left his native Italy to spend three decades in Paris, in pursuit of a more sympathetic reception. He was admired by artists, including Auguste Rodin, yet he was also overshadowed by the French master, who was almost a generation older and already a public institution by the time the younger Italian arrived in Paris, in 1889. In our own day, seeing sculpture by this maverick Modernist has required determination and a willingness to travel. European museums, mostly in Italy, have had examples of his work for some time (although not always on view), but very few American institutions did. To make things more difficult, even when Rosso was represented in a collection, it was often by a single sculpture, and large exhibitions, especially in the United States, were extremely infrequent—which is why the 2015 show at CIMA remains so memorable. His first major museum showing in the United States, at New York’s Museum of Modern Art, was in 1963, and it was not until four decades later, in 2003, that a sharply focused study of five of Rosso’s major themes was seen at the Harvard University Museums, in St. Louis, and in Dallas.

Now, however, through May 13, 2017, “Medardo Rosso: Experiments in Light and Form,” at the Pulitzer Arts Foundation, St. Louis, offers a spectacular overview of the achievement

of this elusive master.<sup>1</sup> Organized by Sharon Hecker, a leading international expert on Rosso, and the Pulitzer's Associate Curator, Tamara H. Schenkenberg, it's the largest and most comprehensive exhibition of the artist's work presented to date by an American museum. Twenty-six works made between 1882 and 1906, in various materials, drawn from public and private collections across Europe and the United States, many of them rarely exhibited and several mounted on Rosso's own bases, make clear the evolution of the artist's imagery, his use of repetition, and his inventive explorations of technical possibilities. It's a more complete retrospective than these dates suggest; in the latter part of his working life, Rosso developed no new motifs, but instead tested the limits of variation by manipulating and sometimes subtly altering older images and casting them in different materials. The exhibition's multiple versions of several motifs, in different materials, accentuate this aspect of Rosso's process, during his most productive period.

The emphasis is on his decades in Paris, the most significant part of his career, but there are also important examples of works from his early years in Milano. There's an ample, interesting group of drawings (as there was at CIMA), although few are direct preparations for sculptures. More revealing is the selection of Rosso's photographs of his sculptures (again, as there was at CIMA). He was, like his friend and neighbor in Paris Edgar Degas, an early enthusiast of the medium. Unlike the CIMA show, which stressed Rosso's photographs as independent compositions (he often used his sculptures as protagonists in views of interiors), the photos at the Pulitzer Foundation show him concentrating on the effects of light on form. These often eccentrically cropped images suggest how Rosso wanted his works to be approached and studied—which frequently turns out to be from unexpected, sometimes oblique viewpoints. These suggestions are honored by the installation at the Pulitzer;

<sup>1</sup> "Medardo Rosso: Experiments in Light and Form" opened at the Pulitzer Arts Foundation, St. Louis, on November 11, 2016 and remains on view through May 13, 2017.

while just about all the pieces can be seen from all sides, our initial encounter is often from the angle dictated by the artist's photographs.

The Pulitzer Foundation's elegant Tadeo Ando building, with its beautifully proportioned galleries and floods of subtle light, sometimes reflected off the shallow pool outside, is an ideal setting for these modest-sized, expressively textured sculptures. The near-domestic scale of the galleries allows us to develop a close relationship with the works, at the same time that we are permitted occasional long views, while the exquisitely crafted, silken, pale concrete of Ando's walls provides a sensuous contrast to the inflected surfaces of Rosso's sculptures. The unstable daylight of the ground floor exhibition spaces seems to have been purposely devised for the installation, but even the works in the artificially lit lower level galleries look fine. And thanks to an interactive panel, we can even adjust the lighting on a bronze cast of the enigmatic *Ecce Puer (Behold the Child)* (1906), sharpening or blurring the minimally indicated face conjured up behind a transparent, pleated "veil" now accentuating the delicate striations that obscure the child's soft features, now heightening our awareness of mass and bulk. Rosso probably would have loved this, given his appetite for technological innovation and, as the informative catalogue reminds us, the fact that the start of his life as an artist coincided with the change from gaslight to electric light.

The exhibition begins with *Portinaia (Conciergerie)* (1883–84), the downward-turned head of a notably ordinary woman, the lower part of her face almost buried by the hints of her chest and hunched shoulders. Made while Rosso was still in Milan, before he left for Paris, the piece reads at once as both notably lifelike and extremely free. We are in the presence of someone we would recognize, despite the absence of conventional details. The translucency of the wax implies the character of flesh, but the modeling of the woman's blunt features is so relaxed and broad that the vivid characterization of a familiar urban figure seems ephemeral. It's this quality of elusiveness—a sense of disembodiment that we would ex-

pect impossible for figurative sculpture in the round to achieve—that distinguishes Rosso’s work. There’s nothing comparable until Alberto Giacometti’s attenuated figures appear to make the space around them as significant as the sculptures themselves. The sensation is rather like seeing things in the dark; if we look directly at an object, absent light, it becomes unintelligible, but if we look slightly away, we gain a sense of what is there, at the edge of our sensory capabilities. Rosso appears to present us with momentary glimpses of his subjects, fragments of perception temporarily stilled, but not entirely clarified.

A group of the sculptor’s sometimes irregularly shaped photographs of *Portinaia*, made under different kinds of lighting and from different angles, intensifies our impressions, so that when we approach the next works on view, three versions of the mysterious, early *Carne altrui (Flesh of Others)* (all 1883–84), in different materials, we are sensitized to the various ways bronze, plaster, and wax react to light, as well as to the differences in cropping and the angle of presentation of each version. The close-up head of a young, sleeping prostitute, surrounded by forms that suggest both an embrace and bedding, changes dramatically, depending on the properties of the material in which it is cast. We will see this repeatedly. Rosso continually recycled images, casting them himself in different materials (and inviting his admirers to witness these “performances”). He often altered the original motif in some way each time, changing, for example, the proportions of the elements supporting a head or bust, and reveling in the unplanned variations created by “imperfections” in the resulting casts: rough edges, mold-marks, interruptions in the flow of molten bronze, fluid wax, or liquid plaster, all of which conventional foundries would have carefully eliminated. As the catalogue points out, it is this visible memory of a complex, imperfect method that creates the nervous surfaces of Rosso’s sculptures, not, as in the work of Rodin, the action of the hand. Rosso’s emphasis on materiality and process (which he shared with both Rodin and Degas) is part of his modernity. His use of wax and plaster for finished works is, in itself,

a refutation of established assumptions about sculpture and a declaration for the modern. Both wax and plaster, traditionally, are materials used in preparing works to be cast in bronze, not adopted for their own qualities. Rosso was thoroughly familiar with foundry procedures; the bronzes he made in Milan were cast by professionals there, from whom he learned enough to do his own casting later on. But he rejected traditional methods, just as he did traditional standards of finish.

Rosso’s sculptures’ often startling lack of full three-dimensionality is another challenge to the expected. Some of his most apparently volumetric works seem, on longer acquaintance, to have only two and a half dimensions. In the nearly abstract bronze version of the Paris-period *Enfant au sein (Child at the Breast)* (late 1889–90), the child is a rounded, head-like mass, pressed against the mother’s swelling breast. (A photograph of a plaster version shows the mother complete with head and shoulders; the dramatic alteration in the sculpture’s focus subverts the literal and heightens emotion.) From a frontal view, the image, while fragmentary, appears relatively solid, but we soon discover that *Enfant au sein*, like many of Rosso’s most eloquent works, is hollow and relief-like—a revelation of the history of its making and of the artifice of representation, in general, that intensifies the effect of transience. Rosso sometimes subverts this sense of the insubstantial by filling the hollow backs of his relief-like sculptures with masses of plaster, emphasizing three-dimensional presence but doing little to increase naturalism.

Some works, such as *Enfant au sein*, are so elusive that it’s difficult to imagine how they were seen at the time they were made. Others, such as the head *Bambino ebreo (Jewish Boy)* (1892–94), are fairly explicit. We learn that Rosso thought particularly highly of *Bambino ebreo*, selling more casts of the work than any of his other Parisian sculptures and giving examples to friends, critics, and collectors. Knowing this should make us value Rosso’s more naturalistic images more highly, but to present-day eyes, other works dominate. Witness *Une Conversation (A Conversation)* (1892–



99), a fully three-dimensional group of three barely suggested figures, two seated women and a standing man. This extraordinary plaster verges on abstractness, yet somehow the proportions and rhythms of the rough-hewn elements, pulled out of a connecting horizontal mass, allow us to interpret them as rapid, soft-focus allusions to particular characters at a particular moment in time. The small, intense *Malato al ospedale (Sick Man in the Hospital)* (1889), with its slumped figure merged into single, tense, expressive form with the chair, is another standout. So is the astonishing portrait *Madame Noblet* (ca. 1897–98), a roughly shaped plaster block in which we, almost unwillingly, read an improbably specific face, hair, and a suggestion of clothing; a lump becomes a shoulder. Equally extreme is another head of a child, *Enfant à la bouchée de pain (Child in the Soup Kitchen)* (1892–97), a bronze, in which Rosso has deliberately retained traces of the plaster used in casting, turning the pale, loose patches on the surround from which the child's face emerges into a near-painterly evocation of steam-filled air. Leonardo da Vinci,

comparing painting and sculpture, claimed sculpture to be the inferior art, since it could show only the shapes of things, not effects of transparency and atmosphere. Unlike the sculptor, Leonardo wrote, the painter “can depict mists through which the shapes of things can only be discerned with difficulty.” The best of Rosso’s fascinating, visually hard-to-grasp, compelling sculptures can read as having been designed to prove his distinguished compatriot and predecessor wrong.

“Medardo Rosso: Experiments in Light and Form” will not be seen anywhere but the Pulitzer Arts Foundation. While other shows (and collections) have relied on authorized posthumously cast bronzes, made under the supervision of the artist’s son, this exhibition includes only works made in Rosso’s lifetime, usually entirely by himself. The extreme fragility of many sculptures on view makes it remarkable that they were able to travel in the first place. For anyone who cares about modern sculpture—or about good art, in general—the exhibition is not to be missed. Book a trip to St. Louis before mid-May.

# Adam on the Thames

by Benjamin Riley

Of all the sobriquets applied to Robert Adam (1728–1792), the most elucidative of his work in London—drawings of which are on view at the Soane through March 11—may be the one he gave himself: “Bob the Roman.”<sup>1</sup> Adam had traveled to Rome as part of the scrum of young gentlemen seeking a classical education *in situ*, but unlike most of these dabblers he was not a young milord. Indeed, though Adam occasionally affected noble pretensions in Rome—“a good lie well timed sometimes does well” he wrote, damningly—he was there on official business as the shepherd of Charles Hope-Weir, a younger son of the Earl of Hopetoun, whose country manse Adam’s father William had helped design and build. Once having arrived in Rome, Adam took to studying the monuments of antiquity: “I hope to have my ideas greatly enlarged and my taste formed upon the solid foundation of genuine antiquity . . . my whole conception of architecture will become much more noble than I could have ever attained by staying in Britain.”

Rome was to prove Adam’s great tutor, the source of his most solid architectural ideas, though he was sure to warn his family not to address letters to him with the phrase “architect” appended to his name, the social stigma being too much for the vain young buck to bear. Though he eventually fell out with Hope, Adam installed himself in a rarefied milieu of

British gentlemen, taking quarters at the Casa Guarnieri, where the Duke of Bridgewater and Robert Wood, the antiquarian, were staying. Adam seems to have preferred the company of his countrymen to that of the native Italians, remarking in a letter to his sisters that “this country abounds in vermin of all ranks who, when they have no stranger to steal from, rob one another.”

He spent much of his time in Rome sketching under the tutelage of Clérissseau and Piranesi, with Piranesi even dedicating his book of *vedute* of the Campus Martius to Robert. His letters home reveal Rome to have been a heady mix of nobles and architects, the latter of whom would go on to be his competitors in London and for whom Robert rarely had a kind word.

Of William Chambers, whose Somerset House was built not far from Adam’s Adelphi Terrace, “His taste is more architectonic than picturesque. . . . His sense is middling but his appearance is genteel.” On the then-penurious Mylne brothers, “They have neither money nor education to make themselves known to strangers . . . few people know there are such lads in Rome, but as they apply very closely and will undoubtedly make considerable progress, one does not know what may be the consequence with the fickle, new-fangled, ignorant Scotch nobles and gentles who may prefer them to people of more taste and judgement.”

There is no doubt who those people of taste and judgement are. On James “Athenian” Stu-

1 “Robert Adam’s London” opened at Sir John Soane’s Museum, London, on November 30, 2016 and remains on view through March 11, 2017.

art, the man who was to become his principal London rival, Adam offered the scathing verdict: “pityfullisimo.” Adam, doubtless, had no shortage of confidence. But even as Roman life drained him, he never lost his sense of humor. His letters are filled with comical references to his bibulous and lecherous manservant Donald, to whom he consistently referred as either “The King of Sleep” or simply “The King.” “He drinks nothing but wine and eats more in a day than he used to do in a week and is turned very fat. He’ll take but caukly [stiff] we hame again [before we are home], silly man.”

Adam’s final days in Rome were spent in an orgy of work and socializing, having taken a box at the opera while simultaneously undertaking a program of sketching Rome’s baths, to be reproduced in a book that would “attack Vitruvius, Palladio, and those blackguards of ancient and modern architecture, sword in hand.” The book never appeared, but Adam maintained his renegade streak through his career. His Roman adventure came to an end by spring 1757: Adam declared that “when a man can no longer make the same figure in the same town it is surely much more advisable to live like a scrub in another.” Of course Adam could never live like a scrub—he exited Rome in a green chariot. Stops in Florence, Bologna, Padua, and Venice were mere prelude to the trip that would make Adam’s career—his visit to Diocletian’s palace at Spalatro (now Split, Croatia). At Spalatro Adam saw the ruins of the Roman Emperor’s palace, grandly fronting the Adriatic, a vision which would inspire much of his later work in London and which provided the basis for a popular book of sketches. The ruins, “not only picturesque, but magnificent,” spurred Adam’s desire to complete a project on a similarly grand scale in London—a chance he would have years later in the Adelphi development.

