The New Criterion

March 2018

A monthly review *edited by Roger Kimball*

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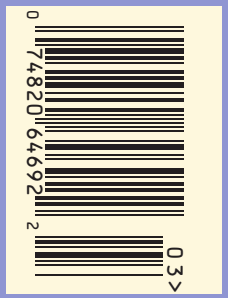

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Notes & Comments: March 2018

Art & an affront

We're not sure whether to file this under "No good deed goes unpunished," "Legal follies," or "Art-world nonsense."

Jerry Wolkoff is a New York developer. In the early 1970s, he bought the Neptune Meter factory building, a sprawling nineteenth-century industrial structure, in a run-down part of Long Island City. That was back in the "Ford-to-City-Drop-Dead" days, a time when real estate in much of Manhattan, let alone the outer boroughs, was depressed, and the city itself was reeling from the assaults of the 1960s and the misguided urban policies that followed in the wake of that hideous decade.

Mr. Wolkoff had always intended to develop the space, but timing is a developer's greatest asset. He bided his time, renting out office space in the building. A generous, public-spirited chap, he started renting studio space to artists in the 1990s. Also in the 1990s, he was asked by artists if the exterior walls of the building could be used as a canvas for urban self-expression. Those overseeing the display insisted that the word "graffiti" not be used to describe the resulting patterns. But, as Juliet argued, "a rose by any other word would smell as . . . "—well, you know. Some more recent descriptions of the result speak of "aerosol art." If you remember what the sides of New York subway cars looked liked in the late 1970s, you'll have a good idea of what happened to the Neptune Meter building after some eleven thousand murals had been added to its walls.

Except by this point, the site had been unofficially rebaptized variously as "5 Pointz: The Institute of Higher Burnin'," "5Pointz Aerosol Art Center," or just "5Pointz." The numeral was a reference to the five boroughs of New York, the "z" a concession to the orthography and insouciance of the wielders of the aerosol cans. *Nostalgie de la boue* is a powerful force in decadent societies, especially among affluent members of the middle class wishing to proclaim their emancipation from and disdain for middle-class values. So it is no surprise that 5Pointz gradually became a tourist attraction and mecca for school tours. It was both "art" and an affront, an irresistible combination.

But time's wingèd chariot pursues all, even aerosol artists and property developers. So in the fullness of time, which in this case was 2013, Mr. Wolkoff applied for and received permission to demolish the now-rotting edifice and replace it with an upscale residential condominium complex replete with a public park. In a gesture to the building's recent adventures, the plans called for ten thousand square feet of wall space and panels to be used exclusively for art, including a ground-level façade reserved for "curated graffiti."

It was in late 2013 that Mr. Wolkoff made his blunder. Everyone knew he was about to demolish the building (this was accomplished in 2014). But suddenly, and apparently without

warning, he had the building whitewashed, thus effacing the effacements. The "arts community" was outraged. Certain lawyers were ecstatic.

Naturally, a lawsuit was brought against Mr. Wolkoff. His tort was violating the 1990 Visual Artists Rights Act, which affords artists certain rights in their work even if they do not own it. The act deals exclusively with formal rights, not aesthetic value, which is lucky for the beneficiaries of this decision. A jury found for the plaintiffs, and last month the U.S. District Court Judge Frederic Block awarded $6.7 million in damages—the maximum allowable—to twenty-one graffiti grandees, $150,000 for each of the forty-five works that met the criteria. Eric Baum, a lawyer for the artists, said that the decision is "a triumph for artists all around the country." He did not, so far as we know, comment on the decision's implications for the integrity of private property.

He was, however, chuffed about its "cultural significance": "The cultural significance of 5Pointz and the value of the aerosol art created by the twenty-one plaintiffs has been recognized as fine art. It is now clear that the federal law protects the dignity of the artist and ensures that their artwork is treated respectfully."

So, the perpetrators of the graffiti are richer by $75,000 to $1.3 million. Who knows what the attorney's take was? And Judge Block got to preen and moralize about the "insolence" of the developer and the great cultural loss he forced upon a grieving public. "The shame of it all is that since 5Pointz was a prominent tourist attraction, the public would undoubtedly have thronged to say its goodbyes . . . and gaze at the formidable works of aerosol art for the last time."

Chew on the adjective "formidable" for a moment. Doubtless it would have been like stout Cortez and his men gazing with "wild surmise" upon the Pacific.

Mr. Wolkoff's action was described as "gratuitous, willful, and malicious." It is worth noting, however, that he apparently whitewashed the murals out of consideration, not malice. He did not want the artists' work publicly dismantled piecemeal in the lengthy demolition process. Better, he thought, to draw a veil over an arrangement that had always been meant to be temporary.

As Justin Davidson pointed out in *New York* magazine, "The 5Pointz case produced a strange role reversal." Indeed, the irony is delicious. "Graffiti artists, who started out as apostles of irreverence and improvisation, were now arguing for preservation and permanence. And a real-estate developer had reason to regret his former friendliness to art." Should he have held off whitewashing the graffiti until the artists had a chance to document their scrawls and—if Judge Block is to be believed—the public had had a chance to throng to the site to pay its last respects? Maybe. But in this instance, Mr. Wolkoff acted with some of the spontaneity and "insolence" we like to see in artists—but not real estate developers.

Readers with long memories will know that in some ways the controversy over the fate of 5Pointz is reminiscent of the controversy over Richard Serra's *Tilted Arc* back in the 1980s. The work in question—a huge, minatory, bullying curve of rusted Cor-Ten steel—was fiercely disliked by the people who had to pass by it outside the Javits building in New York. They wanted it moved. Serra wanted it to stay. Nearly everyone in the art world was on Serra's side, partly—as Hilton Kramer noted in these pages at the time—because of the presumption of "the artist's divine dispensation." Who cares about the public's rights when we have uppercase Art on the line? But beyond that repulsive philistinism of the elites was the grubby old business of shocking, or at least irritating, bourgeois taste. That was part—a very large part—of what fueled the evanescent popularity of so-called "graffiti art," at 5Pointz as elsewhere. Aesthetic quality was never an issue. On the contrary, it was always about transgression, about the "transvaluation of values," about thumbing one's nose at convention, propriety, artistic merit. To use Judge Block's term, it was all about "insolence." Mr. Wolkoff's error lay in not being insolent towards the right people.

Speaking of insolence

Back in February 2016 in this space, we reported on the "Rhodes Must Fall" movement. This little gem of anti-historical political correctness was co-founded by one Ntokozo Qwabe, a young South African law student who was attending Oriel College, Oxford, courtesy of a Rhodes scholarship, which paid not only his school fees but also provided him with roundtrip airfare from South Africa and an annual stipend of £13,658. Despite—or was it partly because of?—these benefactions, Mr. Qwabe dedicated himself to having a statue of Cecil Rhodes removed from Oriel, the great philanthropist's alma mater.

The "Rhodes Must Fall" movement enjoyed its mayfly's moment of attention. Students at the Oxford Union voted 245 to 212 to remove the statue of Rhodes as part of a wider movement of "decolonization." (This was the same body that, in 1933, resolved by a vote of 275 to 153 that "this House will in no circumstances fight for its King and Country.") The movement found grateful echoes in the United States, where calls to remove statues of Robert E. Lee, Thomas Jefferson, and many other Southern heroes and statesmen enjoyed a brief and shameful publicity. (In the States, this embarrassing animus against history has mostly moved on to the field of literature: schools in Duluth, Minnesota, for example, have removed *To Kill a Mockingbird* and *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* from their curricula because the books contain words of which the P.C. Gauleiters disapprove.)

Eventually, however, some modicum of common sense, leavened by a strategic dollop of self-interest, stopped the "Rhodes Must Fall" movement in its tracks. Speaking up for common sense were professors like Nigel Biggar, who pointedly observed that if the statue of Rhodes were removed, then statues of Winston Churchill would be next on the list of proscribed figures. "If Rhodes must fall," he said, "so must Churchill, whose views on empire and race were similar. And so probably must Abraham Lincoln. While Lincoln liberated African-American slaves, he doubted they could be integrated into white society and favoured their separate development—their apartheid—in an African colony." Professor Biggar's central point was this: "If we insist on our heroes being pure, then we aren't going to have any."

The element of self-interest raised its head when donors to Oriel made it clear that were the statue of Cecil Rhodes to go, so would their millions of pounds in donations. In the end, public opinion swung decisively against the "Rhodes Must Fall" movement, and it sputtered to an inglorious end, much to the disappointment of historical revisionists and champions of divisive identity politics everywhere.

A friend introduced us to an illuminating footnote to this drama. While the controversy was unfolding, the London *Telegraph* ran a story about the reaction to Rhodes in Zimbabwe, the country formerly known (until 1980) as Rhodesia, where young Cecil made his name and his fortune. Surely, Zimbabwe would act to efface every trace of the man who conquered them and imposed upon them colonial rule.

In fact, the Zimbabweans have tended to act about Rhodes with far more historical savvy and common sense than preening African academic exports like Ntokozo Qwabe or Western social justice warriors. Cecil Rhodes is buried on the Matopo Hills some twenty miles south of Bulawayo, the second-largest city in Zimbabwe. A brass plaque proclaims the grave's tenant. There have been occasional calls to exhume Rhodes from this place of honor, but they have always been successfully, and intelligently, resisted. The *Telegraph* reports on Middleton Nyoni, then the Town Clerk of Bulawayo, who dryly responded to a demand that Rhodes's grave be moved: "It is the Taliban who destroy history—and I am not a Taliban. After Rhodes's grave, who is next?"

Good question. Even the notorious Robert Mugabe, in effect the dictator of Zimbabwe for nearly forty years until he was forced from office in November 2017, understood that Cecil Rhodes was an inextricable part of Zimbabwe's history. "I say to my people 'listen, let him stay down there.' Cecil Rhodes, well, that is history now." As the *Telegraph* noted about Rhodes, "this particular Victorian helped to make them what they are. To erase his memory would be to erase part of themselves." It is sad that so many Western progressives are innocent of that basic historical understanding and human sympathy.

Soviet fate, Russian hope
by Jacob Howland

Perhaps unsurprisingly, the centenary of the Russian Revolution was greeted in many quarters with what William Doino Jr. described in *First Things* as "a mix of romantic myth and Orwellian revisionism" ("Mourning the Russian Revolution," February 27, 2017). Consider, for example, the calculated sentimentalism of *The New York Times*'s "Red Century" series, advertised as "exploring the history and legacy of communism." One now-infamous article in the series, "Why Women Had Better Sex Under Socialism," used the poorly sourced claim that women in countries like East Germany and Bulgaria enjoyed more sexual pleasure before the fall of the Iron Curtain to promote the genuinely obscene notion that "women had more fulfilling lives during the Communist era." The author interviewed two nostalgic older ladies, but was unable to speak to the millions of women and girls whose lives were destroyed by forced relocation and imprisonment during Stalin's "dekulakization," or those who died of starvation and disease during his Five-Year Plans, or who saw their husbands and sons, fathers and brothers executed or shipped off to the Gulag during the Great Terror, and often followed them to the same fate. That the paper of record could print such mendacious rubbish is a telling symptom of the ideological sickness of our times.

The widespread collapse of journalistic standards in the United States is part of a general and rapid deterioration of thought, language, and, above all, cultural and historical memory. Like the Bolsheviks, our iconoclastic age increasingly despises the past and scorns its accumulated insight and experience. Although we need look no further than the last century, we seem largely to have forgotten what a stunted and bitter harvest of ignorance and ill will must be reaped by a civilization that ceases to plough the rich loam bequeathed by its ancestors—to educate itself in the most basic sense. Today one must seriously ask whether some new and strange permutation of the Soviet fate, nourished by a volatile mixture of social and political fragmentation and increasingly converging technologies of surveillance and political manipulation, might be gestating in the dark womb of our age.

Now more than ever, we must recall the damage inflicted by Communism on the souls of human beings, and on the institutions that cultivate virtue and provide meaning in human life. No one better understood the origins of totalitarianism, or was more able to reckon its human cost, than the great Russian writers of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. They have something important to teach us about the multiple threats we now confront. In their writings, moreover, we may hope to find—even in the worst case—a precious measure of individual salvation.

Reading the Russians can feel like being slapped in the face. Dostoyevsky, for one, repeatedly smacks his readers with astonishing prophecies of ideological terror and social insanity (see especially *Demons*). Disoriented and sickened by an intellectual cocktail of Romanticism, Hegelian philosophy of history,

and utopian socialism, *Crime and Punishment*'s Raskolnikov authors an article asserting that human beings are divided into two basic categories. The multitude is fit only to reproduce itself and obey; the creative and transgressive few "have the gift or talent of speaking a *new word* in their environment." The former class merely preserves the world; the latter "moves the world and leads it towards a goal." These movers and leaders of the spirit are all criminals and destroyers of the present, inasmuch as they violate the old law, sanctified by time and usage, for the sake of their "new law" and word. Raskolnikov's argument that the elite few nevertheless have the right to "step over blood" in the pursuit of "the New Jerusalem" rationalizes his own violent crimes in a way that eerily anticipates the exponentially greater ones of the Soviet Union more than half a century later. "It's good that you only killed a little old woman," the detective Porfiry Petrovich tells him. "If you'd come up with a different theory, you might have done something a hundred million times more hideous!" In *The Black Book of Communism*, the historian Stéphane Courtois and his co-authors estimate that the USSR, China, and supernumerary Marxist regimes around the world collectively killed ninety-four million people within their own borders between 1917 and 1997. Not for nothing was Dostoyevsky banned under the Soviets.

Dostoyevsky's dark prophecies are amply confirmed in *Hope Against Hope* (1970), Nadezhda Mandelstam's dry-eyed memoir of the persecution and death of her husband, the poet Osip Mandelstam, in the time of Stalin. Originally an aspiring painter, Nadezhda brings an outsider's perspective to the innermost circles of literary art. The Mandelstams seem to have known all of the major Russian writers of the 1920s and 1930s, including Isaac Babel and Mikhail Bulgakov; Anna Akhmatova, Boris Pasternak, and Ilya Ehrenburg were lifelong friends. Through the 1920s, they also had an ally in the Politburo. When Soviet editors refused to publish Osip, he and Nadezhda were given crucial material aid by Nikolai Bukharin, who was shot after being condemned in the last Show Trial of 1938—the same year Osip died in the Gulag.

Written in lean prose that makes no excuses for anyone—least of all its author—*Hope Against Hope* is an invaluable account of the collapse of intellectual life and the terror and bleakness of everyday existence at the height of ideological tyranny. It is in these respects comparable only to Vasily Grossman's novel *Life and Fate*, which centers on the Battle of Stalingrad and the experiences of a nuclear physicist and his family and friends. More, it is a morally incandescent epic: the story of a poet doomed by his absolute refusal to let his tongue be cut out, and of his wife's heroic dedication to the preservation, in the face of isolation, poverty, and official anti-Semitism, of verse that she carried for decades only in her memory.