The Adelphi represents at once the zenith and the nadir of the Adam career in London. While it was the realization of Adam’s ambition for a grand urban project, it was also nearly the undoing of his nascent career and a source of great shame. The drawing presented here (*ca.* 1768–69) of the Royal Terrace, the Adelphi’s

riverfront, palatial block of houses, shows the scale of Adam’s imagination. A monumental central block with thirty-three bays, which conceals eleven houses with the end and central houses ornamented with palmette strips running the length of the elevation, the design mimics the majestic waterfront palace that Adam had seen in Spalatro and adapts it to Georgian needs. As impressive as the Adelphi design is, the moneymaking scheme attached to it would have been even more remarkable, had it not been an abject failure. The Adam brothers—for the architectural firm in London was a family concern—had taken the lease of the Adelphi site for ninety-nine years from the penurious Duke of St Albans, in debtors’ exile in Brussels, and thought at the time they had gotten rather a good deal. They borrowed heavily to build the houses, allegedly employing fellow Scots to build quickly to the sound of bagpipers.

The rent on the houses would make a fine sum, but the scheme rested on the construction of wharves beneath the Royal Terrace, which the brothers intended to rent to the Ordnance Board. Securing permission to build the wharves was a task in itself, requiring a special Act of Parliament and nominally usurping the City’s patrimony. Censorious comment was swift in coming:

Four Scotchmen by the name of Adams,  
Who keep their coaches and their madams,  
Quoth John, in sulky mood to Thomas,  
“Have stole the very river from us.”

The Adam brothers were already begrudged as Scotsmen, and especially so as friends of the Earl of Bute, the former Prime Minister, loathed by many of London’s English. When the Ordnance Board declined to rent the wharves, the Adams were left at sixes and sevens. Although the houses were let as expected, with David Garrick taking the first residence, the loss of the wharf income, coupled with a run on Scottish banks, put the success of the scheme in jeopardy. The ever-cunning Adams devised a new plan to rescue the development. They would distribute the remaining unrented houses via a lottery, also requiring an Act of

Parliament, and simultaneously auction off at Christie's the antiquities Robert had accumulated on the Continent. Despised by many for their opportunism in the wharf plan, the brothers invited more opprobrium with the lottery. Horace Walpole, always the wasp, sarcastically remarked: "What patronage of the arts in Parliament, to vote the City's land to these brothers, and then sanctify the sale of the houses by a bubble." Despite the shame of the lottery, the requisite funds were raised and the Adelphi development was saved. That the brothers themselves won a number of tickets, allowing them to retain the leases to many of the Adelphi buildings, was convenient, if highly suspicious. The project was salvaged, but the Adams' reputations were significantly damaged—they would never work in London on a similar scale again.

Even with the calumny surrounding the project, the Adelphi stood as a bold essay in a new style of London building. Contemporary comment surrounding the architecture was mostly favorable, with one observer exclaiming that the Adelphi comprised "serious and monumental structures. They could make us wish that Robert Adam had designed Imperial Delhi!" Not all were so pleased. Walpole moaned that the buildings were "laced down the seams, like a soldier's trull in a regimental old coat." But if the buildings were controversial then, they seem now to be a stunningly original and influential model. Thomas Cubitt's work in Belgravia—notably Eaton and Belgrave Squares—represents the apotheosis of the palace-front trend, and owes a great deal to Adam's daring work at the Adelphi (not least the ascension of stucco, which Adam pioneered). Ultimately, Adam's major achievement was his translation of Roman antecedents into a cosmopolitan London style, cleverly referencing classical models while not slavishly parroting them.

While Adam's exteriors worked off his Roman models, his interiors are arguably more original formulations—energetic expressions of a classicizing idiom without concern for pesky notions of "authenticity" that might plague contemporary practitioners. His ceilings, well-represented here, are masterpieces

of color and pattern, their pastel sorbet-like tones forming abstract confections that must have delighted owners fortunate enough to have them installed in their houses. The most striking design included here is from Northumberland House (1770), the London seat of the Percys that fronted the Strand until its 1874 demolition. A rare Adam use of glass, the ceiling centers on a circular medallion peopled by muses, which is in turn framed by a banded octagon, alternating Etruscan tracery and scalloped fans, which leads out to more tracery, half-lunettes, and an almost roped golden border. If the design sounds complicated, that's because it is—the whole tableau is magnificently labyrinthine, an exercise in exuberance. Though said to be inspired by work at the Villa Madama outside Rome, the polychrome ceiling, which complemented more colored glass in the Northumberland House drawing room, is all Adam—an audacious rendering of disparate elements into a coherent, fecund whole.

There is an air of nostalgia that hangs about the show, a muffled lament for London's lost buildings. Though the Blitz cost London many of its treasures, a number of Adam buildings were lost for a less sinister but equally disruptive reason: London's expansion. Northumberland House was pulled down to connect new roads to the Victoria Embankment. Lansdowne House was poked in 1930 by the creation of Fitzmaurice Place, which connected Curzon Street and Berkeley Square. Number 20 Soho Square was demolished in 1924 to make room for a double-fronted office building with a massive Doric portico, a brutal and unfeeling replacement for the comparatively reticent Adam façade that stood there from 1771. Most notably, the Adelphi's Royal Terrace was demolished to make way for the "New Adelphi," a towering piece of Art Deco, which the Pevsner guide rightly calls "savagely ungraceful . . . in a transatlantic commercial idiom." London's ascendance was bad news for the stock of Adam buildings, as it was for the Georgian era as a whole. Private houses in prime locations were too valuable to keep up; it is difficult

to justify a home where offices could sit, and it is equally difficult to convert eighteenth-century domestic spaces into places where paper can be efficiently pushed.

The survival of Number 20 St James's Square is therefore even more remarkable. After multiple twentieth-century commercial owners, the freehold has once again been purchased by a private owner who plans to reconvert the structure to domestic use. Through its various owners, the building's interiors have been preserved, a stroke of good fortune. The plans for the building are on show here and give a feel for an overlooked aspect of Adam's architecture. While justifiably lauded for his sense of external "movement" in façades, there is a graceful sense of procession at work in his floorplans too. Square drawing rooms give way to apsidal parlors, all patterned with exquisite moldings, painted panels by Zucchi, Wedgwood tablets, and scagliola chimneypieces. Adam interiors are classical phantasms, wholly unsuited for our stripped-down modern age, and for that even more charming. His gift for variation—both in ornament and in building plan—though clearly of an era now lost, still beguiles the contemporary observer.

With over 9,000 drawings in its Adam volume, it seems unlikely the Soane will run out of new drawings to exhibit for the foreseeable future and as long as the museum keeps organizing shows as clever and expository as this one, there is no reason the drawings should ever go back in the vault. Frances Sands, the Soane's curator of Adam drawings, has done an admirable job in pulling together a compelling set of material from the nearly endless Adam archive. The inclusion of Richard Horwood's 1792–99 map of London, which is dotted with numbers corresponding to the drawings and displayed in the show's first room, is an immensely useful guide, allowing the visitor to place Adam's extensive work in geographical context. Sir John Soane's Museum is one of London's treasure boxes, and this show is a gleaming example of the Museum's potential to produce tightly edited shows around a single topic. We can hope for many more in the future.

## Exhibition notes

“Francis Picabia:  
Our Heads Are Round so Our  
Thoughts Can Change Direction”  
The Museum of Modern Art, New York.  
November 21, 2016–March 19, 2017

“Francis Picabia: Our Heads Are Round so Our Thoughts Can Change Direction” makes the twentieth century seem very small. At least that's the observation I came to upon exiting MOMA's sizable retrospective of paintings, drawings, collages, and ephemera by the self-described “beautiful monster.” The exhibition begins with early forays into Post-Impressionism, and follows with a succession of catch-as-catch-can styles: offshoots of Cubism; diagrammatic paeans to the machine; obtuse riffs on Ingres; a louche Suprematism; absurdist experimentations in film and theater; “monster” couples rendered in gloss and globs; Biblical imagery applied in washy overlays; oil-on-canvas appropriations of nudie magazines; and abstractions that are all thumbs, scabbled surfaces, and graffitied genitalia. There are additional byways: out-of-left-field pictures of clowns, *The Spanish Revolution*, Gertrude Stein, and Marlene Dietrich. What really counts is how art and culture, and with them the sweep of history, are rendered frivolous: trifles on the way to oblivion. Individual works of art are less important than the individual himself. How could the twentieth century not take a backseat to, in Picabia's estimation, the “only complete artist”?

Organized by MOMA's Anne Umland and Catherine Hug of the Kunsthau Zürich, “Our Heads Are Round” showcases an artist for whom the adjective “mercurial” could have been coined. Picabia (1879–1953) took a proud and perverse pleasure in being impossible to pin down. In the standard tellings of Modernism, Picabia is listed somewhere alongside Surrealism and Dada; certainly, his contrarian wit is in keeping with the nose-thumbing antics of the latter. Still, even a quick jaunt through MOMA reveals that Picabia was (to paraphrase Groucho Marx) incapable of belonging to any anti-art club that accepted him as a member. Though he had ties to Dadaist circles in Paris, Zürich,

and New York City—among Picabia’s confidantes were Paul Éluard, André Breton, and Marcel Duchamp—petty politicking among the group’s members prompted him to jump ship. “I was feeling stifled among them . . . [and] terribly bored.” Picabia formed “Instantism” as a response, but the one-man art movement was little more than a jape. Besides, Picabia knew which way the Dadaist wind blew. The movement, he predicted, “will live forever! And thanks to it, art dealers will make a fortune.”

Picabia could afford to be flighty. His father was a Cuban-born descendant of Spanish nobility; his mother a scion of the French upper-classes. Between the sugar interests of the former and the successful mercantile family on his maternal side, François Marie Martinez Picabia y Davanne grew up in, and sustained, a life of affluence. The young Picabia was encouraged in art by his parents and proved precocious in talent and chutzpah. As a child, he forged the family’s art collection, subsequently selling the originals and replacing them with his own copies. *And no one noticed.* So the story goes, but it’s best to take Picabia’s sundry anecdotes, aphorisms, and pronunciamientos with the requisite grain of salt. His was a temperament forever on the lookout for preconceptions to be thwarted and standards overturned; critical approbation was much desired. Known for throwing lavish soirées and indulging in mistresses, Picabia traveled widely but ultimately stayed close to home; he died in the Paris house in which he had been born. Not long before the end, Picabia quoted Nietzsche: “Where art ends . . . I am the poet of my own life.”

It is Picabia’s capricious brand of poetry that is being touted at MOMA, and in no small way. Writing in the catalogue, Umland heralds the “discordant” nature of Picabia’s work and how it “challenges distinctions between good and bad, progressive and regressive, sincerity and parody, high art and kitsch.” Before you go asking just when the shopworn notion of “challenging distinctions” will be permanently excised from the curatorial handbook, take heed of how Picabia’s varied output is “congruent to . . . our hierarchy-exploding digital age.” (In this regard, “Our Heads Are Round” continues in the theoretical

footsteps of “Forever Now,” MOMA’s misguided attempt at tapping into the technological zeitgeist.) There can be no doubting the reach of Picabia’s this-that-and-the-other-thing aesthetic amongst contemporary artists. The world-weary *pasticherie* of the ’80s art star David Salle is inconceivable without the example of Picabia’s “transparencies,” and any provocateur with the savvy both to manipulate and to flatter a paying public can count this consummate gadfly as spiritual kin. Picabia’s “irresistible, unruly, nonconformist genius,” we are told, “offers a powerful alternative model” for artists in the here-and-now. Powerful the model may be, but is it impolite to ask if the model is at all *good*?

“Our Heads Are Round” is an attempt at promoting Picabia up the totem pole of great artists in the cause of revamping the Modernist “narrative.” As played out in the catalogue, the chief obstacle and villain in this scenario is Pablo Picasso. Once MOMA’s poster boy, the Spanish master is now being placed in direct opposition to Picabia—the upshot being very much in the latter’s favor. “Old-fashioned” Pablo, don’t you know, “believed in his . . . godlike ability to reimagine the world.” Picabia, by contrast, put up the good fight by being *bad*, upending his gifts so that we attention-deprived denizens of the twenty-first century could feel better about our lowered expectations. What Umland and Hug miss (or ignore) is that arrogance comes in an assortment of flavors. Pissing away one’s talent in the cause of nihilistic hijinkery connotes its own peculiar kind of “godlike” virtuosity. And Picabia did have talent. Take into account *Udnie [Young American Girl: Dance]* and *Eda-tonis [Ecclesiastic]* (both 1913), monumental canvases that propel Cubism into a realm so allusive, muscular, elastic, and funny that they still startle. One can’t help but wonder if the crowning audacity of these encompassing masterworks spooked the artist. Easier to take the low road than risk anything quite so heroic again; better to fail by design than to come by it honestly. After this masterful one-two punch, “Our Heads Are Round” traces forty circuitous years of squandered promise. What a long and pointless trip it is.

—Mario Naves

“Paul Nash”

Tate Britain, London.

October 26, 2016–March 5, 2017

Paul Nash, who died in 1946, was one of the finest English landscape painters of the first half of the twentieth century. He painted what he had known and loved from his childhood, the gently rounded chalk hills to the west of London and above all the trees that grow there. Later he moved to live in Kent and subsequently Dorset where he recorded and captured these two very different parts of the South Coast. Some have claimed—and with reason—that he is the true heir to Constable, no artists between them having so well expressed the distinctive qualities of the English countryside.

Apart from forays to the French Riviera, where, taking advantage of its very un-English bright sunlight he produced *Blue House on the Shore* (1930), a sharp cube of a building, he worked almost entirely in southern England. He never painted the bleak, rugged, romantic mountains of Wales and Scotland, nor the industrial North of England. It's grim up north and also grimy. Not Nash country.

Yet there is also another nastier side to his work, for Nash was also a leading war artist. In World War I he saw the worst of the fighting in the mud of Flanders where he was stationed in the Ypres salient, and in World War II he watched and painted the Battle of Britain taking place in the air. These are perhaps the two most vividly remembered episodes in modern British military history. One of Nash's previous exhibitions was held in the Imperial War Museum, which has a notable collection of his work.

Before the First War, Nash was fascinated by the life of trees, which he saw as endowed with individual personalities. They are there in his watercolor *Wittenham Clumps* (1913), an Oxfordshire hill, crowned with beech trees. The hill's real name is Mother Dunch's Buttocks but a painting with that title might have been misunderstood so he wisely used the term provided in the official map of the area. The trees stand green against a vague English sky, offset by the tawny earth and the remains of the harvested corn in the fields below. The work is a masterpiece of soft color and also of shape, for the straight and vertical

trunks of the trees are in contrast to the gentle undulations of the hills. There are hills like this all over the chalklands of the south of England, often surmounted by tumps and ditches that indicate that there was once a Bronze or Iron Age settlement there. The turned earth with its flints and lumps of chalk is good for beech trees but bad for agriculture and so the dreamy Nash could have easily walked to the top. People go there to commune with their ancestors of thousands of years ago. This aspect touched Nash, who was also fascinated by the even older stone megaliths of the region. He wrote that the hills were “haunted by old gods, long forgotten.”