Hope Against Hope's opening words could only have been written by a Russian: "After slapping Alexei Tolstoi in the face, M. immediately returned to Moscow." Although the man had it coming, Osip did not strike just anyone. Known as the Red Count, Tolstoi was both a reliable servant of the new law and word and a decayed epigone of the old: a potent emblem of a broken age. In 1932, two years before Mandelstam's incautious retribution, he had presided over a writer's court that, following "orders," failed to punish a novelist named Borogin who had violently assaulted Nadezhda. (Borogin had been assigned to spy and produce reports on the Mandelstams, a practice so widespread among the intelligentsia that it came to be known simply as "to write.") The Red Count was also a blood relation of Leo Tolstoi and Ivan Turgenev. A literary and political hack, Alexei epitomizes in *Hope Against Hope* the moral and intellectual collapse of a great culture, and the actual indistinguishability, in the USSR, of Raskolnikov's two classes. His is the hot red face of stunted, selfish, indignant Soviet Man (and Woman): the innumerable poseurs and squinting tools who comprised the great elite mass of the totalitarian State, and who were themselves fed wholesale to the Gulag. The essential question raised by *Hope Against Hope* and its sequel, *Hope Abandoned* (1974),

is whether the Mandelstams' story of moral struggle against the tremendous weight of an ideologically volatilized social totality is not a prophecy for this century, as Dostoyevsky's novels were for the last.

Grossman's *Life and Fate* vividly conveys the fear and paranoia of life under Stalin. When a character dares to speak freely in the presence of a presumed friend, momentary exhilaration is inevitably followed by abject fear of denunciation. In one scene, a commissar visits a Soviet outpost in Stalingrad that is surrounded by Germans, and is scandalized to find the soldiers who hold the building showing open contempt for him. He resolves to write up their commander, but the entire outpost is wiped out before the report can be filed. These soldiers, the freest people in the City of Stalin, had dropped their political masquerade only because they were facing imminent death.

How did things come to such a pass? Nadezhda Mandelstam sheds light on the matter in *Hope Against Hope*, and especially in the more expansive and desultory reflections of *Hope Abandoned*. "The basic error of our times," she writes, was the replacement of "the idea of popular education . . . by the political concept of indoctrination." ("What do the people need to be indoctrinated for? What satanic arrogance you need to impose your own views like this!") The "accumulated riches" of culture and tradition were deliberately spurned and forgotten, and the "religion" of "progressive" ideology—"the idea . . . that people can foresee the future, change the course of history and make it rational"—was speciously elevated to the rank of science. Conversely, actual sciences like biology and linguistics—to say nothing of softer disciplines like history and sociology—were infected with ideology; dedicated scholars who refused to embrace crackpot theories lost their careers and sometimes their lives. A "language of state" came into being; words shifted in meaning, and fundamental distinctions were effaced. This new, debased, and coarsened speech was diligently policed for doctrinal correctness. "Coldly calculated versification," promoting officially approved lessons and attitudes, replaced "true poetry." The "older generation . . . provoked the scorn of the young," students regularly denounced their professors, and unguarded humor could send one to the camps. Political technicians treated people only as members of the "classes" and "sub-groups" into which they divided the population. Those arrested and executed or sent to the camps were wiped from memory; any close relatives who managed to escape the same fate were evicted from their apartments, denied employment, and closely monitored by State functionaries. Honesty was nowhere to be found, cryptic communication was assiduously cultivated, and lying and self-deception were ubiquitous. "Like the builders of the Tower of Babel," people began "to speak in different tongues." Inevitably, the society as a whole was afflicted by "a progressive loss of a sense of reality."

Although we do not live in anything like the USSR, all of this has begun to feel weirdly and depressingly familiar. In the United States, public schools and the media, as well as the wider spheres of culture and commerce, have become theaters for the contentious enactment of identity politics, which crudely subsumes individuals into broad and largely arbitrary categories. Writers and artists who allow their imaginations to roam too widely are publicly shamed by people who have forgotten that "cultural appropriation," understood as the internalization of the best that has been thought, composed, and created, is the heart and soul of education. The threat of denunciation by politically correct "flash mobs" hatched in cyberspace has produced an atmosphere of genuine paranoia: how else to explain the removal of all books with the word "Negro" in the title from the library at the public school where my wife teaches? Entire academic disciplines in the humanities and social sciences have become little more than centers of progressivist propaganda, peddling neo-Marxist theories of race, sex, class, and culture. Undergraduates picket courses in Western civilization on the grounds that the great books inculcate "institutional racism" and "colonialism." Many professors and students now behave more like policemen than teachers and learners, monitoring their classes for "micro-aggressions" and

unchecked "privilege." The rest, mindful of the anonymous online bias reporting systems that are now an inescapable feature of the landscape of higher education, have learned to bite their tongues for the sake of self-preservation. If Nadezhda is right that "any era should be judged by the degree to which it is possible to exercise the basic human right of professing one's faith and speaking one's mind," we are doing poorly indeed.

Nor is this social decay confined to the domains of education and culture. As Angela Nagle has recently documented in *Kill All Normies: Online Culture Wars from 4Chan and Tumblr to Trump and the Alt-Right*, social media, to which the young in particular are cripplingly addicted, is an incubator of radicalism. Politics today, Nagle observes, is downstream of culture, and culture is downstream of the internet; spillover from the virtual reality of chatrooms is inevitable. Violent extremists have taken to settling ideological disputes through street fighting, rioting, and the criminal destruction of monuments and other public property. At its worst, as at Charlottesville, the situation is reminiscent of the battles between communists and fascists in Weimar Germany, as well as the civil war that raged for four years after the Russian Revolution. In both cases, widespread social chaos produced what Nadezhda describes as a general "craving for an iron hand" that was soon satisfied in spades.

Nadezhda regarded the Soviet Union as an acute case of what she saw as the chronic sickness of the West: the loss of collective memory, "the one feature that distinguishes us as human beings." A passage in *Hope Abandoned* sounds a particularly timely warning:

> Nothing can be predicted with certainty: people could even forget how to read altogether and books molder away to dust. We might even stop talking with each other and communicate only by emitting call signs or bloodcurdling war cries. Sometimes I think this is what we are coming to. We did, after all, learn to speak in a lying code language designed to conceal our real thoughts. One's descendants pay for such things by losing the power of articulate speech altogether, caterwauling instead like fans at a football game.

These words anticipate developments that seem to be currently unfolding before our eyes. How are we to weather a future in which reasonable speech and inarticulate violence are hopelessly confused?

History ebbs and regathers, much as the sea assaults the shore. When it surges most forcefully, one can only try to remain upright in the flood. Very few stood their ground as the twentieth century's great waves of ideological aggression broke over their heads. Fewer still did so year after year, decade after decade, until the bitter, triumphant end. Among these were Osip and Nadezhda Mandelstam and the poet Anna Akhmatova (the mentor of the Nobel Laureate Joseph Brodsky), who together constituted an iron triangle of artistic principle, moral conviction, and literary brilliance.

Osip Mandelstam's life and work are seamlessly united; his speeches and deeds form a singular impression of wholeness, of joyful integrity and inner freedom. "Everything has become heavier and more massive," he wrote in his essay "On the Nature of the Word"; "thus man must become harder . . . the sacred character of poetry arises out of the conviction that man is harder than everything else in the world." Osip demonstrated his own adamantine hardness—the "deep bedrock of principles," in Nadezhda's words, "which set him apart from anyone of his own or later generations"—when he meddled, on pain of death, in the case of an imprisoned art historian; when he intervened to save five old men facing execution, sending Bukharin a volume of his poetry with an inscription to the effect that "every word here is against what you are going to do"; and especially when, taking the measure of a Goliath like no other the world has ever seen, he weighed little stones of poetry—dense verses of formal power, earthy thematic richness, and striking imagery—against the immense totality of the USSR. He suffered his terrible, tragic destiny with relative equanimity because his capacity for joyful immersion in the fullness of the passing moment was unlimited, and because he viewed death as the final triumph of a life replete with meaning. Surveying Osip's life, Nadezhda observes that "poetry, even more than philosophy,

is a preparation for death"—an echo of Plato's *Phaedo* that connects her husband with another man of gem-like hardness who opened himself to the fullness of eternity in the heart of time, and whose life and death courageously affirmed sacred human values.

If Osip Mandelstam is a poetic Socrates (or perhaps a poetic Jesus: *Hope Against Hope*'s depiction of his last days has a gospel-like glow), his soulmate, devoted student, and occasionally hagiographic chronicler is a Russian Plato. Nadezhda Mandelstam found salvation in the lifelong task for which she so admirably suffered and struggled: the preservation for posterity of her husband's late, unpublished verse, which for several decades she dared not commit to paper. The slow and loving labor of memorizing and internalizing his words—a task in which she was faithfully assisted by Akhmatova—planted his music deep in her soul, by degrees attuning her ready and receptive nature to the integrated measures of his art and existence. More, it gave her a deeply informed and coherent perspective on her times. "Poetry always precedes prose, and so it did in the life of Nadezhda Mandelstam," Joseph Brodsky observes. Her two books are a faithful translation of the meaning of the poet and his poetry in the clarifying register of prose, composed, as Seamus Heaney writes, with "a cask-burning passion to be as exact and exacting as possible." Brodsky's obituary of Nadezhda beautifully articulates her lonely achievement:

> Her memoirs are something more than a testimony to her times; they are a view of history in the light of conscience and culture. In that light history winces, and an individual realizes his choice: between seeking that light's source and committing an anthropological crime against himself.

Osip found salvation in his integrated vision of history, time, and human existence, and in the art through which he articulated that vision. His intuition of his particular historical destiny—fully and fearlessly to be a poet in the time of Stalin—is expressed with confident irony and cheerfulness in "The Wolf," which Nadezhda identifies as the "theme poem" around which his *First Moscow Notebook* (1931–34) is organized:

> I have forsaken my place at the feast of my fathers
> and lost my happiness and even honor,
> in order that future centuries may thunder with glory,
> and that humanity may be noble.
>
> This age of the wolfhound hurls itself on my shoulders,
> but my blood's not the blood of a wolf,
> so stuff me as you would stuff a hat into the sleeve
> of the hot fur coat of the Siberian wasteland:
>
> so I won't see the débris or the slushy mud
> or the bloodied bones strapped to the wheel,
> so all through the night the blue polar foxes
> will shine at me in their primeval beauty.
>
> Take me off into the night where the Yenisey flows
> and the pine tree reaches the stars:
> my blood is not the blood of a wolf—
> only an equal will kill me.

The wolf had already bared its teeth by 1923, when Osip was blackballed by the Soviet literary magazines. The first stanza of his poem "The Age," composed that same year, speaks to both the crisis of his times and the monumental effort of his poetry:

> My age, my beast, where is the man
> Who can look into your eyes
> And join together with his blood
> The vertebrae of two centuries?

The age, once upright and vital, has been crippled by the unbearable weight of the State, loaded onto its shoulders in the name of an imagined future. The backbone of civilization, the upright human spine of tradition and culture, has broken, and the age (*my* age, *my* beast, Mandelstam says) now suffers like a dumb and dying animal. It is hard to overstate the magnitude of this injury, which universally harmed individuals and ultimately destroyed, in the critic Clive James's reckoning, "almost the entire mental life of a whole great nation"—and what a life! Conscious of being a surviving heir of the nineteenth century's greatest and most fertile literary tradition, Mandelstam—who burst into

tears when as a child he first heard the word "progress"—is both the pitiable, speechless beast and the still whole man. *He* is the answer to his question: the one who, fortified by a lush green tradition, will try to heal his age, heal himself, by fusing past and present with his lifeblood of iron-rich, highly oxygenated words.

Although Mandelstam was not religiously inclined, he ultimately came to embrace his cultural inheritance as a Jew: an "honorable title . . . in which I take great pride," he writes in *Fourth Prose*. From the first, however, he understood his poetry in Christian terms. Art, he declares in his early essay "Pushkin and Scriabin," is "joyous communion with God, like some game played by the Father and his children, some blind-man's bluff or hide-and-seek of the spirit!" He was, moreover, "the reader of one book," a book he always carried with him in a portable edition so he would be sure to have it in prison wherever he might be arrested. That book was Dante's *Divine Comedy*, the greatest and strongest of cultural bridges: a perfect model for his own vital, vibrant, and Atlas-like literary effort. One is reminded in this connection of his very short poem "Meteorite," in which blazing, smoking verse whistles down out of the blue, fertilizing the poetic imagination and providing raw material to be molded into songs of otherworldly hardness and density:

> As the meteorite from the heavens wakes the
> earth somewhere,
> the exiled line fell to the ground, not knowing
> its father.
> What is implacable is a godsend for the creator—
> it couldn't be anything else, no one judges it.

Nadezhda understood better than anyone that Osip's verse, formed under tectonic pressures, shelters glowing embers of civilization from the wasting winds at the end of the world. In the middle of the central chapter of *Hope Against Hope*, precisely where one would locate the keystone of a great weight-bearing arch, she identifies "the dominant theme in the whole of M.'s life and work": "his insistence on the poet's dignity, his position in society, and his right to make himself heard." He insisted on these things because he was animated "by that sense of being right without which it is impossible to be a poet." The "categorical nature" of a poet's judgments, which "derives from the 'wholeness' of his vision," makes people angry; they "accuse him of arrogance and a desire to lay down the law." The suspicion that gives rise to this accusation is by no means groundless, for poetry, Nadezhda observes, "is a law unto itself." More to the point, "poets can never be indifferent to good and evil, and they can never say that all that exists is rational"—the only two things, one might say, that Stalin ever asked of them.

"Even supposing that the free human mind has come to the end of its time," James opines, "Mandelstam is one of those supreme artists who convince you that there is such a thing as poetic immortality, and that it is at one with the simplest forces of creation, so that nothing can destroy it." This powerful impression of indestructibility stems from his absolute unwillingness to compromise in matters ethical and aesthetic. "What a pity," Nadezhda remarks, "this was not a quality that could be doled out to others—he had enough of it for a dozen writers." But if his "destiny was hatched from character," it is also true that the compressive weight of his times gave his character and poetry their extraordinary strength and brilliance. Brodsky believes that "the intensity of lyricism in Mandelstam's poetry" made it inevitable that he would be swept up by Stalin's iron broom, because "lyricism is the ethics of language." Denunciation and arrest were in any case unavoidable after he composed (in late 1933) a poem that spoke of Stalin's "thick fingers . . . like worms" and "cockroach mustache," an attack whose sharply focused *ad hominem* deliberately reduced the vast ideological tyranny of the Soviet Union to the more manageable scale of an individual human monstrosity. One guesses that Osip Mandelstam slapped at Stalin not just because he'd had enough, but because he wanted and needed more. Conscience and culture stood in the balance against history, as it does today. And if poetry—the noblest speech of the freest individual—could not be shown to outweigh the crushing machinery of totalitarianism, then the free human mind really would have come to the end of its time.