Everything changed for Nash with the outbreak of war in 1914. Soon he found himself painting the dead tree trunks that were all that was left of the woodlands around Ypres in Flanders after repeated bombardment by heavy artillery in a small area that also saw the death of so many British, Australian, and Canadian soldiers. Today it is much visited by history-conscious battlefield tourists, drawn also to the many war memorials and cemeteries.

The best-known of Nash's desolate pictures from this time is *The Menin Road* (1919). Here, the vertical slaughtered trees stand in ranks in a once-flat landscape, now made up of churned-up soil and shell holes full of water. It stretches as far as the threatening sky that fills the upper part of the painting. In the foreground are shattered pillboxes. Two soldiers in khaki uniforms that blend with the muddy ground pick their way cautiously through the damaged land, seeking a road that is no longer there.

Nash painted this in anger after he had himself worked close to the front line and known the death of many of his comrades. He wanted to speak for them to and against the people at home who were keen on the war. Nash's anger was an anger at war in general, but, a century later, when revisionist British historians are trying to rescue the reputations of their country's incompetent generals, we can see another aspect of the futility Nash experienced. Ypres, like Verdun, was a salient, a bulge protruding into the enemy line that was being held at enormous cost for largely symbolic reasons. Ypres was the last fragment of Belgium to be held by British troops, and Belgium was the country whose

invasion by Germany had given the British an excuse for entering the war in the first place. The problem with a salient is that the enemy can hit you from three sides. The rational thing to do is to prepare new defenses further back and straighten the line. *The Menin Road* and Nash's equally vivid pictures *The Ypres Salient at Night* (1918) and *Void* (1918) show what happens when you fail to do so. Nash's gentle watercolors have given way to his harsh, sometimes huge, oil paintings of the modern battlefield.

Nash was psychologically damaged by the stress of war, and indeed for a time suffered a nervous breakdown. In the 1920s his paintings of the Kent coast had become hard and angular and expressed his perceptions of a fragile and menaced world, as in *The Shore* (1923). Here he concentrates his attention not on nature but on the concrete sea walls and the long groins stretching far out into the sandy beach, a stark pattern of defenses against the invading sea. Nash's *Wall Against the Sea* (1922) conveys the same sense of a threatened shoreline, this time one of colorful natural beauty, that has to be defended. An island's boundaries are its shores.

Nash now came strongly under Continental influence in the form of surrealism and abstract art, and he also began to collect *objets trouvés*. Whatever the curators may think, it cannot be said that his ventures into these styles and ideas were very successful, and he gradually recovered his own personal vision. Where Nash did succeed was in incorporating aspects of these new schools into his traditional work on landscapes. Perhaps indeed he had anticipated the Continentals, for there is a distinctly surreal quality about his watercolor *The Pyramids in the Sea* (1912). When last I looked, the Pyramids were nowhere near the sea. Above them and lighting them is a new moon, holding the old one in its arms, a favorite image for Nash. In the distance is a conventional landscape, but in the foreground the smooth rise of the high curving waves comes right up to the sharp-edged triangles of the pyramids. One set of pure shapes confronts another. Sine waves meet Euclid.

There is more geometry in *The Rye Marshes* (1932), where square and oblong buildings look like a child's toy blocks and the acute angles of the canals have been overemphasized.

Even the white clouds have lost their ragged roundness and become orthodox trapeziums. *Harbour and Room* (1932–36) is indeed truly surreal, but it is also a geometrically rendered view towards the sea. *Objects in a Field* (1936) is not really improved by the objects. It is a very good field, a field given depth by a large and long segmented concrete trough that stretches from the viewer almost to the far side of the painting. The trough is based on a photograph of a real trough that he had made in the same year. At this time Nash was well known for his skill in photography as well as for his paintings. In *Equivalence for the Megaliths* (1935), he has placed abstract cylinders, ramps, and a screen in front of an archeologically informed portrayal of a mild English country prospect.

Soon Nash was once again a war artist, though many of his iconic portrayals of the aerial Battle of Britain of 1940 are not in the exhibition. What is present is his masterpiece, *Totes Meer* (Dead Sea) (1940–41). It has been described as the finest oil painting to emerge from that time of conflict. It is an entirely frozen and static pile of wrecked bombers that had been taken to a dump in Cowley, near Oxford, so that their metal could be recycled into new planes by the erstwhile automobile manufacturers, Morris motors of Cowley. From a distance the painting does indeed look like a sea, one disturbed by dislocated ice and glimmering in the light of Nash's trademark ghostly double moon. Yet as one moves closer to the picture it becomes apparent that the dead sea is made up of tangled piles of wings and fuselages, marked with the white fringed black cross of the Luftwaffe. You can now see why he has given the picture a German title. It is the graveyard of dead enemy aircraft. In the immediate foreground, a sightless wheel looks out at us. This ability to provide a combination of two pictures, each best viewed from a different distance, provides more support for the claim that he is Constable's heir.

Nash and his great English contemporaries, such as Henry Moore, Graham Sutherland, and John Piper, are famous for applying modernist methods to traditional themes, particularly nature. War is one more traditional theme, and here Nash was pre-eminent.

—Christie Davies



# Old museums, new tricks

by James Panero

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The best museums are often museums of museums—institutions that put their own history on display alongside their collections. The museums that fascinate me are never the buzziest models off the shelf but those that have been allowed to age. Either through conscious efforts at preservation or through the preservative fluids of neglect, such institutions invite us to experience history as a part of history. Rather than attempting to exist outside of themselves by erasing their past, museums that seem antiquated or even “out of date” can reflect the highest values of their mandates to protect and present the objects in their collections, which must include themselves.

The Metropolitan Museum of Art is of course one example of a museum that has preserved its own history better than most, something I wrote about in these pages in December. Even as it has evolved into more contemporary forms, the museum has worked to reveal the ornamental details of its architectural past—from the Victorian Gothic heart of its initial 1880 building by Calvert Vaux and Jacob Wrey Mould (now its gallery of Medieval art), through its many later additions in the Romanesque, Beaux-Arts, and modern styles.

Such a presentation can be even more revelatory in museums of science. Here older buildings and displays serve a vital and often overlooked role in teaching us about the history of instruction and inquiry. By seeing what older halls get right and wrong (or what we now believe to be right and wrong), we gain perspective on our own scientific cer-

tainties and the charismatic methods through which museums now present themselves to the modern public.

The American Museum of Natural History, the grand institution just across Central Park from the Metropolitan, and with a similar history, has likewise developed as an accumulation of buildings in a wide variety of styles. The institution has also been blessed with generations of naturalists and craftsmen who were the best in their scientific fields. History has borne that out, and we can continue to see it in the wondrous animal dioramas that have become the hallmark of the institution and have fascinated patrons across the ages (including this reviewer, beginning with almost weekly visits as a child).

After the naturalist and taxidermist Carl Akeley died in 1926 on the slopes of Mount Mikeno in the Belgian Congo while developing his Hall of African Mammals—beneath the spot now represented in his gorilla diorama—background painters such as James Perry Wilson, foreground sculptors such as Raymond DeLucia, and taxidermists such as Robert Rockwell carried on his work though the Hall of North American Mammals, one floor directly below. A decade ago, Stephen Christopher Quinn, who has continued what is now a century-old legacy of dioramic design at the museum, published a history of their efforts in his book *Windows on Nature*.

An equally interesting but less frequented area of the museum is the Hall of Northwest Coast Indians—in part because the room

has been diminished over the years from its original brilliance. Directly off the museum's Seventy-seventh Street entrance, now fully enveloped by later additions, the hall occupies the first floor of the museum's first building.

This room is remarkable not only for its age but also for the work of the museum's iconoclastic anthropologist, Franz Boas, who developed it at the turn of the last century. A curator and field worker, Boas was, in the final decades of the nineteenth century, one of the country's primary Pacific Northwest explorers and personally responsible for acquiring many of the objects the museum now possesses from the region.

Anti-evolutionary, Boas was also anti-theoretical and argued for pragmatism and a high degree of intra-cultural observation in research. Departing with his day's progressivist beliefs in the eugenic order of evolution, which grouped non-Western cultures together with primitive man, Boas displayed ethnographic objects on their own terms. He divided the large hall into sections and dedicated each to a certain tribe of the Northwest Coast: the Tlingit, the Haida, the Kwakiutl. Within these alcoves he further assembled the items of each group: ceremonial masks, pots and bowls, ceremonial ladles, the blankets and coppers of the potlatch. Extensive texts and descriptions were located with the objects, and additional pamphlets and monographs were available for museum patrons within the hall and in the museum bookstore. During his time at the museum, Boas himself even led tours of the collection in order to explain his advanced method of display.

The result was distinctly non-hierarchical, allowing each object to exist in tribal specificity. But more than just recognizing the value of his objects, Boas also acknowledged the intelligence of his patrons. Far from the feeble-headed immigrant masses envisioned by his trustees, Boas believed his museum-goers were able to take on the complexities of his own field experience and understanding. (He was, unfortunately, less charitable to a family of Greenland islanders dying in the museum basement).

The young Claude Lévi-Strauss happened to be one such new arrival to absorb Boas's

lessons. Boas's displays served as a visual structure for Lévi-Strauss's developing methodology when he visited the hall in the 1940s. The opening paragraphs of *The Way of the Masks*, Lévi-Strauss's book on ceremonial masks in the Pacific Northwest, is dedicated to the museum and its "outmoded but singularly effective museographic methods."

Boas feared that elisions and simplifications of ethnographic material would delude the museum public into believing they had mastered complex information. "There appears a multiplicity of converging and diverging lines which it is difficult to bring under one system," he said against surface conclusions and quick assumptions. Yet Morris Ketchum Jesup, then president of the museum and an ally, nonetheless objected to what he saw as Boas's cluttered display. He wanted a presentation that combined didactics with entertainment, and set about instituting these changes after Boas's departure in 1905.

While Boas's tribal enclaves were maintained, the number of objects on display was reduced, large totem poles were commissioned for the room, and wax mannequins were created to add an element of theater to the large Haida canoe in the center of the hall. Between 1910 and 1926, the artist Will S. Taylor painted theatrical murals along the inside walls while the windows were blacked out and the architectural ornamentation covered over. Each of these post-Boas additions raised the stakes of spectacle but retreated from the radicalism of the presentation. What has resulted today is a muddle of intentions in a hall that calls out for a return to his original design.

The totality of the museum's rich history, its masterpieces and its missteps, must now inform its latest efforts at building and development. Since its founding in 1869, the American Museum of Natural History has always been a work in progress. With a wide range of buildings, the museum has gradually expanded over a quadrangle between Central Park West and Columbus Avenue that was, in fact, set aside in the Commissioners' Plan of 1811, which established the original street grid.

This past month, the museum unveiled plans for a 194,000-square-foot, \$340-million new wing known as the Richard Gilder Center for Science, Education, and Innovation, to be constructed facing Columbus Avenue in line with Seventy-ninth Street and set to open in 2020. In recent years, a pocket of local residents has objected to any additional encroachment by the museum onto what is now known as Theodore Roosevelt Park, yet the museum has every right to build there. Arguments for green space ring hollow considering the proximity to Central Park, and new construction will fit within the footprint outlined in the museum's nineteenth-century master plan, which remains incomplete.

More pressing should be questions of how the building—costing as much as a stand-alone museum—relates to the values of the institution and reflects the culture in which it has been conceived. It might be said that every generation gets the museum wing it deserves. The fanciful rustication of J. Cleveland Cady's south façade gives way to the Beaux-Arts grandiloquence of John Russell Pope's Roosevelt Rotunda on up through Polishek's vitrine-like computer-age planetarium. Such organic expansion at the very least allows for the preservation of older buildings and halls.

The Gilder building, by Studio Gang Architects, will dispense with historicized style altogether in favor of sculptural concrete resembling “slot caverns, riverbank canyons, and hydrologic flow,” explains Jeanne Gang, who used water and blocks of ice to study the forms. The monumental effect will be post-diluvial—a natural history museum at the eschaton.

Inside, some of what is planned sounds very promising. A five-story “collection core” will line the interior with visible storage displaying 3.9 million specimens, or about 10 percent of the museum's collection. Large areas will be dedicated to live butterflies and other insects as the museum continues to drift into a role traditionally taken up by zoos.

Still unknown remains the proper use of the building as a center for education—the same questions that dogged Boas's original hall.

With new “exhibition techniques for diverse audiences” offering an “authentic engagement with science,” here is a fully immersive diorama that promises seamless storytelling on the deleterious effects of humanity but one that may not fully consider the “multiplicity of converging and diverging lines,” as Boas put it, in the Malthusian shade. With a new building designed to “combat the post-truth era” and provide “wisdom for how to treat your environment,” according to museum leadership, it remains to be seen whether such mandates will also lay bare the history of science in the hands of progressivism. In this museum of natural history, the Gilder Center must not become a temple of doom.

It is taken as a given that museums must keep current with contemporary dictates and modern expectations. Yet just consider an exception to this rule, and a truly exceptional one at that. The Wagner Free Institute of Science, incorporated in 1855, has operated out of the same building in North Philadelphia since 1865. Much like Boas's famous hall, but without a growing museum to envelop it, the institute and its displays remain nearly untouched since the late nineteenth century.

As a remarkable specimen of Victorian science, the institution deserves a visit by anyone interested in the history of museum culture. Yet more remarkably, even with its antiquated resources the Wagner continues to operate today as the oldest free education program in the country, teaching 18,000 low-income children annually while offering free access to its 100,000-object collection, mainly to an under-served local community. On the day I visited, while educators had organized a collection hunt upstairs, a paleontologist was unwrapping his findings for an enraptured assembly of children in an auditorium that still retains hat hooks beneath every seat.

With barely the resources to remain in operation, here is an institution that continues to instruct us on just what it takes—or doesn't take—to learn from the objects of our fascinating world.

## Music

# New York chronicle

by Jay Nordlinger

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Ignat Solzhenitsyn played a recital on the barge. He is a pianist and conductor (and son of the great man). The barge is the venue—the famous venue—of Bargemusic. This venue sits under the Brooklyn Bridge. It is “New York City’s floating concert hall,” as PR has it. Many of us over the years, surely, have made quips about barcarolles.

A barcarolle, you recall, is a song or other piece of music having its origins in Venice and its gondoliers.

As Solzhenitsyn is a friend of mine, I should not review his recital. Suffice it to say he is excellent. I *will* say a little about the music he played—the two works on the first half of his program. These are unfamiliar, or at least they were to me. One of them is by a little-known composer; the other is by a very well-known and canonical composer. Go figure.

Solzhenitsyn began his recital with the Six Preludes, Op. 6, of Robert Muczynski. He was an American composer, born and brought up in Chicago. He had his higher education there, too. The bulk of his career, he spent at the University of Arizona. He composed his Six Preludes in 1954, when he was twenty-five. He would soon play them in Carnegie Hall, in a program consisting entirely of his own music. Born in 1929, he died in 2010.

I will say just a word about each prelude. The first is bright and interesting, reminiscent of Prokofiev. The second is ruminative. The third is a kind of scherzo, buzzing around like a bee. (This would be more Rimsky-Korsakov than Prokofiev.) In the fourth, Muczynski is

back to the ruminative. Then there is more buzzing. Then there is rhapsody—outright, sprawling rhapsody. The fifth prelude has both the jagged and the lyrical (a good, and Prokofiev-like, combination). There is a touch of a scherzo at the end of it. And the final prelude is a bulldozer, plowing its way through, heedless and unstoppable. I was reminded of the Precipitato, the last movement of Prokofiev’s Sonata No. 7.

Muczynski’s preludes are not derivative. I don’t mean to say that. But they bear influences, as music does.

The Six Preludes have been played for many years, especially by students, from what I have been able to find out. I met them only on the barge. They seem to me to come from the pen of a man who loved the piano: who loved listening to it, playing it, and composing for it.

How about the other unfamiliar work on Solzhenitsyn’s program? It was a Schubert sonata. An unfamiliar Schubert piano sonata? Isn’t that like saying “unfamiliar Beethoven symphony”? No, because the Sonata in B major, D. 575, is rarely programmed. Why is a mystery, to me. Schubert wrote it in 1817, when he was twenty. (So his middle years, right?) I will say a word about each of the four movements, as with the Muczynski preludes.

The first movement is both simple and not. I don’t know how Schubert does that, but he does, over and over. The second movement is a song—a beautiful Schubert song, in E major. He could not help writing songs, even in his instrumental music. The third movement is a scherzo, and a Schubertian one: not an imp-

ish or devilish scherzo, but a genial one. The final movement is so smooth, so interesting, so Schubertian. It has no discernible mood. It exists in that Schubert world, that atmosphere all the composer's own.

If you will indulge a cliché, a joy of music is discovery: the making of new friends, even when they are composed by giants, whom you have known for years.

Under the auspices of Great Performers, Christian Gerhaher came to Alice Tully Hall for a recital. It's true: he's a great performer. This German baritone is one of the best lieder singers of our time, and he has a superb partner in his regular pianist, Gerold Huber. (Also German, Huber was born the same year as Gerhaher, 1969.) The two of them don't even look at each other. Their communication is barely conscious at this point, I think.

Their program was all-Mahler—an unusual kind of program. How did they do it? They began and ended with selections from *Das Lied von der Erde*. In between were the *Rückert-Lieder*, a song from *Des Knaben Wunderhorn*, and a couple of other items.

Gerhaher can look wild, disheveled, almost a musical demon. (That can be exciting.) On this evening, he was composed, and dressed in classic fashion: white tie and tails. Not for him the black pajamas that are today's uniform.

The recitalists began with *Das Lied's* first low-voiced song, “Der Einsame im Herbst.” The orchestra, or in this case the piano, plays a long introduction. Then the singer comes in on a high F, not easy to come in on. Gerhaher grabbed the note, just a little, but it was a good one. Now I will make some general remarks about his singing.

He is an intelligent guy—a prized interpreter—but he does not intellectualize his songs: he just sings them. He is not so much an *artiste* singing art songs as a guy singing songs (with much refinement, to be sure). He gives you a range of colors. And he does not force his voice. What a beautiful voice it is. Amazingly beautiful. Is this an obvious thing to say? No, because people are so taken with Gerhaher's interpretive powers that they may forget the obvious: what a throat.

The same is true of Dietrich Fischer-Dieskau. People love to talk about his insights, his diction, his mental mastery. But without that golden throat—you and I would never have heard his name.

Gerold Huber does many admirable things on the piano, of which I will cite a few. He has a good sense of the detached and the legato. When he imitated a drum—as Mahler calls on you to do—it was startlingly drum-like. And he knows what volume to play at: how loud, how soft. Famously, Gerald Moore titled his memoirs *Am I Too Loud?* The truth is, an accompanist can be too soft, too retiring, too unassertive. Huber, like all the best accompanists, or “collaborative pianists,” has the gift of the right volume. (I cherish a remark by Craig Rutenberg: he likes being known by the traditional term “accompanist,” because “collaborator” reminds me of wartime France or something.)

About the *Rückert-Lieder*, I will make a single remark: Gerhaher sang “Liebst du um Schönheit” with a quality I had never heard in it before: annoyance. When you hear it, you realize it goes with the poem.

The recital ended, appropriately, with the *Abschied*, the Farewell, from *Das Lied von der Erde*. I am reminded of Shostakovich—who once asked his younger colleague Rodion Shchedrin, “If you could take one score with you to a desert island, what would it be?” Shchedrin, put on the spot, said *The Art of the Fugue* (Bach). Shostakovich said *Das Lied*.

I don't know what you sing for an encore after an all-Mahler program—except the holy “Urlicht” from the “Resurrection” Symphony. Which is what Gerhaher did. It was a great recital, thanks to Gerhaher and his superb pianist. But thanks to Mahler too, whose genius was evident all over again.

At the New York Philharmonic, they played a new trombone concerto by William Bolcom—they being the orchestra's principal trombone, Joseph Alessi, and, of course, the orchestra itself, led by its music director, Alan Gilbert. Bolcom was a figure of my youth. What I mean is, I grew up in Ann Arbor, and he taught at the University of Michigan. He led a dual life: classical composer and jazz, or cabaret, pianist. He teamed up

with his wife, the singer Joan Morris, for all sorts of performances, in popular veins. You would see the couple around town. I spotted them once in an ice-cream parlor, Lovin' Spoonful, on Main Street. They were celebrities, and deservedly so.

Bolcom's trombone concerto is in three movements. The first has a marking that I associate with Beethoven: "Quasi una fantasia." That's how the two sonatas of Op. 27 are labeled. (The second of them has a much better-known label: "Moonlight.") I will report a little of what I heard, in this Bolcom concerto.

It begins on an Ivesian note, with a muted trumpet (as I recall). This is evocative—calling up the American past. In the orchestra, there is unease, and the composer uses plenty of percussion. These things are par for the course in today's music. In this first movement, we hear low, yawpy sounds. And there are sudden shifts. This is a shifty movement. At one point, the music gets big and angry. Then there is a ravishing cello solo. (Cello solos are always described as "ravishing." It's in the music writer's handbook.)

At the end of the movement, someone in the audience, thinking the concerto was over, shouted, "Encore!"

The second movement is marked "Blues." It is indeed bluesy, and rocking, and Bolcomesque. This is the composer of "The Graceful Ghost Rag" (probably Bolcom's most famous piano piece). The final movement is "Charade," and it is jazzy, Bernsteinian—very *West Side Story*, to be specific. You could almost see the Jets and the Sharks dance. I believe, too, that I heard a quotation from a Bolcom cabaret song, "Amor."

I will go out on a limb and say that the second and third movements are Bolcom's natural self—his musical and compositional inclination. Does he write music such as the first movement because he has to? Because that's what contemporary American composers do? This is too big a subject—a can of worms—for a chronicle such as mine.

After intermission, the Philharmonic and Maestro Gilbert performed a new symphony, Wynton Marsalis's Symphony No. 4, "The Jungle." Actually, I have written that wrong: the work is called *The Jungle*, and, in paren-

theses, we have "Symphony No. 4." So, one should write this: *The Jungle* (Symphony No. 4). Upton Sinclair wrote a novel called *The Jungle*, in 1906. It was about Chicago and the meat-packing industry. Marsalis's work is about New York. The Philharmonic's program notes described it as "a wary, unvarnished ode to New York City." Can odes be wary and unvarnished? I would have to ponder that.

At the beginning of the 2010–11 season, the Philharmonic premiered Marsalis's *Swing Symphony* (Symphony No. 3). (He appears to be consistent in his naming style.) In these pages, I wrote that the work "is essentially a jazz piece: a jazz piece with some classical window dressing. And it is long, pleasant, harmless, tedious, unmemorable—a little dull. Marsalis is a masterly musician, but this is not a masterly creation." I think I liked No. 4 better, on first hearing—but some of those same thoughts and words apply.

Like No. 3, No. 4 is for symphony orchestra and jazz orchestra, combined. It has six movements—but, on the night I attended, the Philharmonic omitted the first movement, playing the remaining five. There was apparently a question of rehearsal time. In the future, the orchestra will play the symphony complete. But even with the first movement shorn, the work clocks in at fifty minutes—which is not a bagatelle.

Marsalis has given his six movements titles. And he has written descriptions of each, in a "guide." Take the final movement. It is called "Struggle in the Digital Market," and is described as follows: "The city is driven ever forward by more and more profit and the myth of unlimited growth for the purpose of ownership and seclusion. Some form of advertisement occupies every available space. The struggle asks, 'Will we seek and find more equitable long-term solutions . . . or perish?'"

An individual listener can take the composer's sociological musings to heart or ignore them—and listen to the symphony simply as music. So it is with Bernstein's violin concerto, AKA his *Serenade*. You can match Plato's *Symposium* to the music, as the composer fancied. Or you can ditch the symposium and listen to the concerto.

Marsalis's second movement is called "The Big Show," and is intended to reflect "the brash,

brassy razzle-dazzle of our city.” I must say he is faithful here. The music is big, brassy, and New Yorky. It has touches of Gershwin and other titans of jazz. This movement suffers from some posing, I think—some attitudinizing. There is gesture after gesture, which is distinct from a naturally developing composing.

The third movement—“Lost in Sight (Post-Pastoral)”—has an oboe song, rather nice. Then there are some down-and-dirty sounds, not nice at all. For the cello, there is a funky solo. (Not all of them are ravishing.) Then people start to hum—people in the orchestra, I mean. Eventually, the music turns Coplandesque, nicely insinuating. With the fourth movement, it’s maracas time. This is the Spanish section, “La Esquina.” The music lives *la vida loca*, and a pleasant life, too. Movement No. 5 is called “Us,” and it, too, is pleasant. It also has the whiff of the cocktail lounge about it.

In the sixth movement, we get that “digital struggle.” Digital or not, there is conflict in the music. There is also clapping—clapping from orchestra members. The clapping seems simple enough, but the rhythm is actually quite tricky. Later on, the piece resists ending. I mean, it rails and wails and protests against ending. It screams against ending. I found this very effective, perhaps the most effective part of the whole symphony (or the five-sixths of it that we heard).

At various points in the symphony, especially when the music got quiet, a man sitting near me said, “Wow,” for the benefit of his neighbors, surely. He was signaling his special appreciation of the piece. I appreciated it too, if I wasn’t as wowed. I found the piece quite pleasant to listen to. (There’s that word again, “pleasant.”) I also wondered whether one should sit and listen to it, reverently—as opposed to dancing to it, or eating to it, or milling to it. I also thought that the music could serve as a soundtrack to a movie.

Those are rude remarks, I’m sure. And I have a rude question—but a pertinent one, I think: if *The Jungle* were not written by our leading and most beloved jazzman—a trumpeter of almost superhuman ability—would orchestras such as the New York Philharmonic play it? I don’t know.

The Metropolitan Opera staged *Roméo et Juliette*, the Gounod opera. The production was Bartlett

Sher’s, which has this feature: the lamps of Verona rise out of sight. So do the chandeliers at the Met (whatever the production, whatever the opera). I thought this made for a nice symmetry, if you will. Presiding in the pit was Gianandrea Noseda, the Italian maestro. I would have liked a bit more ardor, and a bit more momentum, from him. But he conducted intelligently and musically, as usual. The little F-major *berceuse* that begins Act II was notably lovely.

Our Juliette was Diana Damrau, the German soprano. Even before she opened her mouth, she was winning: girlish, Juliet-like, adorable. For all these years, I have said that her “secret ingredient”—to go with her ample singing skills—is adorability. She was not in her best voice on this night. The voice was small, as well as blemished. Yet she never pushed it, and she has any number of qualities to compensate. Moreover, as she told me once in an interview, “your voice is your voice. You can’t go to the store and buy another one.”

Her “Je veux vivre”—AKA “Juliet’s Waltz”—was interesting. It was exceptionally slow, and yet not too slow. She played with the notes and words, teasing them out, enchantingly. Her high C at the end was low, but this hardly mattered.

Opposite her as Roméo was Vittorio Grigolo, the Italian tenor. He was in splendid voice. All night long, he poured forth gold, often with a little quiver in it. He was both loud and lyrical—a lucky combination. His high soft singing was exemplary. When he did this, I could feel the pressure in my diaphragm, I swear. He was sometimes a little swoony, but he never crossed into vulgarity. In his aria, “Ah! lève-toi, soleil!” you could hear the sunrise. Pardon my sappiness, but it’s true.

Grigolo is the target of snarkiness, which must relate to his penchant for hamming it up onstage. But there must be envy involved too. Grigolo has a one-in-a-million—one-in-hundreds-of-millions?—voice. I think of a tagline from long ago: “Don’t hate me because I’m beautiful.”

Responsible for the titles—the translation on seatbacks—was Cori Ellison, a distinguished dramaturg. Freely and wisely, she mixed in Shakespeare’s own words. I don’t know whether anyone has said this before, but he could really write.

## Album note

*Lukas Foss*

Complete Symphonies.

Boston Modern Orchestra Project, \$35.99

Lukas Foss was one of our most adventurous composers. He was born in Berlin in 1922 to a Jewish family, which moved to Paris in 1933, and then to America in 1937, to escape the Nazi threat. He was a prodigious piano and compositional talent at a young age. Foss was to become the pianist of the Boston Symphony Orchestra during his early years, a professor at UCLA and Boston University, the conductor of the Buffalo Philharmonic, the Brooklyn Philharmonic, and the Jerusalem and Milwaukee Symphonies, and an elegant speaker about music.