Mighty Penn
by Michael J. Lewis

The Pennsylvania Station in New York
Is like some vast basilica of old
That towers above the terror of the dark
As bulwark and protection to the soul.
—Langston Hughes

Through it one entered the city like a god . . . .
One scuttles in now like a rat.
—Vincent Scully

It is the easiest thing in the world to convince someone that Penn Station should be rebuilt. All it takes is a look at a photograph of the original station and then a look at Penn Station today. The subterranean warren huddled under Madison Square Garden is one of the most disagreeable public spaces in New York, or in any major Western city. The public usually becomes inured to bad design, through a combination of familiarity and the inability to imagine something better, but the photographs of Penn Station in all its Roman glory are a constant reminder that it does not have to be this way.

Incompetent design is everywhere, of course, but today's Penn Station represents something far worse. Its humid unpleasantness seems too thoroughgoing and systematic to be accidental; something so uniformly nasty can only be the result of deliberate design. And such was the case. When the reeling Pennsylvania Railroad tried to delay its inevitable bankruptcy in 1963 by selling off its air rights, it lowered ceiling heights to the physically acceptable minimum—which turns out to be rather below the psychologically acceptable minimum.

To rectify this planning calamity, better late than never, a group has organized itself under the name Rebuild Penn Station, which is at once their mission statement and battle cry.

Rebuild Penn Station is currently conducting a campaign of public persuasion, making its case pragmatically rather than on the ground of nostalgia. With the planners Richard W. Cameron and James Venturi, it has undertaken a study showing how wider track platforms and additional escalators will improve circulation and eliminate the desperate bottlenecks that make a train trip so unhappy. To recreate the vanished station would not be cheap. Construction costs have been estimated at $3 to $3.5 billion, which does not include the cost of replacing the buildings on the site. Madison Square Garden would have to find a new home. And the twenty-nine-story slab of Two Penn Plaza should also come down (although the station could be built around it, if necessary). Yet as Rebuild Penn Station likes to point out, Santiago Calatrava's flashy (and leaky) World Trade Center Oculus cost $4 billion to build. It serves fifty thousand passengers daily; Penn Station serves six hundred thousand.

Rebuild Penn Station is an initiative of the National Civic Art Society, the Washington-based nonprofit organization that was established in 2002 to promote "beautiful, meaningful civic design." Under its president, Justin

Shubow, the National Civic Art Society first made a name for itself in its opposition to the National Eisenhower Memorial, Frank Gehry's "Eisen Curtain" (Shubow's term for the metal mesh screens that are its most prominent feature). While it could not prevent the construction of Gehry's memorial, its tenacious opposition helped mitigate some of its worst features. It became clear that there is a great reservoir of untapped public support for a dignified civic architecture, so long as one makes a persuasive visual case. Not everyone cares about monuments and memorials, of course, but everyone sooner or later deals with train stations. And so there could hardly be a better test case for the prospects of reviving a humane and gracious architecture than Penn Station. The challenge of Rebuild Penn Station is to make the public consciously aware of what it already knows instinctively, that something went catastrophically awry at Penn Station. And to understand why our current station is so bad, one must first understand why the original Penn Station was so good.

Into the twentieth century, train passengers could enter Manhattan only by means of ferry. Northbound passengers detrained at Jersey City into the lobby of a ferry house and walked directly into the waiting ferryboat that would whisk them across the Hudson to a corresponding ferry house on Twenty-third Street. The Pennsylvania Railroad did what it could to minimize the inconvenience. It commissioned Frank Furness, Philadelphia's imaginative Victorian architect, to outfit the ferryboat interiors with mahogany seats, tile floors, and brilliant electric lighting. (It was here that Furness first replaced the conventional labels on the restroom doors, "Gentlemen's Cabin" and "Ladies' Cabin," with the modern terms "Men" and "Women.") Yet all the festive decor could not conceal that the ferry ride added an hour or so to the trip.

The solution was a tunnel under the Hudson, but this was impossible so long as trains burned coal. By the turn of the century, electrified trains were possible, and the president of the railroad instantly grasped the possibility. This was Alexander J. Cassatt, a trained engineer and the brother of the painter Mary Cassatt (a modernist in her own right). Cassatt set the grand project in motion in 1901, and began building two single-track tunnels that would take trains under the Hudson and directly into midtown Manhattan. Here would be an enormous station, taking up a full four city blocks, from Seventh to Eighth Avenues, and from Thirty-first to Thirty-third Streets. The site was enormous—784 by 430 feet—and enormously expensive. For an architect it was the project of a lifetime, and Cassatt made an inspired choice.

Up to this point, Cassatt had turned to Furness for every one of his buildings, from the railroad's corporate headquarters (Philadelphia's Broad Street Station) to his own house, church, and cricket club. These were cheerfully belligerent performances, with Furness's characteristic Victorian overstatement. But Cassatt intuited that Penn Station was essentially a civic building, and that classical dignity was the order of the day, not Victorian restlessness. He put the project in the hands of America's most brilliant and accomplished classicists, McKim, Mead & White. (As a consolation prize, Furness was given the station in Wilmington, Delaware, whose spirited brick and iron expressiveness demonstrates precisely what Cassatt did not want for New York.)

McKim, Mead & White were all nominally the architects, but the building has nothing of Stanford White's sensual treatment of materials and textures. It was entirely the work of Charles F. McKim, whose classicism was of the severe Roman sort. McKim had studied at the Ecole des Beaux-Arts in the 1860s, and his planning is that of the Ecole at its very best. It is a hallmark of a fully resolved Beaux-Arts plan that one never hesitates for an instant and is always effortlessly aware of the direction of movement and the waiting destination. At Penn Station, everything flowed with gracious axial logic. The pedestrian entered on Seventh Avenue, moved along a generously proportioned, shop-lined arcade, and entered the main waiting room with its monumental vaulted ceiling. This was set at a right angle to the main axis—indicating that it was a place of repose, not movement—

although the hurrying passenger could dash through it to the train concourse beyond. Here the elaborate plaster coffering of the vaulted ceiling vanished, exposing the steel frame beneath and letting light pour into the train platforms below.

Beaux-Arts architects were trained to make intelligent use of the cross axis, and this Penn Station did with panache. To avoid chaos, arriving and departing passengers used opposite ends of the waiting room—arrivals at the north and departures at the south. Taxi stands were placed at either end, reached by descending ramps, crossed by pedestrian bridges. This made it possible to accommodate automobile traffic easily, something that was not foreseen when the station was designed in 1904 but that was already of critical importance when the station opened in 1910.

The most extraordinary feature of Penn Station, however, was not its plan but its character. Most of the great urban train stations, regardless of their architectural style, follow the same conventional formula. They bring their tracks into the city above grade, crossing streets by means of viaducts, and enter into that marvel of engineering known as a train shed. These were invariably of iron and glass—iron to prevent fire from sparks, and glass to bring light through the smoky air. In a terminus, the train shed was fronted by a monumental head house that served as its formal face and was generally of considerable architectural pretension. It was in the nature of things that the shed was the work of an engineer, thinking in terms of the maximum achievable span, and the head house the work of an architect, thinking in terms of a pleasing civic image. This was the basic typology of the station, as perfected in the great terminals of London and Paris in the mid-nineteenth century, and still surviving in the stations of most larger European cities.

But at Penn Station there was no mighty train shed, unrolling grandly behind the façade of a head house. The station rested above the tracks, which arrived below street level rather than above. The architecture was above the engineering, so to speak, not in front of it, and so the key architectural event that gave earlier stations their monumental urban presence was absent. McKim's challenge was to achieve this monumental urban presence when the great engineering drama was below ground and out of sight. His imaginative solution was to think of the station as both a bridge and a gateway. In purely physical terms, the station was nothing more than "a monumental bridge over the tracks, with entrances to the streets on the main axis and all four sides," arranged so as to create "the greatest number of lines of circulation." But in symbolic terms, it was a gateway, although one placed at the very center of the city, rather than at the periphery of the traditional city wall. McKim compared its function to the Brandenburg Gate in Berlin, a dignified classical portico that also accommodated an enormous amount of daily traffic. This was the inspiration for the colossal Seventh Avenue façade of Penn Station, McKim's solemn essay in the dignified power of the Roman Doric.

A gate at the periphery need only be a place of passage; a gate in the center of a city, especially one that one emerges into from below, requires a grand and welcoming space. But the classical buildings that Beaux-Arts architects studied were fiercely hierarchical; the axis of a palace leads to a throne, the axis of a temple to an altar. Public buildings in the modern sense scarcely existed in the ancient world, which certainly had nothing quite like a train station which directed scurrying travelers along different paths. McKim found his model in the great Baths of Caracalla, built in the third century A.D. and still one of the most stupendous ruins of Rome. Charles Moore, McKim's assistant and first biographer, describes the day when McKim decided to make it the basis of his waiting room:

> That afternoon it was simply artistic impulse that led him to hire the willing but astonished workmen to pose among the ruins to give scale and movement—movement, because in all his designing McKim ever had in his mind's eye the people, men and especially well-gowned women, who would sweep up and down his broad staircases.

In fact, McKim's paraphrase of the Roman bath is considerably larger than its prototype, so large that Grand Central Station might have fit inside it. When it opened, Penn Station was praised for this stupendously creative use of Roman architecture—and half a century later, this same studious historicism was invoked to justify its demolition. It was, after all, just "a duplicate of the hall of the old Baths of Caracalla."

The demolition of Penn Station, which began in 1963 and took nearly three years, left intact its entire substructure—the train platforms, layout of the concourse, the tracks beneath. In fact, when entering on Seventh Avenue, one is still passing along McKim's grand axis and following the circulation pattern he devised at the start of the last century. And yet if the plan survives, it does so without those changes in proportion and scale, the sequence of compression and release, that gave it decorum and grace, and that treated the station's users not as objects to be channeled efficiently through troughs, as in an abattoir, but as citizens, invested with dignity and self-respect. There can hardly be a more devastating rebuke to functionalism than the translation of McKim's glorious sequence of spaces into a mere two-dimensional diagram of paths of movement.

Rebuild Penn Station is not alone in recognizing the grievous problems in circulation and crumbling infrastructure at Penn Station. The now defunct post office immediately behind the station on Eighth Avenue, also by McKim, Mead & White, is to be converted into use by Amtrak and the Long Island Rail Road. In honor of Senator Daniel Patrick Moynihan, perhaps the last politician of note to show sustained interest in architecture, it is to be named the Moynihan Train Hall. At the same time, a new concourse for Long Island Rail Road users has been opened under Eighth Avenue and further renovations are planned for the station's two subway stations. All of these improvements are welcome and necessary, but they are scarcely adequate. Only 20 percent of the station's commuters will use it, and New Jersey Transit riders will scarcely be affected. These piecemeal interventions reflect the divided lines of responsibility and ownership between Amtrak, the Port Authority, and the lessors of the buildings above the station, as well as between the City and the State of New York. Although an equally vexing confusion over responsibility and ownership afflicted the World Trade Center site, a satisfactory administrative structure was nevertheless eventually built.

Another challenge for Rebuild Penn Station is the ideology of historic preservation, a movement that is violently opposed to the making of historic facsimiles, not only of a building but of any of its damaged or missing parts. This doctrine is a recent one, historically speaking. It is scarcely older than John Ruskin, whose *Seven Lamps of Architecture* (1849) contains a memorable tirade against architectural restoration.

> Do not let us talk then of restoration. The thing is a Lie from beginning to end. You may make a model of a building as you may of a corpse, and your model may have the shell of the old walls within it as your cast might have the skeleton, with what advantage I neither see nor care: but the old building is destroyed, and that more totally and mercilessly than if it had sunk into a heap of dust, or melted into a mass of clay.

Of course Ruskin was writing about a particular kind of restoration, the replacement of decayed masonry, and the rebuilding of a wall in pristine modern masonry. It is standard practice for a mason to recarve a badly eroded stone by first tooling away the worn surface and then cutting anew the moldings and details. Only the outer half-inch of material is lost, but for Ruskin this was to lose everything. This outer surface was the part of the building that bore the evidence of the work of the human hand, each visible chisel mark and edge held the impression of living human labor—sometimes plodding, sometimes joyous, but always alive. And if it was worn and scarred, so much the better, for it testified all the more eloquently to the passage of centuries. At a time in the Industrial Revolution when machine-tooled factory products were displacing the work of artisans, Ruskin

felt an exquisite agony at the effacing of the living surface of a building—like the flaying of a body. All that was left was inert matter. Behind this was a *cri de coeur* against the materialism of the modern world—and yet this was itself a kind of inverted materialism, in which all that mattered was one component of a building's physical fabric, its material skin. (Ruskin had little to say of those aspects of a building that we regard as its essentials: its plan and spaces.)

Ruskin's tirade, entertaining as it is, has been enormously destructive. Our modern revulsion toward facsimiles is in large part a reaction to the restoration of Colonial Williamsburg, which began in the 1930s, a comprehensive and well-intentioned reconstruction of an entire colonial town that resulted in the reproduction of numerous buildings, including the original Capitol, which was lost to fire in the eighteenth century. This sort of restoration sought to recreate vanished buildings with such impeccable accuracy that they could not easily be distinguished from the original. In the inevitable counter-reaction this became taboo. It became official orthodoxy, enforced by historic preservation legislation overseen by the Department of the Interior, that historical facsimile be strictly forbidden, and that historical building fabric, no matter how ruinous, must be lovingly preserved. (Perhaps the best example of this is the moldering joists of Philadelphia Independence Hall, which have been encased in modern steel trusses that carefully keep in place the useless but sacrosanct timber, as if fragments of the True Cross.) But while architectural elites might object to the making of a facsimile, those of us who are not architecturally ideological, and that includes most people, do not. It would be the bitterest of ironies if the rebuilding of Pennsylvania Station were to be thwarted by the inflexible orthodoxy of the historic preservation movement, a movement that would scarcely exist were it not for the destruction of that station in the first place.