Like his friend Leonard Bernstein, he made his mark in three areas: piano, composition, and conducting. Though he never rivaled Bernstein in popularity, Foss is the more interesting and accomplished composer. Where Lukas had a smaller stage, Bernstein had a grand one. Their desires to be everything to everyone left something to be desired. Where Bernstein seemed to find salvation in conducting, Foss found salvation in composition. Both men suffered from doing too much, spreading themselves far too thin. Both men were so busy they didn't have sufficient time to sit in undisturbed silence to write the music they might have written. Having said this, they still must have led the musical lives they wished. Money aside, they could have done what Esa-Pekka Salonen has now done: step out of the limelight of conducting (sort of) and retreat to the quiet of the studio, where there is no publicity person, no orchestral manager: only you and the music waiting to be written.

Bernstein and Foss lived through the musical and cultural chaos of the Sixties and Seventies. Foss looked at these new approaches early on and engaged them with excitement and verve. His became not so much a style as a poly-stylistic approach to music. Early on he was a neo-classicist as a result of his work with Copland at Tanglewood (Symphony No. 1).

Later he explored improvisation with his ensemble at UCLA (*Echoi*) and also tried on dodecaphonism and aleatoricism (*Time Cycle*), collage (*Baroque Variations*), minimalism (in a piece written for my ensemble Musical Elements, *Embros*) and others. About this extensive musical approach, Foss said: "The more influences, the richer our vocabulary," followed by an expansion to "The more techniques, the richer our vocabulary." Many of Foss's pieces don't completely work, but there is in almost every one a moment of pure genius—and that is a gift.

The symphonies are another matter. They cover over fifty years of his creative life, from 1944 to 1995. These works are big-boned, expansive, serious, and probing. Foss threw his full powers into them, and they cohere exquisitely. Each is in the traditional four movements. Together they form a body of work that places them among the very best American symphonic works of the twentieth century.

The first symphony of 1944, written when Foss was just twenty-two, is a burst of energy. While paying homage to Copland of his Americana period (*ca.* 1935–55), it busts the style wide open in emotional depth and daring. Its packing is tight and rigorous, as each of the four movements clocks in between seven and ten minutes. It is stronger than Bernstein's first and is at least equal to Copland at his best, in the second and third symphonies. This work is so good and approachable that it should be a repertoire standard right up there with *Appalachian Spring*.

The first movement is a little bit coy and a little bit winsome. It opens with a transparent and bright G-major arpeggio, then quickly moves to a state of pondering questioning; these are the two emotional positions of the movement. There are changes of meter from duple to triple, with the triple skipping—and a strong and primal (almost primitive) use of dominant-tonic relationships, the simplest of tonal mechanisms: Foss revels in its usage as if he is showing his almost Mozartean credentials, as if stating, "I too can make a lot out of the most trivial and banal!"

Simple melodies abound in single wind instruments supported by string accompani-



ment, with the occasional brass fanfare. The orchestration is marked by the alternation of choirs, something one finds in the music of the other American symphonists, including Copland of course, but also Schuman, Harris, and Gould. There is an easy use of jazz syncopation as four-beat patterns are broken up into eight-note groups of three, three, and two. There are sections that are portentous, others innocent, gentle, almost naive. A quick and not-overly-heavy climax gives way to a resting point on an easy major chord. Foss gauges the ending of each movement in careful regard for its place in the larger structure. The man is astute at a very young age.

The second movement is ostensibly a slow movement. But this is only advisory, as much of the music is more upbeat—the journey starts slowly but builds in momentum and speed. This movement, like the first, features solo winds over strings and open sonorities borrowed from Copland. The music is grounded in the bass, as it is very much built from the bottom up, with traditional tonal implications. There is then music that is march-like with steady eighth notes—then music that is folk-like in its simplicity. A section of a disjointed rhythmic ostinato (quite off-kilter at that) provides a sense of disquiet, unease, until it transitions seamlessly back into the opening lyrical materials. An ending of quickly repeated materials, a double cadence, ends with a major chord with a jazzy flat seven.

The third movement is a scherzo and all that that implies. The music alternates between being high and brash and softer and gentler trio-like music. Like Bernstein and Copland, Foss is exploring and incorporating all aspects of American music, classical and jazz. The music sometimes plateaus as it ponders its next direction, but proceeds effortlessly to a climax. The last and fourth movement is a bit longer than all the others. A rhythm of four sixteenth notes followed by two eighth notes pervades this music (da-ga-da-ga dut dut). A climax occurs a little before the halfway mark, which leads to the final climax as the symphony ends in a blaze of victorious glory.

Symphony No. 2, more expansive than the first, with each of its four movements allegedly based on a Bach chorale, demonstrates a mastery of new avant-garde techniques. The Allegretto—a slow dance in three/four time—presents a lovely tune in the strings, interposed with a simple single line of rhythmic vitality. A gorgeous, molasses-slow chorale at the end, with mandolin playing out of key, is almost Ivesian. This music is a love letter to the past.

The third, subtitled *Symphony of Sorrows*, provides a look at sorrow from many vantage points. The “Fugue: Of Strife and Struggle,” alternates long held tones—atmospheric, hovering, and portentous—with faster music that moves by fits and starts. The orchestration is distinct and sharp. “Elegy for Anne Frank” puts the piano, Foss’s instrument, in support of an aching tune in the strings, creating almost a parlor or salon atmosphere. This intimate music moves in and out of time, memories of Anne, and perhaps of his past self.

“Wasteland” opens with bursts of sixteenth notes separated by silence; then the wasteland enters: quiet low notes, desiccated, in minor second descents, in a short/long rhythm. The music is an exercise in going nowhere without producing boredom, and succeeds brilliantly. The last movement, “Prayer,” is as intimate as music can get. A solo trumpet sounds like an emotive combination of a soldier playing “Taps,” a cousin to the figure in Ives’s *The Unanswered Question*, and the blowing of a ram’s horn to awaken the Dead.

The first movement of Symphony No. 4 begins as a world of atonal hovering alternating with a dramatic motif comprising an upward-moving diatonic scale fragment, a confrontation of different musical worlds. These scale passages turn into a bubbling, insouciant, neo-classical, suave soufflé with occasional gruff interruptions. A tune appears that evokes the spirit of Ravel’s *Boléro*. All is charmingly dry, bright, and transparent. The music is humorous, tongue-in-cheek, with quicksilver changes of music and emotional character and surprises all around. The climax puts this all together in a Stravinskian overlay of controlled ostinatos over a drone.

The second movement is Foss at his most daring. It is in dream time and inchoate. All is hazy, in a fog, as a Jew's harp, a sweet tonal tune played by solo violin and celeste, and a harmonica suggest sounds of a prairie of the past. Textures are mostly thin and transparent, and all seems to come from afar, very quietly. This is a grand reverie, music with a past and present, but no future.

The third movement, a scherzo, is tonal, perky, and bubbly. The orchestration is bright. The work is a rondo of sorts with delicately scored episodes. There are also moments of off-kilter rhythms, which throw a wrench into the workings. Phrases often end abruptly, as does the conclusion, which is oxymoronic—an odd, gentle Bronx cheer.

The fourth movement is a dreamy take on the opening material of the first movement. Even though this is fifty years later, this cyclic aspect of treatment of the material is just like that of the first symphony. This soft, gentle music is interrupted by loud and curious brass interruptions. This is occasionally offset with long, quiet, quizzical string chords. The drama of this movement is played out in the conversation between these materials. Much of this is very jazzy, as the orchestra eventually plays a burst of syncopated sharp

attacks, in which the piano and vibraphone are featured, along with the brass. A low, dramatic string line appears that sets these bursts in relief, and then high strings appear, which lead to open Copland-like sonorities. Eventually a brass fanfare appears stressing perfect fourths and tri-tones, and at the finish one hears high, long tones in the violins, and then a sudden and abrupt ending. One wonders if Foss isn't dreaming of times long past, with Bernstein, Copland, and Koussevitsky at Tanglewood, and so coming full circle in his musical and life journey.

These symphonies appear on the Boston Modern Orchestra Project (BMOP) label, performed by that orchestra and their conductor Gil Rose. The sound is clear and beguilingly transparent even at its thickest and loudest. Heartrending moments are just that, and, when brashness and bombast is called for, it is of a scorched-earth, no holds-barred, variety. Matthew Guerrieri, who studied with Foss, provides extensive and loving notes. Lukas, of blessed memory, should have a big, happy grin on his face—as he usually did, by the way. You will too after listening to this extraordinary legacy, which is revelatory.

—*Daniel Asia*

The media

## Cessation of the oracles

by James Bowman

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*The pronouncements of the Delphic oracle were delivered by a priestess, appearing to rise (by a cunning mechanical contrivance) amid clouds of incense on her serpent-throne, from a chasm which cleft to the centre of the earth, in a theatrical display calculated to outscore the appeal of the rival oracle of Zeus at Dodona. Her voice was one of the most powerful influences on the history of ancient Greece. . . . Yet despite the impressive display, the shrine declined in prestige as it became apparent that the messages of the god were politically calculated or purchased by corruption.*

—Felipe Fernández-Armesto, *Truth: A History and a Guide for the Perplexed*

What's happening to the sooth-sayers of the media in our own day is hardly unprecedented in human history, and nor, I expect, is the media's own inability to grasp what has befallen them. The ideas of "post-truth" and "fake news" that have been posited as explanations (and which are the subjects of recent essays in this space) are not without merit, but are pretty nearly useless so long as they are regarded only as someone else's problem. Those of us who are disinclined to take the oracular pronouncements of the media as to what is truth or fact at their own valuation take a somewhat different view of what constitutes fake news, and think that news outlets ought to have enough self-awareness to see what we see. But I imagine that once you've been an oracle for as long as they have, you must have the devil of a time adjusting to non-oracle status, if you ever do.

Which is why, I take it, when the media turn to self-examination as they have done

in the wake of the November election, they continue to behave as if their utterances are no less Delphic than ever, even though they have become much more predictable than predictive. Here, for example, is Nicholas Kristof of *The New York Times* on "Lessons From the Media's Failures in Its Year With Trump"—which, by the way, gives away in its headline what would have been obvious in any case: namely, that if the election of Mr. Trump represented media failure, then the election of Mrs. Clinton would have represented the success of the media's election project.

The last year has not been the news media's finest. Despite some outstanding coverage, over all we misled many people into thinking that Donald Trump would never win the Republican nomination, let alone the White House. Too often we followed what glittered, yapped uselessly at everything in sight and didn't dig hard enough or hold politicians accountable for lies.

"Politicians"? Well, his audience will know which politician is intended, as also how frequently and with how much ontological certitude he actually was "held accountable"—whatever that may mean—for lies, real or imagined, since there certainly were a great many accounts of them.

I haven't gone through the media's election coverage and counted every instance of the words "lie," "lies," "lying," "liar," and their cognates or synonyms, but I'm quite sure that if I did I would find there were many, many more

occurrences of these words, the vast majority of them with reference to things said by Mr. Trump, than in any election past. You may remember that the vogue for promiscuous accusations of lying came into our politics like a miasma under George W. Bush and the alleged “lies” that took us into war in Iraq. It received a new fillip from Democratic tactics in the election of 2012 (see “Lexicographic Lies” in *The New Criterion* of October 2012). But by now the accusation has become almost robotic and has accordingly lost whatever force it might once have had.

It can hardly, therefore, be the case that the media were not holding “politicians” accountable for lies in the recent election. Rather, it appears that people in far greater numbers than ever before were willing to believe the politicians over the media purporting to hold them to account, though that obvious inference never occurs to Mr. Kristof. To him, the answer to every problem or pseudo-problem is for the media to do more of what they are already doing, since it must be literally unimaginable that they could be doing anything wrong. Such smugness and self-righteousness, which takes for granted its own right to pass authoritative judgment on what is and is not a “lie,” must be why they have declined in prestige and are trusted less than ever before.

Mr. Kristof’s *New York Times* colleague, Jim Rutenberg—who last summer urged his fellow reporters to abandon the façade of impartiality and campaign openly against Mr. Trump (see “After the Fact” in *The New Criterion* of October 2016) even though they could hardly have been more open about their sympathies than they already were—wrote his own self-dramatizing “Lessons From 2016 for the News Media, as the Ground Shifts.”

Starting a weekly column about the nexus between media, technology, culture and politics in the middle of the 2016 presidential campaign was like parachuting into a hail of machine-gun crossfire. Dense smoke was everywhere as the candidates and their supporters unloaded on one another and, frequently, on the news media, which more than occasionally was drawn into

the fighting. The territory that was at stake was the realm of the true, and how all sides would define it in the hyperpartisan debate to come under a new president.

As James Taranto recently observed in *The Wall Street Journal*,

By “the realm of the true,” Rutenberg means the authority to issue pronouncements about what is true—an authority, he seems to believe, that rightly belongs to journalists and the sources they deem trustworthy. Elsewhere in the Dec. 26 column he describes the news media’s role as “to do its part in maintaining a fact-based national debate.” And this supposed authority extends beyond matters of fact to judgments of morality and taste.

This Delphic notion of truth is what Mr. Kristof appears to mean by holding politicians (i.e., Donald Trump) “accountable”—as does Susan Glasser of *Politico*, who undertook her own election postmortem in a long autobiographical essay for the Brookings Institution called “Covering Politics in a ‘Post-Truth’ America.” She, too, frankly sees Mr. Trump’s election as a media failure.

So much terrific reporting and writing and digging over the years and . . . Trump? What happened to consequences? Reporting that matters? Sunlight, they used to tell us, was the best disinfectant for what ails our politics. But 2016 suggests a different outcome: We’ve achieved a lot more transparency in today’s Washington—without the accountability that was supposed to come with it.

Supposed by whom? Accountable to whom? Obviously not by or to the 63 million people who ignored all that “reporting that matters” and voted for Mr. Trump anyway. Both mattering, in this sense (as also in “Black Lives Matter”), and “accountability” are weasel words—words which mean literally nothing outside some particular context but which are routinely used absolutely in a manner that suggests that their context doesn’t matter. *Pace* Derek Parfit, the philosophical author of *On*

*What Matters* who died at the beginning of the year, I remain skeptical that there is anything beneath the moon which can matter absolutely; it can only matter to this or that person or group of people, since its mattering in general could be falsified by any other person or group of people to whom it did not matter. The “Black Lives Matter” slogan itself recognizes this by the implicit suggestion that, to the police, black lives don’t matter but ought to. The eliding of the “ought” and the “is” is a bad habit that the philosophers (and others) have learned from Marx.