Yet while architectural reconstructions have been frowned upon in this country, Europe has been witness to a growing number of them. Among the reborn buildings are Moscow's Cathedral of Christ the Savior, dynamited in 1931 to make way for the Palace of the Soviets; St. John's Cathedral in Warsaw, destroyed by the Nazis in 1944; the Berlin Palace, condemned as a symbol of Prussian militarism five years after the end of World War II—each of these has been scrupulously rebuilt, at great expense and with deep research.

In the end, the principal obstacle confronting Rebuild Penn Station is neither administrative nor financial but psychological. Our society is reluctant to acknowledge that there is any realm in which our predecessors were more capable or accomplished than we are. To architects it would be a confession of failure to admit that they are not in a position to create something at least as beautiful and efficient as Charles McKim did. Such a confession, like all confessions, could be good for the soul.

At present, Rebuild Penn Station is in need of articulate political supporters who can make the case for decent civic architecture, as Senator Moynihan once did. The timing is auspicious. Madison Square Garden's lease is set to run out in 2023, and its management should be considering alternative sites at this moment. And as various elements of the surrounding transit lines are renovated and made to sparkle, the contrast with the station itself will become all the more unbearable. There is also a satisfying irony to the timing: Irving M. Felt, the developer who negotiated the demolition of Penn Station in order to build Madison Square Garden, said in 1962, "Fifty years from now, when it's time for [Madison Square Garden] to be torn down, there will be a new group of architects who will protest."

Actually, no. There won't be any.

The case of Henry Green
by Dominic Green

"This is, I think, a two-pipe problem," Holmes tells Watson in *The Hound of the Baskervilles*. Not in the novel of 1902, but in the 1939 film, with Basil Rathbone as the quintessence of Holmes and Nigel Bruce as a splendidly bumbling Watson. That famous line does not appear in Conan Doyle's novel. The scriptwriter, Ernest Pascal, abbreviated it when he lifted it from a Conan Doyle short story of 1891, "The Red-Headed League," in which Watson asks why Holmes has sat down at a pivotal moment in the plot."'To smoke,' he answered. 'It is quite a three-pipe problem, and I beg that you won't speak to me for fifty minutes.'"

The case of Henry Green is what Holmes—also not a real person—might also have called a three-pipe problem. Like Conan Doyle, who turned out as a goalkeeper for Portsmouth as "A. C. Smith," Henry Yorke adopted the persona of "Henry Green" for public performances. As with Yorke's Eton contemporary "George Orwell," the motives and circumstantial evidence are tangled, and the slipperiness of the pseudonym is inseparable from the problems of resolution, of fixing Green's novels in their time and our canon. Eyewitness statements place Green at the center of English modernism, but Yorke claimed not to have been at the scene of the crime. Later, Green recanted part of his evidence, possibly because of Yorke's financial troubles. In 1973, Yorke drank Green to death in a murder-suicide.

The Green file was already open. In a 1958 interview for *The Paris Review*, the erratic private investigator Terry Southern called Green "the writer's writer's writer." The testimony was fixed. Southern had already stitched himself up as Green's literary heir. According to Green's biographer, Jeremy Treglown, Southern had "approached Green in 1955 to ask if he would be willing to look at a book that he was writing, in part as an homage to him." Green had advised Southern on revising what became Southern's first novel, *Flash and Filigree*. This happened to come out in the same year as the *Paris Review* interview: a clear case of rigging the market in literary reputations.

Green was also always more of a critic's writer than a reader's writer. Though the critics have not always agreed over which of Green's novels are the ones to read, writers have cherished Green as they have exploited him. In 1993, reviewing the reissue of six Green novels in these pages, Brooke Allen noted the "oddly assorted" nature of Green's admirers: "W. H. Auden, Elizabeth Bowen, Terry Southern, Eudora Welty, and John Updike." The variety of sensibilities among the Chlorophiles, as Updike called them, suggests Green's value as a technical resource.

"Technically, *Living* is without exception the most interesting book I have read," Evelyn Waugh wrote in 1929, reviewing Green's second novel for *Vogue*. Green's technical "effects" and "information," Waugh thought, made it "necessary to take language one step further than its grammatical limits allow," as Joyce had done when "re-echoing" and "remodifying" the information of fiction with the effects of poetry. "I see in *Living* very much the same

technical apparatus at work as in many of Mr. T. S. Eliot's poems—particularly in the narrative passages of *The Waste Land* and the two *Fragments of an Agon*."

Waugh capitalized upon Green's conversational effects, and nodded to Eliot too, in *A Handful of Dust* (1934). But the conversational fireworks were only one weapon in the Waugh arsenal, and the resemblance does not run deep. Green has wit and can be sexually knowing, but he lacks the eighteenth-century ebullience that drove Waugh to name a character Polly Cockpurse, to tack "The Man Who Liked Dickens" onto the manuscript, and then to cook up an alternative ending to accommodate serialization in an American magazine.

New York Review Books has reopened the case yet again by reissuing seven of Green's novels and the 1993 collection *Surviving*. So it is still a scandal, at least in Bohemia, that Green is not better known. He seems to have become the Walter Scott of English modernism, but without the burden of Scott's sales figures. Readers know him more than they read him, and writers read him in order to rob him. To solve the case, we must go back to the scene of the crime.

"The hardest task in modern criticism," Cyril Connolly wrote in *Enemies of Promise*, "is to find out who were the true innovators."

The technical case for Henry Green is that he had an ear for vernacular speech akin to Sherlock Holmes's eye for material detail; that he extended modernist technique by cutting between voices and perspectives, and by experimenting with syntax and register; and that, by substituting dialogue for free indirect discourse, he freed modern fiction from the apron strings of the nineteenth-century novel.

The most notable tic in Green's fiction was his attempt to dispense with the definite article. This was not a new idea, and Green himself came to regret it as "affected." Yet in *Living* (1929), it created a rare overlap between literary experiment, the streams of consciousness in Joyce, Stein, and Woolf, and the truncated speech patterns of working-class Birmingham:

> Mr. Gates went back to foundry with chaplets he had fetched from stores shouting against storekeeper's dirty mind, and laughing, but noise of lathes working made it so what he said could not be heard.

Anthony Burgess, his ear attuned both to the Joycean torrent and to the stopped glottals and factory slang of Manchester, called *Living* "the best brief novel about factory life that we possess." The rhythms are sharp and metallic, and the repetitions and linguistic compressions push the reader inside the story. Like the protagonist Lily Bates, who comes close to emigrating but hears the "factory buzzer" in the hoot of the emigrant's steamer and returns to her lodgings, the reader is trapped in the intimate dullness of working-class life.

Green explained his excisions in realist terms: "I wanted to make it as taut and spare as possible, to fit the proletarian life I was then leading." Yet Green was not living the proletarian life. The workers at Pontifex, his father's Birmingham factory, belonged to the skilled working class, the "aristocracy of labour." When Waugh visited Green at the factory, he praised the "manual dexterity" of the workers: "Nothing in the least like mass labour or mechanization—pure arts and crafts. The brass casting particularly beautiful: green molten metal from a red cauldron."

In *Living*, the proprietor's son also views the workshop in aesthetic terms. His categories, though, are more topical. His eye has been trained by Vorticism and the Grosvenor School:

> Standing in foundry shop son of Mr. Dupret thought in mind and it seemed to him that these iron castings were beautiful and he reached out fingers to them, he touched them; he thought and only in machinery it seemed to him was savagery left now for in the country, in summer, trees were like sheep while here men created what you could touch, wild shapes, soft like silk, which would last and would be working in great factories, they made them with their hands.

The contrast between heroic industry and trees "like sheep" summarizes how Vorticism, in Britain's softer climate, sheared Futurism of its menace. In Cyril Power's color linocuts,

the faceless commuters on the Tube escalator terrify not because they are a mob, but because they are so orderly. "Dear good English people," Julia thinks as she looks down on the station concourse in *Party Going* (1939), "who never make trouble no matter how bad it is, come what may no matter."

The workers, Green recalled, thought *Living* "rotten," but they were not his intended audience, only his raw material. Working on the novel, Green told Nevill Coghill, the Oxford medievalist who had encouraged his literary ambitions, that he was writing the novel in "a very condensed kind of way in short paragraphs." Though he wanted to bring the realist eye of Balzac and Zola to the foundry, he wanted the narrative effect to resemble that of a "very disconnected cinema film."

Henry Yorke was born in 1905. This places him very much A.D. (After Dickens), but just a little B.C. (Before Cinema). In 1907, when Yorke was two, Eugene Lauste, a London-based inventor who had worked in Edison's laboratory, patented the first technology for recording sound on celluloid film. In 1919, when the fourteen-year-old Yorke was in his first year at Eton, an American inventor, Lee de Forest, patented the commercial application of sound on celluloid, by creating a "married" print which carried a strip of sound as well as a sequence of images. In 1923, when Yorke was the secretary of the Eton Arts Society, New Yorkers saw the first commercial sound-on-film screenings. In 1927, a year after the publication of *Blindness*, Yorke's first novel as "Henry Green," the success of *The Jazz Singer* confirmed the triumph of the speaking, and sometimes singing, image over the written word.

Cinema's conquest of popular narrative occurred in the years of Green's childhood and youth, when mimed sequences were cut by cards of dialogue. These were also the years in which Pound and Eliot broke the epigrammatic sequences of Symbolist poetry into fragmentary narratives. Eliot in particular showed how light entertainment—music hall lyrics and jazz vocalization—could do the heavy lifting of disconnection and alienation.

In *Party Going*, a group of Bright Young Things are trapped by fog in Victoria Station, along with two nannies, crowds of commuters and workers, and a dead pigeon.

> Fog was so dense, bird that had been disturbed went flat into a balustrade, and slowly fell, dead, at her feet.
>
> There it lay, and Miss Fellowes looked up to where that pall of fog was twenty foot above and out of which it had fallen, turning over once. She bent down and took a wing then entered a tunnel in front of her, and this had DEPARTURES lit up over it, carrying her dead pigeon.
>
> No one paid attention, all were intent and everyone hurried, nobody looked back. Her dead pigeon then lay sideways, wings outspread as she held it, its dead head down towards the ground. She turned and she went back to where it had fallen and again looked up to where it must have died for it was still warm and, everything unexplained, she turned once more into the tunnel back to the station.

Here, the absence of the definite article in the opening sentence seems crude, like a title sequence—"A Henry Green Production"—that disrupts the rapid and subtle images that will set the scene. When the pigeon hits the ground, it also lands in the consciousness of Miss Fellowes. Her eye and ours zoom in on the same close-up—the pinching of her fingers on the bird's wing—and then the frame zooms out as we watch her merge again into the crowd. Suddenly she emerges against the human current, directs her gaze and ours first downwards at the pigeon and then upwards, before rejoining the flow of people into the station. Now she is carrying the dead bird.

The sequence is written like a tracking shot. The "Departures" sign under which she passes could be from an Expressionist film. A year before, *The Spectator*'s film critic had deployed a similar trick with the ghost train in *Brighton Rock* (1938). As the other characters arrive at the station, Green's narrative eye sweeps up to the metal rafters where the station controller sits, like the shot in *Citizen Kane* (1941) which tracks upwards from Susan Alexander's opera debut to two stage hands, one of whom holds his nose.

In 1963, Terence Rattigan reprised the conceit of *Party Going* for the script of *The V.I.P.s*, a film in which an all-star cast, including Orson Welles, is fogged in at Heathrow. In Rattigan's script, as in a Graham Greene entertainment, the plot develops and dilemmas are resolved. This does not happen in *Party Going*. Green produces witty dialogue and crisp images, but the plot, like the characters, has missed its connection.

"The English have striven and done a great deal in the world," George Moore had written in *Hail and Farewell* (1911–14). "The English are a tired race and their weariness betrays itself in the language, and the most decadent of all are the upper classes." Green's plots get weaker with each novel. This structural weakness repels readers vulgar enough to want a good story, even as the technical experiments attract writers and critics.

Does the dialogue compensate? The reddest of herrings about Green is that his use of the vernacular was new. Henry James had made heavy work of narrating by dialogue. Ronald Firbank had made light work of it. Yeats and Synge had collected fragments of rural chat. Apart from its modernist period, the English novel always was vernacular. "We'll go over 'em one after another," Steerforth tells Copperfield. "We'll make some regular Arabian Nights of it." The dialogue of grumbling firemen in *Caught* (1943) is not so far from H. G. Wells's *Kipps*, published in the year of Green's birth. Here's Wells:

> "Then there's the ring," said Kipps. "What 'ave I to do about that?"
>
> "What ring do you mean?"
>
> "'Ngagement Ring. There isn't anything at all about that in 'Manners and Rules of Good Society'—not a word."
>
> "Of course you must get something—tasteful. Yes."
>
> "What sort of ring?"
>
> "Something nice. They'll show you in the shop."
>
> "Of course. I s'pose I got to take it to 'er, eh? Put it on 'er finger."
>
> "Oh no. Send it. Much better."

And Green:

> "I know what I'd call 'im, but then I can't. I'm a gentleman," Chopper greeted Pye the next morning, on his return from leave.
>
> "Who are you referrin' to?"
>
> "Why Savoury, of course."
>
> "Oo?"
>
> "You called 'im that yourself. Roe."
>
> "Oh 'im . . . "

"The nineteenth-century novel," Iris Murdoch wrote in "Against Dryness" (1961),

> was not concerned with the "human condition," it was concerned with various individuals struggling in society. The twentieth-century novel is usually either crystalline or journalistic; that is, it is either a small, quasi-allegorical object portraying the human condition and not containing "characters" in the nineteenth-century sense, or else it is a large shapeless quasi-documentary object, the degenerate descendant of the nineteenth-century novel, telling, with pale conventional characters, some straightforward story enlivened with empirical facts.

When he wanted to, Green could write what Connolly called the "new Mandarin," the modernist reform of the grand style. As late as *Loving* (1945), he could still turn on the Norman Douglas:

> Edith laid her lovely head on Raunce's nearest shoulder and above them, above the great shadows laid by trees those white birds wheeled in a sky of eggshell blue and pink with a remote sound of applause as, circling, they clapped their stretched, starched wings in flight.

Green could also write in the "journalistic" style of Somerset Maugham. In *Caught*, Pye goes looking for a woman in the blackout:

> He crossed quickly into that bounded sea of shadow. He grew furtive. He imagined women where none were. He spoke suggestively to gentian hooded doorways.

But most of the time, Green wanted to be crystalline and insinuating, not "journalistic" like his school-friend Anthony Powell, let alone

like Wells or Maugham. As a late modernist, if not the last English modernist, he was concerned with matters of procedure and ritual, and he stretched and starched his style to the point of etiolation.

It was Green's right to do this, just as it was Yorke's right to subordinate himself to his controlling father at Pontifex, and then, when his father was dead, to allow the business to run down while drinking neat gin at board meetings. It is hard, though, to read Green without being struck by the self-inflicted paradox of his writing, a paradox that might have contributed to the perpetual critical uncertainty about the value of his fiction.

Where most writers struggle to achieve a range of effects, Green chose to limit himself. In striving to renew the narrative powers of fiction, he weakened them by alliance with the cinema. Green's novels have the liability of all avant-garde art. Deliberate innovation is the fruit of a particular moment, seeded in aesthetic controversy and cultivated in the hothouse of ideology. When taste changes, preservation by pickling in critical regard is a poor substitute for lost freshness. Like Cubist painting, Green's fiction is now more interesting than inspiring.

The "new Mandarin" style, however, still reads well, because it was essentially a recuperative development, reconciling modernism with tradition. Anthony Powell's great sequence *A Dance to the Music of Time* might conform to Iris Murdoch's analysis in its "quasi-documentary" method and "'characters in the nineteenth-century sense." Tellingly, Powell's protagonist, Nick Jenkins, fails as a film scriptwriter. Powell's narrative builds not by cinematic flashes and the surrender to contemporaneity, but towards fixed tableaux, revelations of timelessness and folly.

The "Mandarin sensibility," Connolly wrote, accumulates detail from a distance and caresses the language as it passes. Green had that sensibility, and he loved the styles of the epic Victorians Carlyle, Landor, and Doughty, but he stifled that passion with the journalistic and cinematic techniques of modernism—quick cutting, demotic speech, and shifting perspectives. He wanted to create "a gathering web of insinuations," which is to say, an ornate stasis. The final novels, *Nothing* (1950) and *Doting* (1952), are written entirely in dialogue, but not much happens.

Green eventually mastered the motif of the dead pigeon, the forestalling of all communication and movement. Somehow, he had produced the negative image of the "rich and complex expression" of the Mandarin style: a rich and complex surface embroidery, whose "cardinal assumption," like that of the old Mandarins, "is that neither the writer nor the reader is in a hurry." The old Mandarins had a tendency to build "euphonious nothings" from their endless periods. The plural voices of Green's dialogue harmonize into the euphonies of *Nothing*.

"As a rule," Holmes observes in "The Red-Headed League," "the more bizarre a thing is, the less mysterious it proves to be. It is your commonplace, featureless crimes which are really puzzling . . ." The innovation of Green's fiction—the absorption of cinematic narrative into a complex linguistic surface—accompanied the cannibalization of fiction by the movie business, and the projection of simplified narratives and dialogue onto a flat screen. Fitzgerald, Faulkner, and Huxley were in Hollywood when *Party Going* came out. Huxley's *After Many a Summer* (1939), about a William Randolph Hearst–like millionaire living in a Hearst-like castle, may well have inspired Welles to write *Citizen Kane*.

In 1962, less than five years after the publication of *Flash and Filigree* and his *Paris Review* interview of Henry Green, Terry Southern started work on the screenplay for *Dr. Strangelove*. One of the lucrative scripts that followed was to co-write with Christopher Isherwood an adaptation of *The Loved One* (1948), by way of Jessica Mitford's *The American Way of Death* (1963). Waugh might have approved of the strapline on the poster—"The Motion Picture With Something To Offend Everyone!"—but the greater offense was to literature.

Words made flesh
by Eric Ormsby

Few objects are earthier than a medieval manuscript. Written with quill pens taken from the feathers of geese, they are penned on parchment, vellum made from the skins of animals. The ink of their scripts is concocted from gallnuts or charcoal. They may be adorned with rich pigments scooped from the soil or with gold and gems. They are sewn with threads of natural fibers, and they are bound in wooden boards sheathed in leather. The more exalted their contents—Bibles, books of hours, scriptural commentaries—the more chthonic their aspect. The amalgam of transcendent texts with materials entirely terrestrial makes them palpable analogues of incarnation, the Word made Flesh, spirit clasped and conjoined with the humblest matter. Of course, printed books share in this luster, but by definition they are not unique, one-of-a kind, the work of a single scribe (or team of scribes). Manuscripts have a stamp of individuality; we are, however remotely, in touch with the hands that went into their making.

In Christopher de Hamel's extraordinary survey of twelve such manuscripts dating from the sixth to the sixteenth centuries, we are constantly made aware of this analogue in some of its most brilliant exemplars.[1] Indeed, his emphasis on the physical minutiae of his manuscripts is almost overwhelming in its specificity, and rightly so. As a paleographer he is concerned with tangible details: with measurable dimensions; with lineation; with the precise characteristics of various scripts—his beloved uncials, rustic capitals, Carolingian minuscules—and with the hands of individual scribes; with the order and arrangement of the quires (their "collation"). But this is no dry codicological treatise. It is enlivened throughout by the author's genial manner, his wit and sense of adventure, his lightly worn erudition, and his delightful prose style. In his introduction he says that his book "should be as near to a conversation as a published book can be," and in this he succeeds wonderfully well. Moreover, he views his meetings with the manuscripts as "celebrity interviews," yet no mere celebrity has ever been more searchingly interrogated, scrutinized, probed, and assessed than de Hamel's subjects. No pin-prick in a page, inserted as a guide mark for a scribe or illuminator, goes unremarked; and yet, somehow, such considerations are never arid or fussily antiquarian but are offered to equally illuminating effect. (He also gives the collation of each manuscript in standard technical notation but these are relegated to footnotes so as not to impede the flow of the narrative.)

The manuscripts are presented chronologically, from the late-sixth-century Gospels of St. Augustine of Canterbury, one of the treasures of Corpus Christi College, Cambridge, to the Spinola Hours from around 1515, now in the Getty Museum (and for which he composed the first bibliographic description when

1 *Meetings with Remarkable Manuscripts: Twelve Journeys into the Medieval World*, by Christopher de Hamel; Penguin Press, 632 pages, $45.

it was sold at Sotheby's in July 1976). Along the way we also encounter the Codex Amiatinus, a pandect or complete Bible and the oldest text of the Latin Vulgate; the Leiden *Aratea*, a truly weird poem on astronomy; the Morgan Beatus, a tenth-century commentary on the Apocalypse; Hugo Pictor, now in the Bodleian, with its famous painting of the eponymous scribe himself; the Copenhagen Psalter, one of the most beautiful of illuminated manuscripts; the thirteenth-century *Carmina Burana*, now in the Bayerische Staatsbibliothek in Munich; the diminutive, and exquisite, Hours of Jeanne de Navarre; the Hengwrt Chaucer, a fourteenth-century marvel now in the National Library of Wales; and the Visconti Semideus, a Renaissance treatise on warfare, now in the National Library, St. Petersburg. I list the locations because de Hamel travels to each of them in turn for his "interviews" and gives vivid accounts of their settings; these too are essential to his encounters. Rare manuscripts, rather like birds of paradise, have their sequestered habitats.

Each manuscript is sumptuously presented, with full-color plates and many inset images of small details, of comparable books, or of personages somehow connected with the manuscripts, from Geoffrey Chaucer, shown in a lovely portrait from around 1415, to James Joyce, who owned a facsimile edition of the Book of Kells, to Hans Kraus, the legendary book dealer who bought the Spinola Hours at Sotheby's for an astonishing £370,000 in 1976. The presentation of each work is cleverly done: for example, a photograph to scale of each of the bound volumes is given at the beginning of its chapter so as to make its dimensions obvious—one of several features, such as the sheer texture of the pages, that no digital image can capture. At a glance we are able to set the massive seventy-five-pound bulk of the seventh-century Codex Amiatinus ("comparable . . . to the weight of a fully grown female Great Dane," as de Hamel rather zanily notes) alongside the fourteenth-century Hours of Jeanne de Navarre, compact enough to be slipped into the pocket of a lady's gown. The most conspicuous glory of de Hamel's book lies in its full-page color plates. These are not only beautifully reproduced but abundant. For the Leiden *Aratea*, a Carolingian manuscript on astronomy, no fewer than twelve plates are given in sequence so that one has the momentary sensation of leafing through the book itself. Chapter Three, on the Book of Kells, shows us everything from the Long Room in the Trinity College Library in Dublin (where the book, a major tourist attraction, is on display) to the custom-made wooden cases (beautiful objects in their own right) to page after splendid page of the original, including damaged or formerly blank pages on which charters have been written in Old Irish, with its own distinctive script.

In this chapter, one of his finest, de Hamel is refreshingly blunt. In discussing the image of the Virgin and Child on folio 7V of the Book of Kells, perhaps "the earliest illustration of the subject in European art," he notes that "the picture is dreadfully ugly." And he goes on to remark that

> Mary's head is far too big for her body, and she has huge staring red-lined eyes and a long nose which looks as though it is dripping downwards, and a tiny mouth. Her pendulous breasts are visible through her purple tunic, and her little legs stick out sideways like a child's drawing. The baby, seen in profile, is grotesque and unadorable, with wild red hair like seaweed, protruding upturned nose and chin, and a worrying red line from his nose to his ear . . . .

This may not win him friends in Ireland, but his remarks are pertinent for at least two reasons. First, he is unhampered by any preconceived reflex of veneration: he really looks at an image and tells us what he sees. This is rare enough to be applauded. (And, come to think of it, he's right: this is a singularly unappealing depiction of Virgin and Child.) Second, and more importantly, he remarks that "intrinsic beauty is a difficult concept in art history, especially across a divide of 1200 years." Maybe the image was based on some earlier, especially venerated depiction and

"the weirdness may be inherited tradition rather than simply being poor draftsmanship." Perhaps too, we may speculate, beauty, intrinsic or not, was not the point of the image but something homelier, humbler, a whiff of the original stable amid all the splendor of ornamentation and the trappings of majesty. As de Hamel notes of the Gospels of Saint Augustine, "When the manuscript was exhibited in the Fitzwilliam Museum in 2005, a visitor was seen by Stella Panayotova, curator of manuscripts there, weeping and kissing the ground in front of its glass case." The aesthete's sharp eye can mislead; the image of Virgin and Child in the Book of Kells was designed to be revered, adored, and entreated by believers, not merely appreciated by future connoisseurs.

While de Hamel's book could serve as a manual of paleography for the uninitiated, and does so with immense flair, it is far more than that. In each chapter he sets a manuscript in its precise historical and social context. Each chapter, moreover, deals with a different aspect of manuscripts: scribal practices, collectors and librarians, royal patrons, the trade in manuscripts, and the often undocumented relations of one set of manuscripts with others. We learn a great deal about Anglo-Saxon England or the scriptorium of Gregory the Great in Rome or warfare in Renaissance Italy or the vexed circumstances of Jeanne de Navarre's accession to the throne in Pamplona in March of 1329, and about other *reines bibliophiles* (such as Christina of Sweden) or the paltry company of scriveners in Chaucer's London. We learn too about the tangled provenance of the manuscripts, as well as about the scholars, bibliophiles, collectors, and sellers of manuscripts at various periods, such as—to name but one—J. P. Morgan, son of the great robber baron, who extended his father's collection with the assistance of the remarkable Morgan librarian Bella da Costa Greene and acquired the exquisite manuscript known as the Morgan Beatus, a gorgeously illustrated commentary on the Apocalypse. This manuscript, as de Hamel notes in one of many fascinating asides, had been acquired by the aptly named Guglielmo Libri (1802–69) whom de Hamel calls "the best-known thief in the history of manuscripts," and who "helped public collections by joyfully relieving them of unwanted treasures." He pilfered from libraries in Dijon, Lyon, Grenoble, Carpentras, Montpellier, Poitiers, Tours, and Paris, among others—but he could accomplish this not only because he was unprincipled but because he had great expertise and "a wonderful eye for rarity." Such erudite crooks figure more than once in de Hamel's pages.

In keeping with his "conversational" approach, de Hamel takes us along with him on his visits to far-flung libraries. (Of the Copenhagen Psalter he says, "Sit beside me and let's gaze in admiration for a moment. We won't touch it: just look.") On each visit, whether to Florence or Dublin or Leiden, New York or Copenhagen or Aberystwyth, not forgetting Munich, St. Petersburg, and Los Angeles, as well as his own Parker Library in Cambridge, he evokes the libraries themselves and their settings and premises, the reading rooms, the lovingly fashioned cases or boxes in which the manuscripts are nestled. (His tenure at the Parker Library had an ironic twist. Twenty-five years before becoming a curator there, as a student eager to consult its treasures, he had been refused admittance: *habent sua fata curatores*!) He is generous in acknowledging the various friends and colleagues who assisted him at each stop. Paleographers and lovers of medieval manuscripts come through in his accounts as a hospitable and rather jolly bunch, and we are made privileged eavesdroppers at their encounters. Sometimes the initial encounters are humorous. At the Medici Library, he reports, "My first inquiry about seeing the Codex Amiatinus itself was met with refusal, that deep all-encompassing sigh of infinite regret which only the Italians have perfected: it is too fragile . . . . In Italy, however, the word 'no' is not necessarily a negative. It is merely a preliminary stage of discussion."

Here I have to admit that for all the magnificent images in these manuscripts, for all the illuminated borders and elaborate ornamentation of, say, the Book of Kells or the

spectacular paintings in the Spinola Hours, it is the various scripts of these works that most enchant me. The uncial letter (the word "uncial" may derive from the Latin *uncia*, "an inch," as de Hamel explains) is sublime in its stately simplicity, as seen in both the Gospels of Saint Augustine and the Codex Amiatinus. Arrayed in double columns, *per cola et commata* (which de Hamel renders as "by clauses and pauses"), perhaps to form easily enunciated phrases for reading aloud from lectern or pulpit, the script is at once sturdy and majestic, perfectly suited for the words of scripture. In their symmetry and clarity the columned words display a compressed monumentality; they seem carved out of the ink that forms them. The double columns of text have an architectural look, like the pillars of a temple in which the words are shaped stones.

What de Hamel calls the "restlessness" of medieval manuscripts, their crisscrossing journeys over centuries, can be documented in several of his exemplars. Thus, the Codex Amiatinus, long believed to have been written "in the hand of the blessed Pope Gregory" (*ca*. 540–604), in Rome, turns out to have been produced in Jarrow, England, under the auspices of the abbot Ceolfrith (*ca*. 642–716). The Venerable Bede, "that towering genius among the Anglo-Saxon writers," as de Hamel calls him, was also active at Jarrow and may have consulted this manuscript. The massive work was on its way to Rome when it was deposited at the monastery of San Salvatore on Mount Amiata in Tuscany (readers of poetry will recognize this as the site of Eugenio Montale's great poem "News from Mount Amiata" with its "missals in the attics"). It was recorded as being there in 1036, centuries after its creation. Only in the late nineteenth century was it identified as having been copied in Jarrow. The identification created a sensation: "the oldest complete copy of the Latin Bible was actually made in England." After 1789, the Grand Duke of Tuscany ordered it transferred to the library designed by Michelangelo in Florence where it now resides in all its heft and splendor under the telegraphic tag *Cod. Amiat. 1*.