In the same way, nothing can be accountable absolutely—that is, in the absence of someone to be accountable to. When the media use the term, of course they mean accountable to them, as the ultimate arbiters of truth and falsehood, right and wrong. The words really amount to a demand for attention, a demand against the public’s skepticism for the media to be taken at their own valuation as the quasi-official custodians not only of truth but also of decency and political right-thinking. Of course, it would sound bad to put it that way, so they just talk about “accountability” in general and rely on vagueness to suggest that it sort of means accountable to everybody—the great American public whom they suppose themselves to serve—but through them, the media, as the people’s true representatives. How much of Mr. Trump’s support must have come from public resentment towards that preposterous, if implied, claim?

Ms. Glasser also mentions the alleged “\$1.9 billion in free media coverage”—I love the precision of the number: not \$2 billion but only \$1.9 billion—that Mr. Trump is alleged to have received by March of last year. This is remarkably restrained of her. What about the many more billions in free coverage he must have received by election day? But then, of course, she could hardly have pretended to credit what she calls “a widespread view that television had screwed up by handing Trump the microphone and failing to fact-check him adequately.” It’s difficult to see how they could have fact-checked him any more than they did—a fact she herself acknowledges elsewhere when

she writes that “even fact-checking perhaps the most untruthful candidate of our lifetime didn’t work; the more news outlets did it, the less the facts resonated.”

Well, that’s one way to put it. I myself have no doubt that the relentlessly anti-Trump coverage produced a backlash among that large majority of Americans who say they don’t trust the media, and that this must have made a difference, perhaps even *the* difference in the election. But when the media allow themselves to entertain the dreadful notion that they might have helped rather than hurt the hated billionaire-*cum*-politician, they do not proceed to the obvious conclusion that lots and lots of voters were prepared to take Mr. Trump’s word over that of the media because they had some reason to be skeptical about what the media were choosing to call “facts.” It’s easier to blame the voters as nuts and conspiracy theorists, or else as that bigoted “basket of deplorables” that Mrs. Clinton described.

At one point, Ms. Glasser almost seems to draw near to something that, in a dim light, might look like genuine self-criticism when she notes that

too much of Washington journalism in the celebrated good old days was an old boys’ club, and so was politics—they were smug, insular, often narrow-minded, and invariably convinced of their own rightness. . . . But this is 2016, and Trump has just been elected president of the United States after a campaign that tested pretty much all of our assumptions about the power of the press. Yes, we are now being accused—and accusing ourselves—of exactly the sort of smug, inside-the-Beltway myopia we thought we were getting rid of with the advent of all these new platforms.

But of course she doesn’t entertain this idea for long.

As editor of *Politico* throughout this never-to-be-forgotten campaign, I’ve been obsessively looking back over our coverage, too, trying to figure out what we missed along the way to the upset of the century and what we could have done differently. . . . But journalistic handwringing aside,

I still think reporting about American politics is better in many respects than it's ever been. I have a different and more existential fear today about the future of independent journalism and its role in our democracy. And you should too. Because the media scandal of 2016 isn't so much about what reporters failed to tell the American public; it's about what they did report on, and the fact that it didn't seem to matter.

In other words, the fault isn't with the media, nor even with this new "democratization of information" which has shaken them up during the last twenty years. How could it be? The problem must be with everybody else, who didn't pay the media enough attention, who didn't agree with the media about what mattered. Not surprisingly, that was also the view of Mr. Kristof:

In 2008, the three broadcast networks, in their nightly news programs, devoted over the entire year a total of three hours and 40 minutes to issues reporting (defined as independent coverage of election issues, not arising from candidate statements or debates). In 2016, that plummeted to a grand total of just 36 minutes. ABC and NBC had just nine minutes of issues coverage each; CBS had 18 minutes. So ABC and NBC each had less than one minute of issues coverage per month in 2016. Those figures come from Andrew Tyndall, whose Tyndall Report monitors the news programs. By Tyndall's measures, there was zero independent coverage in 2016 on those nightly programs about poverty, climate change or drug addiction. "Journalists were confronted with the spectacle of an issues-free campaign," Tyndall told me.

By "issues" he appears to mean only those issues—"poverty, climate change or drug addiction"—that matter to the Left and their media allies and that would matter to us, too, if we took a proper view of the media's authority in mattering matters. Like Ms. Glasser, he simply assumes that telling the rest of us what we

ought to be worried about is part of his job. Presumably the issues on which Mr. Trump based his appeal—immigration, jobs, terrorism—don't count as such in Mr. Tyndall's reckoning, though Mr. Kristof's making an exception in the general picture for the media's investigations into "Trump's foundation, taxes and past" suggests that those things do. Scandals count as issues too, at least when they are Trump scandals.

That is worth remembering when we look at the Kristof prescription for his fellow scribes during the Trump administration that lies ahead: "Not celebrity, but substance." As George S. Kaufman said, "Satire is what closes on Saturday night"—and, he might have added, "substance" closes on Saturday afternoon, at least now that the media's oracular prestige as to what is and isn't substance is gone with the Delphic incense. The media themselves just don't know it yet.

Mr. Rutenberg buoys himself with hope in the backlash to the backlash, noting that,

in the weeks since the election, magazines like *The New Yorker*, *The Atlantic* and *Vanity Fair*; newspapers including *The New York Times*, *The Wall Street Journal*, *The Los Angeles Times* and *The Washington Post*; and nonprofits like NPR and ProPublica have been reporting big boosts in subscription rates or donations. It's as if Mr. Trump's media attacks have combined with the heightened attention on the perils of fake news to create one big fat advertisement for the value of basic journalism.

Meanwhile, Mr. Kristof looks to more philanthropic subsidies "to finance coverage that is important but unprofitable." They may both be right, but they don't explain how any of this is going to make Trump voters start demanding more "fact-checking" to discredit their hero or agree with them about what matters. It sounds to me as if they are whistling past the media graveyard.

## Books

# Latin lover

by Andrew Stuttaford

It was, subversively enough, a Latin teacher who was the first to hint to us that the Romans were not quite the Englishmen-in-training that we had been led to believe. Eleven or twelve years old and enrolled in a Wiltshire boarding school that the 1960s were, most disappointingly, passing by, we'd been brought up on tales of heroic Horatius at the bridge, of steadfast Scaevola at the fire, of legions on the march, of a great empire, if not quite so great as the one on which the sun, until very recently, had never set. In a break from the usual fare—a maneuver by Caesar, more boredom from Livy—Mr. Chips (not his real name, and not his style either: he drove a Rover 2000, a surprisingly chic car for that time and place and, more thrillingly still, was rumored to be a member of London's Playboy Club) introduced us to something, he said, that was a little different, a poem by one Gaius Valerius Catullus:

*Vivamus, mea Lesbia, atque amemus . . .*

Crikey.

Catullus's Poem 5, perhaps his most famous, is an ode to his love and an ode to the intoxication of love.

Just a little later, "*Da mi basia mille*":

Give me a thousand kisses, then a hundred.  
Then another thousand, then a second  
   hundred.  
Then—don't stop—another thousand, then a  
   hundred . . .

The translation is by the British writer and classicist Daisy Dunn, the author of *Catullus' Bedspread*.<sup>1</sup> The book's suggestive (if slightly deceptively so) title is given an extra boost by its sub, the promise that within its sheets readers will discover *The Life of Rome's Most Erotic Poet*. Somewhere in the Elysian Fields Ovid raises an eyebrow. Somewhere at HarperCollins a clever mercenary chortles.

Ms. Dunn has set herself a tough task. "Of Catullus," wrote Charles Stuttaford (my paternal grandfather's cousin, since you ask) in his 1912 edition of the poet's works, "we know very little." Dunn agrees: "Practically everything that can be known about him must be extracted from his . . . poetry," a technique, warned the American classicist Peter Green, that was "risky" and "nowadays" (he was writing about a decade ago) has "the full weight of critical opinion against it," although "there are signs of change in the air."

I don't know if critical opinion has lightened up since then, but when Dunn leaves off her occasionally clunky re-imagining of the poet's daily life ("having wolfed down eggs and bread at some miserable inn") and focuses her attention and considerable erudition on the barely over a hundred poems that survive—poems without title, put in sequence (most likely) long after their author's death—to reconstruct Catullus's biography, the man replaces the shade and the millennia dissolve.

1 *Catullus' Bedspread: The Life of Rome's Most Erotic Poet*, by Daisy Dunn; Harper, 336 pages, \$25.99.

Born into a wealthy family in Verona, then a part of Gaul (Cis, not Trans), Catullus, who died aged around thirty, in, probably, 53 B.C., spent much of his adult life amid Rome's hipster prviligentsia. He was a prominent member of a circle of poets hacking away—somewhat subversively, griped Cicero—at the staid conventions governing poetry in that era. In a turbulent time in the history of the republic (complicated, but well described by Dunn), Catullus loitered on the fringes of politics, insulted the, ahem, “penetrated” Julius Caesar in Poem 57, briefly took a financially unrewarding government job in Bithynia, and mourned a lost brother. Crowning (albeit, in the end, with thorns) a busy sex life, there was his passionate, but doomed, affair with “Lesbia” (almost certainly Clodia Metelli, the wife of an aristocratic politician), a relationship—and its sour aftermath—he chronicled in some of his best-known poems. Metelli was, scolded Stuttaford, “a woman entirely without moral sense,” a description that may not have been entirely unfair, even by relaxed Roman standards.

Much of the delight in this book lies in the details—not *all* of them scandalous—of Roman life that Dunn provides: the recipe for *garum*, a “coveted” fish sauce that could also, it was said, “heal a crocodile bite;” the aristocrats plebbling down their accents two thousand years before Tony Blair’s glottal stops started; the appeal of nearly transparent Coan silk, “a favorite among the less virtuous.”

In Catullus, Dunn has a caustic and gossipy accomplice:

I was idling in the Forum when my friend Varus  
Saw me and led me off to the home of his lover,  
A little tart (as she immediately struck me),  
Though not obviously inelegant or lacking in  
charm.

Yes, much of Poem 64, Catullus’s longest surviving and, to Dunn, “most accomplished” work, dwells on the old myths, myths of a type thought to be more proper fare for the verse of the time, but they were woven into the bedspread that inspired her book’s title. It was a mildly meta conceit (even if that bedspread

belonged to one of the Argonauts), a nod, perhaps, to the interest that Catullus and his circle found in describing the everyday. Discussing Poem 27, Dunn tells how the Romans drank their wine watered down, something, she relates, that appalled Catullus the Gaul. Thus the sly anachronism in Dunn’s rendering (in her *The Poems of Catullus: A New Translation*) of the poem’s final lines:

And you, water, spoiler of wine, away from here  
*S’il vous plaît*. Off you pop to the dour kind.  
Here is Bacchus’ wine, neat.

*S’il vous plaît*.

Gauls talked in a different way too, Dunn writes, tending “to keep their mouths open more often than the Romans as they spoke, causing one word to leak into another like a loudly dripping tap. Gaping vowels gave rise to strange inflections and distinctive dialogue, which was exceedingly difficult to lose. And Catullus was not minded to do so. The sheer languidness of the elided vowel lent itself perfectly to love.”

Reviewer mops brow.

But Catullus was a more sophisticated poet than his naughty reputation might suggest, technically highly accomplished in ways that Dunn makes accessible to the layman, sometimes beautifully so: “[T]hese lines begin so abruptly—*da, dein, deinde*—it as if we hear them with Catullus’ quickening heartbeat.” He was an innovator, a writer about writing (in Poem 50 Catullus recalls “playing now with this metre and now with that”), the member of a literary set, a magpie, this from the street, that from the Greeks. Catullus’s Poem 51, in which he describes how he feels—not great—watching Clodia being watched by her husband, was inspired by a poem written by Sappho some six centuries before. It’s a reminder of the remarkable continuity of culture in the classical world, and it was a challenge of a sort. Catullus wanted his verse, he humblebragged in Poem 1, to “survive . . . for over a hundred years.”

And here we are.

But more recent generations have not always found it easy to deal with Catullus. His preference for the quotidian over the epic brought, as Dunn notes, “the corporeal and the earthy” in



its wake. In Poem 32, he asks his sweet Ipsitilla, “*meae deliciae*,” to invite him round for “nine consecutive,” well, “*fututiones*,” the thought of which already excites him as he lies back after a good meal: “I poke through my tunic and cloak.”

Reviewer worries how his editor will deal with *that*.

To read Catullus is to be offered a glimpse of a sexual morality so alien to Christian tradition that generations of translators, particularly in the more Puritan corners of Christendom (not least those rainy islands inhabited, according to Poem 11, by *horribiles uitro ultimosque Britan-nos*), have tried to consign a good number of Catullus’s poems to the Memory Hole. When, in the preface to his *Catullus: A Commentary*, published by Oxford University Press in 1961, the Scottish classicist C. J. Fordyce admitted that he had omitted “a few poems [actually nearly thirty percent of the total] which do not lend themselves to comment in English” he was just the latest in a long line of embarrassed Brits to do so. In the preface to his 1912 work, poor Charles Stuttaford stated that he had previously come under fire for annotating poems that some critics carped would have “been better to have left unexplained,” and, so, in 1912, that’s what he did. No less cautiously, some poems, including Poem 32, were included, but only in Latin: A reader able to translate *fututiones* (a word invented by Catullus) could cope with its shocking implications.

Stuttaford also did his best to haul Catullus back in the direction of respectability, in essence claiming that much of his poetry was, to borrow a fashionable phrase, no more than locker-room talk. *Maybe*. More plausibly, he argued that some of Catullus’s outrageous—and often outrageously entertaining—invective, including the notorious first two lines of Poem 16, was no more than “vulgar abuse” (to see just how vulgar, check out the 1990 translation by the British poet and classicist Guy Lee). What provoked them was the suggestion by two other poets that Catullus’s love poems were a touch effeminate. Catullus’s response was, as Dunn, delicately describing the indelicate, indicates, to assert “his masculinity once and for all.”

If that doesn’t make you turn to Mr. Lee, I don’t know what will.

## Elegy for elegance

Jaap Scholten

Comrade Baron:

A Journey through the Vanishing World of the Transylvanian Aristocracy.