Paleography is a sensuous pursuit. It relies on the acuity of the eyes, but it is also their delight. The touch and the feel of manuscripts are essential; the fingertips often sense more than the eye can see. A paleographer should have a good nose too. Manuscripts have distinct, quite personal fragrances. In examining the Codex Amiatinus, de Hamel depends both on the feel of the parchment and on its smell. "I have no vocabulary to define this," he writes, "but there is a curious warm leathery smell to English parchment, unlike the sharper, cooler scent of Italian skins." No doubt the ears play a part too in discerning the particular creak or swish of parchment when the leaves are turned. (Only the sense of taste is, fortunately, not involved.)

In my own experience, many years ago, as a curator and cataloguer of manuscripts—in my case, Arabic manuscripts—I was made aware of this sensuous aspect of handwritten books. My texts had none of the majesty of those de Hamel deals with; they were "school texts," treatises on logic or grammar or medicine or arithmetic, often shabbily bound and tattered by use. They had been passed down over generations from fathers to sons, teachers to pupils. Usually they were festooned with spidery marginalia: emendations to the text, or corrections, or indignant objections. Their flyleaves bore stamps of ownership or notices of approbation attesting that a student had mastered the contents and was now authorized to teach them. The colophons were precise, often to the very day and month; though just as often, the manuscripts were missing their colophons or were acephalous, making identification difficult. Such beauty as they had lay purely in their calligraphy and in the glossy sheen of the hand-glazed paper. Occasionally there were miniatures or the riotous floral motifs of the lacquered Kashmiri bindings (so much for the Muslim "ban on images!"). But the principal attraction lay in the scribal hands, almost always of a fastidious elegance; you could feel the pleasure a scribe had taken in the subtle flourishes and dainty swoops he added to certain letters or words. I could not help being aware of the unseen but palpable

host of those who had written or annotated those works, of those who had pored over them, memorizing their lines. Once, while leafing through a sixteenth-century manuscript of Persian provenance, I found a single strand of hair tucked inside as a bookmark; it was a slim, frizzled, rather shiny hair plucked from some luxuriant but long-vanished beard. Had this reader grown bored with his text (it was rather dreary)? Or had he meant to return to a certain passage sometime later? There was no way to know, of course, but I had the vivid sense of the palpable aura that accompanies those who study or consult old manuscripts.

Christopher de Hamel cannot convey this aura any more than he can give us the touch or smell of his chosen manuscripts; and yet, he brings us as close to these rare masterpieces as any of us is likely to come. This is truly a beautiful book, worthy to stand beside the works it celebrates. If there are libraries in heaven, as I'm sure there must be, such books as these, and their fellows, will be there not only for perusal but for the touch and smell and gaze, no doubt transfigured but still redolent of the earthly materials of which they were formed—and there won't be a whisker in sight.

Poems

by Rafael Campo, Alfonsina Storni & J. T. Barbarese

Hospice rounds

One looks at me as from a distance.
Another does not cry; "It's only pain,"
she says, as if cancer were just a nuisance
one looks at square, from a distance.
Outside the window, sunshine, like persistence.
Yet how Bach from the radio seems like rain.
She looks at me. From this great distance
I'm another who cannot cry. Or feel pain.

—Rafael Campo

Ships

Across the flat
violet face of the river,
three black ships
depart toward the horizon.
I can't see them moving,
but with every second
they grow smaller.
Is the river
a pale blue dream?
The jungle of houses
a dream in gold?
An invisible hand
pushes the ships
to unknown piers.
Are they leaving
the shore
in silence?
Their plumes of smoke
trace signals
on the blue backdrop
far beyond.
But the breeze
dishevels and dissolves them
and the message
is illegible.

—Alfonsina Storni, translated by Nicholas Friedman

On a sentence from Benjamin

Warmth is ebbing from things.

Days like this, I miss you,
a few classy hankies of storm trailing the sun,
glare-bursts on goose-water,
the groundhogs like loaves of challah on the grass on the traffic islands,
cars with children at the windows at the idling light.

I miss the sublime average, I miss mediocrity, life before metal revelations and engirdled heights, before uptalk and wifi,
I miss the unmixed blessing of just what's here, uncollected pocket litter, the stray packets of oyster crackers, the fenced yards, the R-8 shaking the fence, the wind spinning the tire swing,
shaving's sleepy arousals, the pleasure of steamed glass, and showering in back of the shed under the caterpillar cocoons, hung from your peach tree like living cotton candy

I miss the security of dullness and how it stops the everyday from hurting itself,
pedestrians wrapped in sunglare, teens making out in public, the blurry tattoos and piercings, the third eye on an eyelid, the bright grim first June heat-wave,
how mown grass can smell like crotch, how the splinted make-out benches with old carved hieroglyphs are national treasures,
heart-and-arrow haikus on trees and delts,
how the pissed-on seats on the Riverline smell almost like fresh coffee, O

the average peripheries, the average visions, which are the walls of our prism, the
blessed typical, the take or leave it look of rain racing down the trolley tracks on Germantown Avenue,
the narrow beam of light on the wall, descending as the sun lifts over the house.

—J. T. Barbarese

Letter from Roswell

Among the ufologists

by Andrew Stuttaford

After losing my way last summer in a tiny town best known as the deathplace of Billy the Kid, I eventually located the right desert highway. Outperforming the alleged aliens who, seventy years before, had allegedly crashed their alleged spacecraft nearby, I swept past a welcome sign decorated with—in honor of a cow town's real and imagined pasts—cattle and a flying saucer, and reached Roswell, New Mexico, in one piece:

> The City of Roswell invites UFO enthusiasts and skeptics alike to join in the celebration of one of the most debated incidents in history.

History is not what it was.

Alien kitsch at my hotel's front desk, an alien face on the elevator floor and each elevator button too.

Applebee's held itself aloof, but Arby's was ready to "welcome" unsuspecting aliens. A little green matador graced the walls of a Mexican restaurant, and the striking architecture of one local McDonald's paid tribute to a saucer that never was. Downtown, an immense metallic construction with a pointed rocket nose turned out to be an old grain silo, a disappointment dispelled by a $2 "black light spacewalk" in a nearby souvenir store, the not-exactly-NASA Roswell Space Center.

The Roswell story—or, appropriately, its fragments—can be found scattered across American culture. It starts in mid-June 1947 when ranch hand William "Mac" Brazel, a link to a legend of the Old West (his uncle may have killed Billy the Kid's killer), stumbled upon the debris that propelled him into a legend of a space age that had yet to arrive.

Brazel wasn't impressed by the "bright wreckage made up of rubber strips, tinfoil, a rather tough paper, and sticks" strewn out there in the desert, but a week or so later he heard that a sighting in Washington State had triggered America's first proper UFO "flap" and, critically, a $3,000 reward for physical evidence of one of these contraptions. Even then it was a few days before Brazel (who had no phone) "whispered kinda confidential" to the sheriff during a routine visit to Roswell, some seventy-five miles away. The sheriff contacted the authorities at the Roswell airfield, home, perhaps fittingly, to the only unit on the planet then equipped to drop an atomic bomb: there are those who speculate that it was New Mexico's role—from Los Alamos to White Sands—in so much of the development of America's nascent nuclear arsenal that (supposedly) drew extraterrestrial observers to the Southwest. It was two humans, however, the intelligence officer Jesse Marcel and a colleague, who retrieved the wreckage from Brazel. On July 8, the base's commander ordered his public information officer to put out a press release, and that's what Lieutenant Walter Haut did:

> The many rumors regarding the flying disc became a reality yesterday when the intelligence office of the 509th Bomb Group . . . was fortunate enough to gain possession of a disc.

The wreckage had become a disc, the disc became a headline: "RAAF [Roswell Army Air Field] Captures Flying Saucer on Ranch in Roswell Region," was the *Roswell Daily Record*'s headline on a front page, still available for sale across town in formats ranging from T-shirt to magnet.

In the release, Haut also explained that the disc had been inspected, "then loaned by Major Marcel to higher headquarters." It was there that Brigadier General Roger Ramey let the air out of the balloon by telling the press that the wreckage *was* a balloon, or, more precisely, what was left of a weather balloon and the radar reflectors it had been transporting. The *Roswell Daily Record*'s headline was bleak: "General Ramey Empties Roswell Saucer." A "harassed" Mac Brazel, it related, was sorry he had "told" but added that "he had previously found two weather observation balloons on the ranch, but . . . what he found this time did not in any way resemble either of these"—intriguing, but not intriguing enough to be talked about for the next three decades.

But people continued to watch the skies. The suspicion that there might be something up there bubbled away, ginned up by an eager press and spinners—mad, Munchausen, mercenary, or misguided—of tall tales that won a huge following. An obsession fed by an entertainment industry that in turn echoed and amplified the stories that its own creations provoked among the credulous, flying saucers were made all the more believable by Sputnik, Vostok, and Gemini. If we could do it, why couldn't they? Even Uncle Sam was curious and, with unknown Soviet weaponry also in mind, carried out studies—most famously Project Blue Book—into UFOs, only to conclude by the end of the 1960s that aliens were not involved. Many Americans (and not just Americans) disagreed, and it was revealed last December that between 2007 and 2012 the Pentagon ran a secret project (with an afterlife that apparently still continues) to take another look at what might be up there. Its investigations turned up some thought-provoking reports as well as startling video and audio recordings, but the fact that its funding has—*so we're told*—been eliminated is pretty good evidence that there is no evidence that anybody green has come calling.

The postwar fascination with UFOs attracted the attention of Carl Jung, a man with a weakness for the strange. In a letter to the editor of the *New Republic* in 1957, Jung essentially conceded that—whatever UFOs were—they were real, but the title of his *Flying Saucers: A Modern Myth of Things Seen in the Skies* (1958) gives the game away, and its text is high Jung: Platonic months, "spring point enter[ing] Aquarius," mandalas, manifestations of anxiety about atomic war. But the dodgy old sage was not wrong to spot traces of the spiritual in this phenomenon. The wave of interest in UFOs has occasionally curdled into flying-saucer cults, and some of their descendants, despite Heaven's Gate's opening to oblivion, still flourish today.

Both the Bible and concerns about the dangers of UFO cults helped inspire "Challenges to E.T.," a conference held that seventieth-anniversary weekend in the Roswell Mall, a complex most notable for the crashed saucer lodged in the roof of its movie theater, and some way from the goings-on downtown. Perhaps that was just as well. Whatever the underlying reason for this gathering, its focus seemed to be on rejecting "the extraterrestrial hypothesis" in favor of just about anything else outré enough to draw a crowd, from human experimentation to, well, I'll just quote from the best introductory slide I have ever seen: "Demons and the Pentagon: What the Hell?"

More benignly, belief in powerful, otherworldly aliens has a niche in the catch-all spirituality of our own time, a belief inspired by a notion, however weird, of technology, while satisfying an all-too-human craving for enchantment. The "God gene" is not easy to escape: those who would not normally consider themselves religious appear to be more likely to believe in UFOs than their churchgoing contemporaries. Then again, why choose? In one store downtown, aliens shared shelf space with Jesus, Mary, and, if I'm not mistaken, a Hindu deity.

A British speaker at "Challenges to E.T." did more than most to decode the enduring

interest in the Roswell Incident, comparing it with his country's long-standing fixation with Jack the Ripper: people like a puzzle. I watched the audience at a session elsewhere in town, gripped by a grainy computerized reconstruction of otherwise illegible wording on the piece of paper—the "Ramey Memo"—photographed in the general's hand as he studied what was either the wreckage from Roswell or, some maintain, a tawdry substitution for the real thing: "Now we come to a really intriguing group of words, which are clearly visible as ON THE 'DISK' with discernible quotation marks around 'DISK' . . . "

But Roswell's puzzle was meant to have been solved by Ramey. For decades it seemed that it had, remaining largely forgotten until the late 1970s. As recounted in the invaluable *UFO Crash at Roswell: The Genesis of a Modern Myth* (1997), a work in part anthropological study and in part persuasive forensic debunking, one of the preconditions for its resurrection was a growth in distrust of the U.S. Government (who else would have concealed the wreckage?), a precondition that the U.S. Government did its best to foster. It's telling that a leading "ufologist," Stanton Friedman, a retired *nuclear* physicist no less—has described Roswell as a "cosmic Watergate."

Suspicion of dark doings by the government is as American as dark doings by the government. The sight of conspiracy theorists being welcomed into a red, white, and blue town is not so very contradictory. Banks and fast food joints advertised their support for the police and the military while street lights were topped with alien head globes but wrapped in Old Glory (July 4th was approaching). And there is something splendidly American about the way that a remote city of fifty thousand not known for very much milks the cash cow that didn't fall to earth.

A section of downtown had been blocked off. Businesses vied for the best alien ("or patriotic") window display. Supplementing a distinctive collection of stores—Alien Invasion, Alien Headz, Alien Stop, Alien Zone—were booths offering alien this, alien that, and alien tat. Vendors sold snacks of any description and snacks beyond description. There were pony rides, a water slide (the temperature was in the nineties), an alien costume contest for pets, and an alien costume contest for humans. A man under a canopy invited passers-by to "receive prayer," while a rival peddled an enlightenment all his own: "The hierarchy of the cosmos and the connection between God, aliens, and man." Attractions in front of the fine early-twentieth-century courthouse included a welcome tent, the Ten Commandments carved in stone, and a signpost to the planets. Bands played soft rock and Tejano, a borderlands mingling.

A block or two away, at the International UFO Museum and Research Center, much expanded since, oh yes, my last visit in 1995, there was work to be done. Travis Walton discussed his abduction by aliens in 1975, a distressing if dubious story subsequently turned into the unexpectedly entertaining *Fire in the Sky*, a movie released during the early '90s abduction boom. Other stars in the Roswell Galaxy spoke on the government cover-up, physical evidence of the crash, and additional matters that, if proven, would change our understanding of *everything*. Yet a touch of carnival had crept in. A flier ("THE ALIEN BODIES! WOW!") promoted a workshop hosted by the "alien hunter" Derrel Sims (admission $10).

More than a touch: to be sure, there was a well-stocked library crammed with ufological scholarship, but the gift shop struck a more frivolous note: alien T-shirts, alien sweatshirts, alien sippy cups, alien key-rings, alien pens, alien onesies, alien ashtrays, alien beanies, alien magnets, plush aliens, plastic aliens, blow-up aliens, everything alien except the real, elusive thing. Educational materials lined the walls of the main hall—those photographs that can't always be so quickly explained away, pictures of "ancient astronauts," the usual—but a replica of the robot from *The Day the Earth Stood Still* stood still nearby, not far from a recreation of that infamous alien autopsy and an engaging display in which a flying saucer whirled behind four forbidding animatronic aliens. The UFO museum, "a 501(c)(3) non-profit educational organization," may maintain a claim to represent the "serious side" of UFO research, but it subverts that seriousness with a wink and a nod.

Many of those thronging its premises understood that very well. Yes, true believers parted respectfully when Stanton Friedman made his way through his flock and gathered earnestly around Travis Walton. But others seemed less convinced, sci-fi curious perhaps, intrigued maybe, believers even, but without the conviction to take their belief very seriously. They were playing a game they half-hoped was real. Others were just there for the fun, their pilgrimage more Mardi Gras than the Camino de Santiago, four girls in shiny skirts and headphone hairstyles, three middle-aged ladies in "alien" eyeglasses vamping in front of those forbidding aliens as the dry ice billowed. Uncle Sam sauntered around the main exhibition hall on stilts, his presence a salute to the doomed spacecraft's touchdown into American folklore.

The deliberations weren't confined to the museum and the mall. The *Roswell Daily Record* hosted a series of lectures in a conference room behind K-Bob's Steakhouse. At the city's convention center, topics included abductees' civil rights and, the horror, "the origins of the UFO ridicule factor."

Bryce Zabel, one of the creators of *Dark Skies*, a UFO-conspiracy TV show from the mid-nineties, once observed that "true or untrue . . . Roswell is seminal." *True or untrue.*

It took more than Vietnam and Watergate to bring a long-lost moment in New Mexico's history back to life. Possibly it was only a coincidence that, as is noted in *UFO Crash at Roswell*, tales of crashed saucers were beginning to come back into vogue in the late 1970s, but it was then that the not-always-reliable Jesse Marcel (by now, he said, a believer in UFOs, certain that the wreckage "was nothing that came from earth") gave an interview to *National Enquirer*, a magazine known for publishing items that could be believed, half-believed, or believed not at all.

Other stories too were recalled: the same issue of the *Roswell Daily Record* that had featured Walter Haut's press release had also contained a report of how the "hardware man" Dan Wilmot, "one of the most respected and reliable citizens in town," and his wife had witnessed "a large glowing" object "zooming" over Roswell on July 2, 1947 (awkwardly a week or so *after* Brazel had discovered that mysterious wreckage, an inconvenient truth that failed to deter some of the faithful or the fraudulent from treating the two stories as one).

The Wilmots' account was at least published contemporarily. Vern and Jean Maltais were not so timely. Two prominent members of the long cavalcade of hoaxers, grifters, pseudo-sleuths, opportunists, attention-seekers, and fantasists who have contributed to the ever-shifting Roswell narrative, they emerged in 1978 to claim that they had been told by a friend that he (and, naturally, given the rich cast of characters who wander in and out of this saga, some archeologists) had discovered alien wreckage (and small alien corpses) in the Plains of San Agustin, New Mexico, or maybe somewhere else. This was enough for Charles Berlitz, a linguist (one of *those* Berlitzes) and the author of books on Atlantis, the Bermuda Triangle, and other concocted mysteries, and the ufologist William Moore. With the help of research by Stanton Friedman, they published *The Roswell Incident* in 1980, a farrago of speculation that arguably did more than anything else to turn a spurious crash into a genuine sensation. The most interesting thing about it was how well (very) it sold.

As the Roswell industry grew, clarity shrank, dates blurred, locations went walkabout, saucers changed shape, there was one crash, there were two, the aliens all died, one survived, a local undertaker was asked about the availability of undersized coffins, a "missing" nurse saw more than she should, the military (a mean-eyed, red-headed colonel or captain, a black sergeant) bullied witnesses into silence, evidence was stolen. Documents showing that Eisenhower was briefed were later shown to be forgeries and set off a schism, but were the forgeries created to discredit those who were coming too close to the truth?

As it happens, there probably was a cover-up, of sorts. The U.S. Air Force published two reports in the mid-1990s, just after *The X-Files*, a television show that played off (and further popularized) the Roswell myth while weaving it into a dense conspiratorial mix that spread

far beyond the small screen, had begun its long run. The first, the exhaustively researched and at times drily amusing *The Roswell Report: Fact vs. Fiction*, brings a touch of much-missed Mission Control rigor as it cuts through the miasma, both pre-modern and post-, which envelops so much of the Roswell debate. If you'll forgive the spoiler, its writers found "no evidence of any extraterrestrial craft or alien flight crew." What they did find "[was] . . . a shadowy, formerly Top Secret project, code-named MOGUL," involving the launch of "balloon trains" some six-hundred feet long and laden with sensors designed to detect whether the Soviets had successfully tested a nuclear device (America's nuclear weapons monopoly only ended in 1949). Given the secrecy that surrounded MOGUL, Ramey either didn't recognize the Roswell wreckage or was unwilling to identify it: either way, he left enough of a gap for the conspiracy theories to seep through.

The Roswell Report: Case Closed was a sequel designed to address the question of alien corpses. Rather charitably, it suggests that recollections of these extraterrestrial unfortunates were the result of memories—muddled over the decades—of Air Force anthropomorphic test dummies parachuted from high altitudes over the desert and, separately, two accidents in which Air Force personnel were killed or injured in the late 1950s.

To some, these reports were merely a new twist on an old cover-up. Facts rarely get in the way of a good story or a satisfying cult. The Roswell show rolls on, sporadically spiced up by the rise and fall of ever-more-innovative embellishments and now graced by a hereditary nobility of sorts: at one meeting we were invited to applaud descendants of the principal witnesses, proud to carry a torch that sheds no light. No matter: according to a 2013 survey, roughly a fifth of Americans believe that a saucer crashed near Roswell and the government covered it up. The UFO museum received some two hundred thousand visitors in 2016 and fifteen thousand people reportedly showed up for the seventieth anniversary celebrations.

No pilgrimage is complete without a procession, no Mardi Gras without a parade. On the Saturday night of my visit, we lined Main Street as hot dusk cooled into warm darkness, some in costume, some prudently sporting tinfoil hats, one (your correspondent) clad in a white linen jacket that had already attracted some comments from more casually dressed attendees earlier in the day. At around 9 P.M., the Electric Light Parade began; illuminated floats and illuminated cars coasted by, escorted by a retinue of illuminated aliens and a zig-zagging skater encased in a glowing green saucer. The High Desert Pipes and Drums of Albuquerque brought up the rear, its marchers illuminated and kilted, drums beating and pipes skirling their way through—of course—*Scotland the Brave* into the New Mexico night.

Reflections

The permanence & failure of Surrealism

by Micah Mattix

Why has surrealism been such a success in painting and such a failure in poetry? Why do some of the most striking lines in twentieth-century poetry—Antonin Artaud's "the sky flows into the nostrils/ like a nutritious blue milk"—go forgotten and unread, if they were ever remembered in the first place? One of the twentieth century's most recognizable images is Salvador Dalí's *The Persistence of Memory*. But if asked to name a single surrealist poem or line of surrealist poetry, most people, critics included, would be stumped.

These were some of the questions that came to mind as I was reading Willard Bohn's recent anthology, *Surrealist Poetry*.[1] The volume is a bilingual collection of mostly French and Spanish surrealist poetry translated into English. All the big names are here—Louis Aragon, André Breton, René Char, Paul Eluard, Federico García Lorca, and Octavio Paz—as well as a good selection of minor figures like José María Hinojosa and Braulio Arenas.

Surrealism has had an "unprecedented global impact," Bohn writes in the introduction, and he's right about that impact being global, even if it hasn't exactly been unprecedented. It is, without a doubt, the twentieth century's most popular art movement. Unlike cubism or abstract expressionism, it spans many media—paint, stone, poetry, and film—and, as a technique for creating images, it has persisted for nearly a hundred years in the work of artists from all continents. The term has even entered everyday discourse. Any situation that is strange or violent, has dreamlike qualities, or evokes a sense of déjà vu is potentially "surreal"—from a *Simpsons* episode to a terrorist attack.

Yet, surrealist poetry has, according to Bohn, "languished." Why? Bohn says one reason is the lack of translations in English, world culture's *lingua franca*. Hence the present volume. But the problem arises even earlier in the chain. There are plenty of translations of Baudelaire and Proust, for example, because so many people think these writers are worth reading and, therefore, worth translating. So why do so few—comparatively, at least—think the same of surrealist poetry?

Bohn's second reason for surrealist poetry's obscurity is more convincing, though he fails to register the significance of what he is saying. The problem is the medium. The problem is poetry itself. Bohn writes:

> Unlike printed texts, paintings and films offer the illusion of being immediately accessible. Although viewers may have no idea what they really mean, the visual images impinge upon their retinas without need of mediation. The fact that many of the images appear to be realistic, that many objects can actually be identified, reinforces the viewer's impression.

In short, while the images of a surrealist painting are relatively clear (and often enchanting), even if their significance isn't, the same is not true of poetry. Poetic images are constructed

1 *Surrealist Poetry: An Anthology*, edited by Willard Bohn; Bloomsbury, 384 pages, $80.

with words and syntax within an overarching narrative, if I can use the term loosely, be it discursive, descriptive, or dramatic. Paintings have narratives, too, of course, but they are always created by the images themselves—a gesture suggests a feeling, the light on the eye is a life story. It's nearly the opposite with poetry, whose images work symbiotically within narratives.

Unlike painting's images, the poetic image is revealed *linearly*. One word is encountered after another. Objects take shape by addition. Characters appear. They do things with objects. Speakers speak. These elements must work together in a specific sequence to create, if everything goes right, a complex whole.

The painterly image, however, is revealed in an instant. We might roam the surface, focusing on a detail here, a texture or color there, and relate them back to the whole, but the sequence of that roaming and relating doesn't change the image one bit. Change the sequence of words in a poem, and you have a new poem.

But surrealism doesn't care about narratives. It cares about images. It is an image-making, metaphor-making technique—a way of bringing disparate things together to create a new, strange one. In fact, its disregard for narrative is one of its defining characteristics. It is a form of play, of imagistic exploration.

Guillaume Apollinaire certainly had the free play of images in mind when he used the term on May 18, 1917 to describe the ballet *Parade*, for which Picasso had designed the set and costumes (Jean Cocteau wrote the scenario and Erik Satie composed the music). Unlike the "artificial" ("factice") costumes and choreography in most ballets, *Parade* possessed "a sort of sur-realism," Apollinaire wrote. What did he mean?

I don't think it's insignificant that one of Apollinaire's favorite words in *Cubist Painters* (1913) is "reality." Painters like Picasso, he writes, "are moving further and further away from the old art of optical illusion and local proportions . . . . Scientific Cubism is one of the pure tendencies. It is the art of painting new compositions with elements taken not from reality as it is seen, but from reality as it is known."

Cubism, in other words, is a two-dimensional representation of the mind ("reality as it is known") and, in this sense, it is more *realistic* than paintings that use *illusion* to represent how things look. If cubism is a two-dimensional representation of the workings of the mind, *Parade*, with its cubist horses and jesters, may have seemed to Apollinaire a three-dimensional one—a cubist painting in action—and so a "sort of sur-realism."

The other aspect of *Parade* is its childlike play. It brings all the arts together in an expression of "universal jubilation" ("allégresse universelle"). It is both a hard-nosed "translation" of reality and a "free fantasy." The ballet, Apollinaire remarks, "has done something entirely new, marvelously seducing, with a truth so lyrical, humane, and joyful that it will be able to illuminate, if it's worth it, Dürer's terrible black sun in *Adrianeholia*." This last remark suggests, of course, that *Parade* does tell us something (all art does), but Apollinaire is less concerned with this than with the imagistic mingling of reality and fantasy.

André Breton, too, defined surrealism as a play of psychic images. For Breton, however, in the process of this play, a narrative *would* emerge from the images themselves, though, significantly, it would always be the same narrative: a critique of Hegel's idealism, which favored reason over irrationality, "presence" over "absence." Breton writes in his *Second Manifesto* that

> Surrealism, although a special part of its function is to examine with a critical eye the notions of reality and unreality, reason and irrationality, reflection and impulse, knowledge and "fatal" ignorance . . . tends to take as its point of departure the "colossal abortion" of the Hegelian system.

While still sharing Hegel's method (and so not exactly a critique of Hegel's *system*), surrealism shows, Breton claims, that Hegel's hierarchical distinctions between beauty and ugliness, order and chaos, spirit and matter, are hobgoblins. Everything is one—ugliness is beauty, beauty is ugliness, spirit is matter. So, in place of Hegel's idealism, it proposes a new and supposedly improved dialectic that takes into consideration the *material* ground

of being. It is no surprise that Breton would go on to claim that surrealism would prove that "historical materialism" is true.

More could be said about the nuances and contradictions of Breton's definition of surrealism. The point here is that, for both Apollinaire and Breton, narrative is in no need of the artist's attention. The poet ignores it because it supposedly takes care of itself, emerging ready-made from a poem's imagery, which is produced, in Breton's view, by some "collective mind." The problem, of course, is that attention to narrative is one of the primary tasks of the poet.

This is why the best poems in *Surrealist Poetry* aren't actually surreal. They ignore Breton's mumbo jumbo about automatic writing (an impossibility, in any case, as Frank O'Hara noted—no writing is ever free of conscious control) while learning from surrealism's technique of combining seemingly unrelated things to create striking images.

The selections from the Nobel Prize winner Vicente Aleixandre are particularly instructive. The early surrealist prose poems show the poet's originality and gift for metaphor with lines like "You are the virgin wave of yourself" and "I'll finally hold . . . your demolished torso, twinkling between my teeth," and even these poems have a narrative flow established by mood and voice. But they are inferior to the dialogue poems included in the volume, which are hardly surreal, and which show both Aleixandre's startling vision and his narrative craftsmanship.

Take "Hands," for example, which begins:

> See your hand, how slowly it moves,
> transparent, tangible, pierced by light,
> lovely, alive, nearly human in the night.
> With the moon's reflection, with a painful cheek,
> with the
> vagueness of dream. See how it grows when you
> lift your arm,
> fruitless search for a vanished night,
> wing of light gliding silently
> and brushing against the dark vault.

Aleixandre goes on to imagine another hand—figured as a wing—pursuing the first. They "encounter each other" in the sky. They are "signs/ calling to each other silently in the dark . . . devoid of stars." In the final stanza, Aleixandre writes, they "collide and cling together igniting/ a sudden moon above the world of men."