Helena History Press, 404 pages, \$24

reviewed by David Pryce-Jones

*Comrade Baron* is a highly personalized defense of aristocracy. These days, that’s the sort of thing that simply isn’t done and this singular book therefore runs the risk of being overlooked, perhaps even finding a place on the Index Librorum Prohibitorum that keeps progressives occupied. That would be a shame. *Comrade Baron* is thought-provoking and a pleasure to read.

A Dutch journalist, Jaap Scholten went to work in Budapest shortly after the countries of the Soviet bloc had recovered their freedom. There he was to meet and marry Ilona, a Countess who happened to have been born and brought up in exile but whose forebears came from Transylvania. On grounds of privacy, I assume, he withholds her family name and for no obvious reason also gives pseudonyms to several elderly Transylvanians whose life stories he tells.

A semi-autonomous province of Hungary since the Middle Ages, Transylvania and its unchanging way of life generally seemed to the outside world a byword for feudalism. Noble families possessed huge estates with thousands of acres of forestry; on the eve of the Second World War, it appears, thirty-four such grand families were still in Transylvania. Over the years, Scholten traveled there with or without Ilona, taking up invitations and interviewing all and sundry. The more often he went, the more he discovered to admire in the past, and the more bearing that past had upon the present.

The internal evidence of *Comrade Baron* suggests that Jaap Scholten has an open mind, with more interest in people than in politics, although in the background his uncle, Coen Stork by name, was Dutch ambassador in Bucharest towards the end of the Ceaușescu

regime. Those unfamiliar with Hungarian history will have to take his word for it that Transylvanian personalities singled out in this book with names like Teleki, Mikes, Kalnoky, Bethlen, Ugron, and a few others besides took their responsibilities seriously. As often as not, they were public servants of whom any nation could be proud. The greatest landowner, Miklós Bánffy (1873–1950), was the Foreign Minister, the director of the Budapest opera, and the author of the trilogy of novels that is a lasting testimony to Transylvania. The Romanians, German settlers, Jews, and gypsies who used to comprise the huge majority of the local population were left to decide whether the benefit of living in a settled order outweighed the hard fact that they were not the equals of the nobles. Numerous well-chosen photographs in the book show some of these nobles in traditional Hungarian uniforms and costumes, the men all moustaches and jackets with braid and frogging, the ladies all furs, ballroom dresses, and pearl chokers. In Scholten's opinion, the defining characteristic of aristocracy is elegance. He allows, however, that he might be a romantic.

Post-war rebalancing of power between the victorious Allies handed Central and Eastern Europe over to the Communists. In a twist of bizarre logic, the punishment of one of Hitler's wartime satellites involved the reward of another: Transylvania was transferred from Hungary to Romania. The settled order of centuries was swiftly obliterated by the Communist Party. In the night of March 3, 1949, the Romanian secret police, the Securitate, rounded up 2,972 families, 7,804 people in total, "most of them nobles of Hungarian origin," as Scholten puts it. All were deported in trucks to some place in the country assigned as their *Domiciliu Obligatoriu*, DO for short, a combination of exile and house arrest. Scholten highlights the fate of some of the more prominent victims: Count Farkas Bethlen was sentenced on trumped-up charges to twenty-two years in prison and Baron István Schell to twenty-five years; Count Zsigmond Kun received a life sentence; István Orbán was accused of treason and shot in the back of the neck; Count

István Bethlen, a former Prime Minister described here as "an outspoken opponent of the alliance with Nazi Germany," was taken to Moscow and died in prison there. Károly Orbán might have been an ambassador or even Foreign Minister. He and his twelve-year-old daughter Maria were in their DO when he was informed that the huge silver firs in the park of his country house had been cut down. For the first time in her life, Maria saw her father cry. He too was executed in a Securitate prison. One among other state-sanctioned tortures condemned people to stand knee-deep in the water of rice paddies, cutting reeds in the Danube delta, or else conscripted as forced labor constructing the notorious Danube–Black Sea Canal. A very different set of photographs on the pages of *Comrade Baron* shows abandoned castles, ruins, and a cellar or bolt-hole that served as a DO.

"Communism is the absolution of criminality," in the phrase of one of the aristocrats quoted here. The regime of Nicolae Ceaușescu lasted almost twenty-five years, during which time Communism became merely the satisfaction of the absurd pretensions of this self-styled "Genius of the Carpathians." Neither an architect nor a huntsman, he had to have the biggest palace and shoot the biggest bears in the forest. A particularly striking chapter describes how he and the toadies around him were trying to pass themselves off as imitation aristocrats when they were merely thieves and murderers.

One authority estimates that by now two and a half thousand Hungarian aristocrats live in thirty countries abroad, five hundred in Hungary, and twenty-five in Transylvania. Quite soon, all that will be left of them will be some names of streets and dishes that their chefs created in bygone days. With their disappearance, to quote one of Scholten's elegiac expressions, the world will have become shorter of breath. There are no replacements. Elegance today is a matter of getting enough money by hook or by crook to build a vast and hideous villa. After half a century of Communism, Eastern Europe has a settled order, but it is a moral vacuum that leads nowhere and to nothing.

## Tales of brave Ulysses

Ronald C. White

American Ulysses:

A Life of Ulysses S. Grant.

Random House, 826 pages, \$35

reviewed by Paul E. Simpson

“Why Grant?” William S. McFeely asked rhetorically in the introduction to his 1981 biography of the Union Army general-in-chief and eighteenth President of the United States. Somewhere around 120 Grant biographies had already been published by then. Twenty years later, Jean Edward Smith stated (in the preface to his own eponymously titled Grant biography) that the number was by then up to 134. Writing in a 2012 review of yet another entry, the Columbia University historian Eric Foner noted that “no fewer than seven [Grant] biographies” had appeared since Smith’s tally in 2001. Extrapolating from these figures, it would appear that Ronald C. White, Jr.’s *American Ulysses: A Life of Ulysses S. Grant* is at least the one hundred forty-second Grant biography, raising yet again McFeely’s essential question: “Why Grant?” Do we really need another Grant biography?

The sheer number of books written about Grant and their wildly varying assessment of the man have, in recent years, made at least a passing reference to the confusing historiography nearly obligatory in any new Grant book review. Some of the more amusing review titles from the last few decades include: “America’s Most Reconsidered General”; “Grant Rediscovered, Again”; and “Still a Mystery? Grant and the Historians.” In a nutshell, the history of Grant historiography goes like this: He defeated the armies of the Confederacy, left office after a two-term presidency as the most popular man in the United States, and re-entered private life as the most respected American in the world. His funeral procession through Manhattan stretched for seven miles and attracted 1.5 million onlookers. His mausoleum in New York City is the largest in North America; his monument at the foot of the U.S. capitol

is the largest equestrian statue in the world. How can it be that modern Americans hold him in such low regard?

In the early decades of the twentieth century, the revisionist “Lost Cause” version of American Civil War historiography began to take hold; in this telling, Grant was not the Washingtonian figure who had saved the Union during crisis, not the bold and brilliant strategist who had finally defeated the indomitable Lee on the battlefield, nor, as President, the crusader against rampant corruption who stood up for the rights of former slaves, defeated the Ku Klux Klan, and put the country back on a sound economic footing with disciplined monetary policy.

In the “Lost Cause” telling of history, Grant was a bumbling, drunken, failed businessman who defeated the South’s “Marble Man” Robert E. Lee (who, in Lost Cause theory, was simply defending the Constitutional principle of “States’ Rights”) only because he had more troops at his disposal and had no compunctions about disposing of them as recklessly as possible until he finally won. Further, Grant ruined Reconstruction by foolishly trying to force integration on a proud, recalcitrant South that had allegedly been fighting to preserve Constitutional government as intended by the Founders. For “social history” context, it’s worth remembering that during this particular Lost Cause period of Grant defenestration, D. W. Griffith’s hugely popular *Birth of a Nation* (1915) was screened at Woodrow Wilson’s White House; James Thurber published a famously amusing parody in a 1930 edition of *The New Yorker* entitled “If Grant Had Been Drinking at Appomattox”; Margaret Mitchell’s novel *Gone with the Wind* won a Pulitzer Prize in 1937; and the film adaptation thereof won ten Academy Awards, including Best Picture, in 1939.

With the Civil War Centennial approaching, several mid-twentieth-century historians undertook an anti-revisionist re-examination of Grant in the 1950s and 1960s, determining that perhaps he was not such a bad person after all, and that he was indeed an effective

general. Among the most notable of these was Bruce Catton (winner of a 1954 Pulitzer Prize for *A Stillness at Appomattox*). This was the sort of “revisionism” McFeely claimed to abhor, and he was having none of it when he undertook his own Grant biography during the Jimmy Carter era. McFeely’s Grant was pretty much all the bad things the Lost Cause revisionists had described, *plus* Grant didn’t really care all that much about the former slaves, *and* Grant betrayed his own social class to boot, sending hundreds of thousands of them to their deaths so that he could claw his way to the top of a Gilded Age American aristocracy.

In considering whether we really need yet another Grant biography, it should be mentioned that the 141-or-so earlier Grant biographies, written over as many years, have varied widely: in tenor—ranging from hagiography to character assassination—and in focus—with many emphasizing a particular aspect or phase of Grant’s career without attempting a fully unified depiction of a person who operated at the apex of two extraordinarily significant decades of United States history. Ronald C. White, Jr.’s *American Ulysses* is the third full-scale, ancestry-to-epilogue treatment of Grant’s life published in the last four decades, so it is perhaps most useful to compare this latest Grant appraisal to the other two: William S. McFeely’s *Grant: A Biography* and Jean Edward Smith’s *Grant*.

McFeely’s Grant was a psychologically insecure grasping social climber: “Once he had become general, he had to go on to be president, and once his time as president was up he had, again, no idea what to do with himself. But the difference was that he had heard those cheers and he could not do without them.” To those historians who insisted that Grant “must have had some secret greatness, hidden within him . . . almost as if it were some special organ implanted in the bodies of a particular few,” McFeely boldly demurred that Grant had no such special quality: “I leave to others the problem of accounting for a Mozart or a Marx . . . .” Mozart or Marx? Interesting choices of comparison for a biographer of Ulysses S. Grant, almost a Lloyd Bentsen de-

bating tactic: “General Grant, I’m a historian. I know Mozart and Marx. And General . . . you’re no Mozart or Marx.”

Why do we still care about McFeely? Because his anti-anti-revisionist book *Grant: A Biography* won a Pulitzer Prize in 1982 (beating out David McCullough’s biography of Theodore Roosevelt, *Mornings on Horseback*) and spawned two generations of anti-anti-anti-revisionism, mostly in support of Grant. In answering his own “Why Grant?” query, he acknowledged that he had written yet another Grant biography “neither because I had discovered some extraordinary mass of evidence that would enable me to greatly revise accounts of the events of his career nor because I had manufactured an intricate theory that would enable me to claim that I had found a ‘new Grant.’” Instead, writing in the immediate aftermath of Vietnam and Watergate, McFeely manufactured an intricate pop-psychology theory that sought to reinforce the “old” Grant through a largely negative portrayal steeped in the cynicism of 1970s America. Grant, he wrote, was “a curious choice for the subject of a biography if the writer is not an admirer of warfare and is not inordinately fascinated by political corruption. . . . No amount of revision is going to change the way men died at Cold Harbor, the fact that men in the Whiskey Ring stole money, and the broken hopes of black Americans . . . .”

Jean Edward Smith’s *Grant* was a runner-up for the Pulitzer Prize in 2001 (McCullough won that year, for *John Adams*). Covering the same key aspects and events of Grant’s life story as McFeely at similar depth and breadth (albeit from a decidedly more positive point of view), Smith observed that all biography “reflects the attitudes and predilections of the author, and the time it was written.” In his preface, he singled out McFeely as being among a group of “academic historians who stressed the inhumanity of war during the Vietnam era [and] denigrated Grant’s role in saving the Union.” The key to understanding Grant, in Smith’s telling, is the dogged persistence he displayed throughout his life:

“The common thread is strength of character—an indomitable will that never flagged in the face of adversity. . . . Sometimes he blundered badly; he often oversimplified; yet he saw his goals clearly and moved toward them relentlessly.” The Pulitzer Prize-winning historian James M. McPherson called Smith’s *Grant* “the best full-scale biography to have appeared.” Two-time Pulitzer-winner David Herbert Donald called it “by far the best life of Grant ever written.”

With *American Ulysses*, White wades into the fray, presenting a Grant biography every bit as thorough and sympathetic to its subject as Smith’s *Grant*. In fact, if White’s book has a problem, it is this very similarity; much of what he writes about Grant has already been covered by Smith, and covered quite well. Both authors seek to re-introduce U. S. Grant to a public that somehow has not yet gotten the message that he was not such a bad guy after all, and in fact was pretty special—the right man, at the right time, for a politically troubled nation. Both authors present a unified chronicle demonstrating that Grant’s persistence in the face of adversity early in life presaged the tenacity with which he would wage war against the Confederacy and then, as President, attempt to reconstruct a fundamentally transformed America. Proving that McFeely still rankles and motivates his fellow historians thirty-five years later, White, like Smith, singles him out for criticism in his introduction.

What White brings to the Grant discussion, and where his book truly excels, is his deeper examination of what he calls “elements of Grant overlooked or undervalued,” particularly his devotion to his wife, Julia, and their children. Even McFeely—who was almost as unkind in his portrayal of Julia as he was to her husband—lamented the dearth of information on Julia’s life, noting that “by rights this book should be a joint study of both of them. . . . I hope the importance of Julia in the Grant story is nowhere lost.” White has done a great deal to rescue Julia from obscurity.

White makes much of the fact that he is the first Grant biographer to have had the benefit

of both the fully collected *Papers of Ulysses S. Grant*—finally complete after nearly a half-century of work by scholars—and The Ulysses S. Grant Presidential Library, which opened at Mississippi State University in 2012, and he has mined these troves to good effect. True Grant aficionados will be interested to learn the names of his childhood friends, their adventures, and what sorts of games they liked to play. They may be surprised to learn of his love of contemporary literature, and of the extent to which his avid reading of novels shaped his thinking and honed his writing skills. They will enjoy the romantic details of his courtship of Julia, their early years of marriage, and his relationship with his slaveholding, Southern-sympathizing in-laws-to-be. They will read with horror the details of nineteenth-century transportation and appreciate Grant’s compassion and ability to manage crisis situations in White’s recounting of his regiment’s transfer to California via the isthmus of Panama. Seven hundred people, including many soldiers’ wives and children, began the voyage from New York City in June of 1852; two months later, only 450 survived to arrive in San Francisco, most of the others having fallen victim to cholera and other diseases contracted during the arduous crossing of Panama. Although not officially in charge of the situation (he was the regimental quartermaster), Grant took command. A fellow officer, traveling with his own young family, wrote that Grant was “one of the coolest men in all these trying circumstances I ever saw.”

Grant had wisely determined that the move to California would prove too dangerous for his young son and for Julia, who was then pregnant, but his decision to leave them home led to what was probably the most significant formative experience of his antebellum life: his two-and-a-half-year separation from his wife and family. Anyone who has read about Grant is aware that this was a tough time for him, and ultimately led to his unwarranted reputation as a habitual drunk. In a chapter titled “Forsaken,” however, White lays bare in heart-aching detail the depths of his despondency—what we today might call clinical depression—during

this period. It was while serving in isolated army garrisons in the Northwestern Territories that Grant began dabbling in side ventures, hoping to find a way to leave the army and still support his family. Some of these ended in failure due to exigencies beyond his control, particularly weather; others failed due to his misplaced trust in old army friends, portending similar errors in judgment he would make as president.

White makes clear, in this and subsequent chapters, that Grant's overwhelming personal concern throughout his life was how to support his family, and to be with them. Amazingly, he rose from clerking in his family's tannery business in 1859 to General-in-Chief of all Union armies in 1864. He gave up what would have been a substantial pension when elected President of the United States in 1868, because then-current law precluded federal political officials from receiving military

pension; presidential pensions were not provided until after Harry Truman's presidency. Post-presidency, Grant was financially ruined following the Panic of 1884, and yet insisted on selling off all his personal possessions, including his wartime and presidential memorabilia, to satisfy his debts. His final act on behalf of his family's financial well-being was the writing of his memoirs while he was dying of cancer. This two-volume work was published by Mark Twain, and remains in print to this day, acclaimed as a classic piece of literature, and its royalties supported his family long after his death.

White's *American Ulysses* is a fine addition to the enormous collection of Grant historiography. If you're already a Grantophile, you will know much of what this biography offers, but you will still come away with a larger understanding of the man who is buried in Grant's tomb.

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## Forthcoming in *The New Criterion*:

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*with essays by Roger Scruton, Conrad Black & Roger Kimball*

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Is there a curse on cursive? *by John Simon*

Richard Posner *by Conrad Black*

Reginald Foster's legacy *by John Byron Kulmer*

## Kafka, tuberculosis & “Magic Mountain”

by Jeffrey Meyers

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Mann’s and Kafka’s lives and work stand at opposite poles of modern German biography and literature. Mann was a patrician North German Protestant, Kafka a middle-class Czech Jew. Mann was a high school graduate and professional writer, Kafka a doctor of law and high-ranking civil servant. Mann had a wealthy wife and six children, Kafka was a bachelor with no issue. Mann lived in America for fourteen years, Kafka wrote an imaginary account of the country. Mann, an ironic realist, was an internationally revered novelist who won the Nobel Prize and died at the age of eighty. Kafka, an expressionistic modernist, published very little in his lifetime and was not well known when he died at the age of forty.

Both novelists keenly appreciated each other’s work. Kafka, who admired Mann as the greatest contemporary German writer, praised “Tonio Kröger” in a letter of 1904 to Max Brod and in 1917 told Brod that “Mann is one of those writers whose works I hunger for.” As early as 1921 Mann had “developed a considerable interest in the writings of Franz Kafka,” and in 1925 he called the posthumously published *The Trial* “remarkable.” In his “Homage” to *The Castle* in 1940, Mann wrote, “never has the divine, the superhuman, been observed, experienced, characterized with stranger, more daring, more comic expedients, and with more inexhaustible psychological riches.”

In 1924, when Kafka died of tuberculosis and Mann published *The Magic Mountain*, the life of one and art of the other came together.

In this novel, Mann portrayed the sanatorium setting where Kafka had lived during his last tragic years. At that time the treatment for tuberculosis, which had no cure, was the same in Davos, Switzerland, the Alpine setting of Mann’s novel, and in Kafka’s sanatoria in the high mountains of Czechoslovakia and Austria. Kafka could have been a character in Mann’s novel. His grim medical experiences and attitude toward his disease, doctors, and fellow patients, his excursions and emotional life, his psychology and symptoms from 1917 to 1924 are amazingly similar to Hans Castorp’s, in the novel’s time frame, from 1907 to 1914. Kafka’s experiences confirm the clinical authenticity of the novel and illuminate the character of Mann’s paradoxical hero.

Joseph Conrad captured the mixture of luxury and morbidity, the unrealistic and horrific essence of the Alpine sanatoria, when he wrote of “Davos-Platz, where the modern Dance of Death goes on in expensive hotels.” In March 1924, three months before his death, Kafka planned to enter a sanatorium in Davos, but could not obtain the necessary travel documents. Kafka, like Castorp, switched to a narrow-gauge mountain railway that slowly puffed its way up the steep incline to the Wienerwald sanatorium in Austria, his last—and futile—hope. Both men were met at the train station by an open carriage or sleigh that carried them for a short ride past the dark woods and glistening snow and into the town.

Both sanatoria were large, impersonal health resorts with an international, multilingual

clientele. The remote yet cosmopolitan group of sufferers were bound together by their serious illness and threat of death. For many years Kafka had hastened his early death by refusing to be ill with the other ill and resisting conventional medical treatment. He chose, instead, tranquil valleys and country inns (precisely like those described in *Buddenbrooks* and *Doctor Faustus*) with sunny balconies and nourishing vegetarian meals, where he could control his own way of life and write in peace. Later on—hypersensitive to noise, finicky about food, and too weak to endure pain—he condemned the sanatoria with characteristic gallows humor. They were excruciating prisons, he said, designed “exclusively for the lung, houses that cough and shake with fever day and night, where you have to eat meat, where former hangmen dislocate your arm if you resist injections.” Patients were forced to become living experiments: “Here the torture goes on for years, with pauses for effect so that it will not go too quickly, and—the unique element—the victim himself is compelled by his own will, out of his own wretched inner self, to protract the torture.”

Similarly, Mann describes the “coughing that had no conviction and gave no relief, that did not even come out in paroxysms but was just a feeble, dreadful welling up of the juices of organic dissolution.” He also portrays tormenting medical operations: the procedure that deliberately collapsed lungs to rest them and the fictional character Anton Ferge’s description of the violation of his body, a kind of surgical rape: “The pleura, my friends, is not anything that should be felt of. . . . Never in my life have I imagined there could be such a sickening feeling, outside hell and its torments”

Kafka finally gave up hope and realized that the agonizing torture chambers in the high mountains would not significantly improve his condition. In *The Magic Mountain* no one is ever cured. Settembrini, completely disillusioned, is still sick. Clavdia Chauchat flees, still inwardly tainted. Joachim Ziemssen, the sons of *Tous les deux*, the gentleman rider, Leila Gerngross, Dr. Blumenkohl, Karen Karstedt, and many others die.

When he first arrived in the sanatorium the intensely private and reserved Kafka was hostile to his fellow-sufferers. He complained about the tiresome egoism of the patients, their tedious talk about the medical profession, the latest therapies, sick relatives, and miracle cures. Mann also satirizes the self-obsessed inhabitants of the International Sanatorium Berghof such as Frau Stohr, who “talks about how fascinating it was to cough.” The patients compete for attention by displaying their pathological symptoms, by boasting about the severity of their disease and their “utterly insufficient remnant of sound lung-tissue.”

But as the corrosive bacilli devoured his own lungs and larynx (in the novel Ziemssen also dies of a tubercular larynx), Kafka eventually became more sympathetic, shared their suffering and felt the first stirring of solidarity with the sick victims. Castorp, who nourishes his own disease so he can prolong his stay in the mountains and avoid beginning his engineering career in Hamburg, eagerly wants to become a real patient. He arrives in a healthy condition, but immediately develops a cold, catarrh, and fever, and begins to cough up blood. He is fascinated by what he imagines to be the ennobling and spiritualizing aspects of disease; he associates illness with distinction and genius, sympathizes with the *moribundi* and loves the sight of a coffin. He visits the sick and dying, attends funerals, and grieves for the death of his beloved cousin Ziemssen. Kafka, reversing his original stance and focusing on his own illness, wrote his sister Ottla, “one of the gains of being with other sick people is that one takes the disease more seriously.”

Kafka soon learned to distrust the encouraging but false assurances of the doctors. The imminent recovery that the physicians repeatedly promised if he would only prolong his stay in the mountains seemed increasingly unlikely. Doctors, he felt, “both believe in conventional medicine and are helpless when you need them most.” Mann’s Dr. Behrens constantly prolongs the stay of his incurable patients, and explodes when Castorp suggests that he has a financial interest in the sanatorium: “I’m not the proprietor here! I’m on hire. I’m a doctor! I’m nothing but a doctor, I would



give you to understand. I'm not a pimp." For both writers the unhealthy climate, diabolical atmosphere, and medical treatment are actually conducive to illness, and intensify rather than cure the disease. The doctors are godlike creatures licensed to treat their victims, but their inept and dangerous procedures merely prolong the agony.

In order to cope with and compensate for their illness, both Kafka and Castorp believe that tuberculosis has a psychological as well as a physical etiology. Kafka wrote that his disease "was actually a mental illness bursting its own banks" and that "the body cannot be healthier than the psyche." This is essentially the belief of Mann's Dr. Krokowski, who asserts in his dramatic lectures that "Symptoms of disease are nothing but a disguised manifestation of the power of love; and all disease is only love transformed."

Kafka's friends remarked on the odd serenity, even cheerfulness, with which he seemed to accept his disease. His biographer Reiner Stach observes that "he always spoke of his illness in positive images . . . read it as a sign, even assigned it moral dignity . . . [called it] 'an illness bestowed upon me.'" From the beginning, he interpreted his tuberculosis and the upheaval of his normal life as a cathartic crisis. Alluding to the traditional horizontal cure, wherein the patients were wrapped up like mummies and like the dead did not feel the cold, and suggesting his impending doom, he stated, "it is not the kind of tuberculosis that can be laid in a lounge chair and nursed back to health, but a weapon that continues to be of supreme necessity as long as I remain alive." Kafka felt he had made a kind of Faustian pact in which he traded health for creative power, and his pathological "weapon" fired up his imagination as it devoured his body. Pain hurt him into art, and, he insisted, "it is possible for nearly everyone who can write to objectify pain while suffering it." He told his publisher that his illness, which had been lurking for years, had finally broken out and was "almost a relief." In a similar fashion Castorp, half in love with easeful death, nourishes and embraces his disease in order to further his hermetic

education, achieve more penetrating insight, and deepen his human emotions.

One of Kafka's excursions proved dangerous and was strikingly like Castorp's. Out on a walk but unable to reach his destination, only two miles away, he kept slipping in the snow and when darkness descended was forced to retrace his steps on the deserted track. In his diary he called it "a senseless path, without an earthly destination." In the crucial "Snow" chapter of *The Magic Mountain*, Castorp sets out on skis. He had "a lively craving to come into close and freer touch with the mountains, with their snowy desolation; toward them he was irresistibly drawn." Lost and exhausted, he lies down in the heavy snow and is tempted to go to sleep and die there before regaining his will to live.

Mann's novel describes in satiric detail the various social strata and mores in the sanatorium. Tuberculosis attacks the young, induces euphoria, heightens the feverish glow of the eyes and skin, and enhances the aesthetic attractiveness of the victim. Stimulated by isolation, gossip, fever, and emphasis on the body; uprooted from family ties and unrestrained by ethical conventions; living with foreigners in a disturbing atmosphere and eager to enjoy the short time left in life, the patients jeopardize their health with flirtation and sex, reckless folly and loose morals. Kafka believed there was a close connection between disease and love, and his paradoxical observation about the love life in the sanatorium applies to Castorp as well as to himself: "far from family and friends, in a quiet snowy setting, relying only on each other, [the patients are] dangerously ill and hence full of lust for life." Sexual intimacy inevitably awakened new and illusory desires, and provoked a fever that "spread his unhappiness to his lungs." Specifically connecting his pathological and emotional life, he said that Felice Bauer, the first of his three fiancées (none of whom he married), was a living symbol of his infection and inflammation. One of Mann's major themes is the ineluctable connection between love and death: "*Pamour et la mort*." Castorp, consumed by tormenting passion, is perversely attracted to rather than repelled by Clavdia Chauchat's wasting disease.

Kafka perceived the disturbing ambiguity of the decaying yet desirable flesh that inspires love while it warns of death: "It is soft flesh, retentive of a good deal of water, slightly puffy, and keeps its freshness only a few days. Actually, of course, it stands up pretty well, but that is only proof of the brevity of human life." The same theme recurs in the novel when Dr. Behrens tells Castorp that the human body is essentially composed of water, Ziemssen is painfully aware of the tubercular ulcers on Marusja's swelling bosom, and Castorp takes possession of Clavdia's X-ray which dramatically reveals the extent of her consumption.

The dying Kafka described the morbid symptoms that prevail throughout *The Magic Mountain*. "It is not life or death," he noted, "but life or one-fourth life, breathing or gasping for breath, slowly . . . burning down with fever." Toward the end, he is forced to acknowledge the uselessness of the painful treatments and face the inevitable result of his consumption: "all this has no other purpose but to slow down the development of the abscesses, from which he must ultimately suffocate, to draw out this wretched life, the fever and so on, as long as

possible." Finally, he described the stages of his ever-constricting existence that led to the still more straitened circumstances of the grave: "before long, I will be confined to Prague, then to my room, then to my bed, then to a certain position in bed, then to nothing more."

Kafka, terminally ill, was forced to face the reality of corrosive tuberculosis and impending death. The Berghof sanatorium satisfies Castorp's Romantic infatuation with disease, encourages the morbid fascination with his own condition, and fulfills his death wish. It stimulates his interest in the psychology of suffering and acquiescence in disease, which is both spiritual and physical, exalting and degrading. Mann's aesthetic point of view is tragicomic, Kafka's personal view is necessarily tragic, but both writers thought the artist's attempt to love was doomed and he had to suffer in order to create. They believed in the Nietzschean paradox that disease could bring new awareness to the author who survived its grave assaults and that physical pain could be transformed into creative achievement. "Sickness itself can be a stimulant to life," Nietzsche declared, "only one has to be healthy enough for this stimulant. . . . We seek life raised to a higher power, life lived in danger."