It's a stunning poem but hardly a surrealist one. Bohn may have included it, and other dialogue poems by Aleixandre, because of its otherworldly final image—the hands joining together to form a moon—or because of the specter of death that haunts the poem. (The hands are described at one point to be those of "lovers recently deceased.") But those elements are hardly exclusive to surrealism. The "fantastic" has a long history in poetry.

Neither does the poem disregard narrative or randomly join disparate images. In fact, like the French poet Yves Bonnefoy, who also toyed with surrealism in his early work, Aleixandre returns again and again to the image of hands (as well as stones and light) in his work. This is a conscious preoccupation, not an unconscious one.

Compare Aleixandre's poem to another that has hands: Louis Aragon's "Drinking Song." The poem begins beautifully and surprisingly with a comparison of water glasses to zeppelins and hands to birds:

> If water glasses were really water glasses
> And not airships
> Sailing at night toward painted lips
> Hands would still be birds

But after this, it's as if Aragon gives up:

> Hands that close on alcohol
> Hands that hug the fire-damp
> The sheep grazing on the tablecloth
> Do not fear the doves because
> Of their whiteness
> Let me laugh
>
> Doves you not only threaten
> The observation balloon that resembles me
> Like a brother but
> Also the leaden plain
>
> Look look how the hands I love
> In the morning when the illuminated signs

> Still rival the dawn how
> They bend the sheep's spines
> Crack vertebrae
> Ah ah the silver-plate was false
> The spoons are made of lead like bullets

The sudden shift of vision (from hands to sheep) and voice ("Let me laugh"), aborting the initial metaphors, empties the comparisons of potential significance. While Aragon maintains some continuity—the hands becomes doves that "bend the sheep's spines"—the metaphor ultimately tells us very little about human love or violence. It is made flat by the poem's disregard for narrative.

Breton held that the practice of automatic writing would produce images of great beauty and reality. They would "enrapture" the mind, he wrote, revealing the foundational truths of the human psyche and the world:

> [T]he Surrealist atmosphere created by automatic writing, which I have wanted to put within reach of everyone, is especially conducive to the production of beautiful images. One can even go so far as to say that in this dizzying race the images appear like the only guideposts of the mind. By slow degrees the mind becomes convinced of the supreme reality of these images.

But if there's one thing that surrealist poetry doesn't do, it is convince us of the "supreme reality" of its images. In fact, as *Surrealist Poetry* shows, while surrealism's metaphors can dazzle, they are most forgettable precisely because they tell us so little. An "elevator cage" is "bursting with tufts of/ women's lingerie," a "wolf with glass teeth . . . eats up time in little round cans," space yields "its full mental cotton," ladies bolt "their metaphysical doors," a woman is "the present that accumulates second by second," and on, and on. The volume is full of such images, but it is often unclear what they might mean without the context of narrative, which makes them mere confections—hardly the hard-nosed philosophical aesthetic Breton championed.

The result is boredom. I could look at Max Ernst's drawings in *Histoire Naturelle* (1926) for hours, but reading even the best "absolute" surrealist poem is something like 10 percent exhilaration and 90 percent standing in line at the DMV.

Does this mean surrealist poetry isn't worth reading? No, there is a real benefit to poets and writers in studying surrealism's experiments in metaphor while moving on, as most of the poets in this volume did, once the lessons have been learned. But there are fewer benefits for the general reader. It is an intriguing theory of image-making, but a limited theory of art, and because of this, it regularly fails to please—the first, and perhaps only, criterion of great art—when applied mindlessly.

Theater

Daggers drawn

by Kyle Smith

Even for a Martin McDonagh protagonist, Harry is an unusually prolific killer. He's put 233 men in their graves. Yet Harry is not as delighted with his lot as you'd think: he's merely the second-best executioner in town, and we'll meet both in *Hangmen* (at the Linda Gross Theater through March 7 and expected at Broadway's Cort Theatre a few weeks later). Any new play by McDonagh, the celebrated Anglo-Irish dramatist and filmmaker, constitutes an event, and this one is as viperishly funny as the norm. Considering the play in conjunction with McDonagh's recent Oscar-nominated film *Three Billboards Outside Ebbing, Missouri*, though, is instructive and clarifying. What unifies the two works is breathtakingly unserious.

We open in familiar territory for a McDonagh work: a man is getting hilariously killed. Hennessy (Gilles Geary), the condemned, is being wrestled toward the noose by prison guards as Harry stands impatiently. There's entirely too much wailing and fighting back and clinging to the furniture for Harry's no-nonsense taste, but Hennessy insists he was not guilty, has never been to the town where he is accused of murdering a girl, and further has never committed crimes against women. This all means nothing to Harry, whose job is not to decide what is just but simply to carry out orders. "If you'd only relax, you could be dead by now," one guard tells Hennessy. With his dying breath, Hennessy curses his executioners.

Two years later, we learn that Harry—played with great gusto by Mark Addy, known for his work on *Game of Thrones* and in *The Full Monty*—has a completely different life away from the prison grounds where he carries out the state's grimmest duty. He's a bluff, matey pub owner in Oldham, in the north of England. His band of regulars is supplemented on this particular day by two strangers: one is a newspaper reporter (Owen Campbell) doing a story on the end of hanging in England, for it is 1965 and capital punishment has just been abolished. The other is Mooney (a riveting Johnny Flynn), a chatty, stylishly dressed young fellow in a skinny tie who might have just stepped out of *Blow-Up*, with shaggy rock-star hair and an accent suggesting he's from the metropolitan south of the country. Harry repeatedly tells the reporter he has no comment about his career on the scaffold, but his attitude changes when the reporter says he'll interview instead another publican, Albert (Maxwell Caulfield), who happens to be the number one executioner in the area, with more than 600 deaths to his credit. Mentioning Albert stokes Harry's competitive fires, and also his sense of injustice: he feels it's unfair that Albert is the more renowned hangman as the latter padded his statistics by traveling to Nuremberg after the war and hanging 15 Nazis a day. Surely the German interlude must be written off as a windfall.

In short, it's all very Martin McDonagh. Whether in plays (*The Beauty Queen of Leenane*, *The Lieutenant of Inishmore*, and *The Pillowman*) or films (*In Bruges*, *Seven Psychopaths*), McDonagh relies on the shocking

juxtaposition of gruesome violence with an utterly blasé attitude toward the same. He normally makes little effort to critique any supposed culture of violence, or desensitization to it, preferring to play with in it for the plot twists and the chaotic comedy. Rarely does he give the audience a moral foothold; that his characters so gleefully murder one another leaves us free to laugh at all of them. If everyone behaves horribly, we need not be unduly disturbed by anyone's grisly demise.

Yet *Hangmen* and *Three Billboards* turn away from that pox-on-all-of-them style. That the film is set in the same state as the 2014 Ferguson riots, and deals with police brutality and racism, suggest that it is an oblique response to the Michael Brown shooting and its aftermath. But the Brown narrative, notoriously, collapsed when exhaustive investigation revealed that the police had behaved reasonably and that Brown was the author of his own misfortune. When the lessons of such teachable moments disappoint the Left, they rarely admit to being wrong but insist that their broader point stands. In this case, that claim is that justice is imperfect. In any system, innocent people will be found culpable and punished, or guilty people will go free. This may be true, but how useful is it? Fiendishly clever as it is in its construction, *Hangmen* finds justice to be elusive, maddening, essentially impossible. In both it and *Three Billboards*, characters who are at a loss when unspeakable acts occur simply lash out at someone who is conveniently close at hand, and both works end without establishing the identity of the murderer on the loose.

The theme is startlingly bold, and equally fatuous. McDonagh is a brilliant writer of dialogue, a caustically funny wit, a skillful engineer of plot and character. He has everything going for him but a point. I called *Three Billboards* nihilistic when it was released last fall and *Hangmen* reinforces that judgment.

McDonagh's inscrutable, hyper-talkative, savage, and likely insane characters would recognize a kindred spirit in the person of Jerry, one of the preeminent roles in avant-garde theater in Edward Albee's justly famed 1958 play *The Zoo Story*. That play (lightly emended) later became the second act of *At Home at the Zoo* (at the Irene Diamond Stage at Pershing Square Signature Center through March 18). As a dramatic work, it is a strange beast: the second act, Albee's first play, made his name when he was only thirty. Forty-six years later, when Albee was a world-famous playwright, he appended to it a new first act consisting of a single scene set at the Upper East Side home of Peter, the publishing executive from *Zoo Story*, and his wife, Ann. Albee said he had long felt *Zoo Story* needed to be developed more. It didn't; seething, angry, and weird, it works nicely, which is to say ruthlessly. It's a coiled rattlesnake in the mid-century experimental theater it helped to define. A more cynical explanation for Albee's decision to craft an extension to the material is that *The Zoo Story* was simply too short to get staged very often. Running dry on new ideas, and bedeviled by flops, Albee calculated that he could extract value from one of his great successes by dusting if off and stretching it out to an evening's length.

Albee (1928–2016) was in effect two different men when he wrote the two acts, writing for two different eras. The young buck who wrote *The Zoo Story* was a bristling outsider, a gay man at a time when to acknowledge that identity was to challenge a norm. The septuagenarian who added the first act, which he called *Homelife*, was a wealthy celebrity with a mantel full of awards who had been in a relationship with the same man for more than thirty years. If *The Zoo Story* was the quintessence of beatnik-era Off-Broadway, the new first act would have been perfectly at home on Broadway, playing to wealthy Westchester couples.

The discordance of the two acts does not seem overly to concern the director Lila Neugebauer, nor the actors Robert Sean Leonard and Katie Finneran, who play marrieds Peter and Ann. Although the set suggests an otherworldly space—it is bare except for the armchair and ottoman used by Peter, with huge white walls decorated with slashes suggesting brambles or windblown branches encroaching on his comfortable living room—the conversation isn't especially alarming. The couple's two daughters are mentioned, and their cats and

their parakeets and their microwaves. Each of them has a curious relationship with certain body parts: "I think my circumcision is going away," Peter says, and Ann wonders whether she should perhaps get her breasts removed so as to outsmart any cancer cells that might be thinking of taking up residence there. All of this is played for whimsical laughs, though. The way the actors smile good-naturedly at each other suggests each of these marrieds is well acquainted with the other's passing obsessions. They aren't a lot more interesting than your median upper-middle-class pair, and the actors and their director don't do themselves any favors by playing Albee's (intentionally bad, in my view) jokes at face value. Certainly the audience with which I saw the play chuckled merrily when, for instance, a book on sleep was described as "sort of a sleeper."

Weaving and dodging a bit as Peter struggles to get through a 700-page textbook he has to complete for work, Ann finally comes to the point—which is that, for all his many excellent qualities, Peter is insufficiently adventurous in bed. In fact she'd prefer that, every so often, he attack her like a rabid wolverine. It's not hard to imagine a couples-therapy session in which a detail like this might turn out to be submerged in a seemingly happy bourgeois relationship, so we're still in the realm of the recognizable.

Not so the second act, however; *The Zoo Story* may no longer be as shocking as it once was, but it retains a certain dreadful force. This time the smartly-dressed Peter is alone reading in Central Park when he is approached by a disheveled and loquacious ne'er-do-well, Jerry (Paul Sparks), who, with a mixture of hostility and charm, launches into a long, increasingly disturbing story about his attempt to kill the dog who disturbs him at his dwelling place, a rooming house for dispossessed souls on the Upper West Side. Between Peter and Jerry the conversation is equal parts flirtation and combat, and in the closing minutes their interaction takes on a sinister tone.

The Zoo Story occupies an unnerving, surreal, possibly subconscious plane, and it makes little sense as a followup to the domestic chatter of *Homelife*. Peter seemed normal in the first act, so why, we wonder, does he linger on the bench instead of walking away from the disturbed Jerry? In 1958, the play would have had a very different effect; for the upper-middle-class burghers in the audience, Central Park would have been so strongly identified with order and tranquility that the appearance on the scene of a transgressor would have been unnervingly incongruous. Cognoscenti, however, would have grasped that, for gay men seeking furtively to meet one another, a part of Central Park not far from where the play occurs was a tantalizing pickup spot. Jerry makes a passing allusion to that aspect of the park in the play.

The gay subtext of *The Zoo Story* would have been one of the reasons why it seemed so dangerous and unpredictable in Eisenhower-era New York, and it has the added benefit of supplying a reason why Peter chooses to stay: Jerry and the palpable aggression he represents attract him in some way he can't quite fathom or even acknowledge to himself. But even though Jerry tickles Peter, reducing him to helpless laughter, and Jerry alludes to gay affairs in his past, Neugebauer and the cast seem to dismiss the sexual element here and even undercut it in the first act, in which Peter appears to be resolutely and boringly heterosexual. What do we make of the weird climactic developments, then? Whatever questions are raised are dropped without ceremony, and the contrary impulses of *At Home at the Zoo* end up nullifying each other.

The cultural hegemony enjoyed, and ruthlessly guarded, by our friends on the Left does not lead to stability within it. To an outside observer, the impression is of a circular firing squad as each subgroup within the professional victim class asserts that it is the most wounded and in need of succor. On the night I saw J. C. Lee's dagger-sharp new play *Relevance* (at the Lucille Lortel Theatre through March 11), this absurd dispatch from the diversocrats popped up on the Web site *Slate*: "How Rose McGowan's anti-trans bias weakens feminism." A note appended to the top of the essay reads, "This post is part of *Outward*, Slate's home for coverage of LGBTQ life, thought, and culture." Within the piece, we learn that McGowan, an actress who has

been praised for her courage after publicly accusing the film producer Harvey Weinstein of rape, canceled a promotional tour for her book about her sexual assault claims after a transgender individual briefly heckled her during an appearance at a bookstore and had to be escorted from the store while disparaging McGowan's "White cis feminism." Oh, and McGowan had once angrily insisted, in a Facebook post, that the celebrity currently known as Caitlyn Jenner but better known for his previous life as the decathlete Bruce had little idea of what it was like to be a woman. McGowan, who has been wearing dresses for considerably longer than Jenner, doubtless had a point, but offend the transgender community at your peril. Her hero status is in jeopardy.

This bitterly contested hierarchy of the aggrieved is the subject of Lee's play, which could do with a bit of sharpening (at the preview I attended, a member of the staff announced that it was still undergoing rewrites, which is not ordinarily the case when a play is being presented to a paying audience). It does make some perspicacious and needful points about the arena of public intellectuals and the gladiatorial combat that takes place therein. Theresa (Jayne Houdyshell) is one of the defining figures of Nixon-era second-wave feminism, the author of one of its signature tracts. At a literary conference where she is to be honored with a lifetime achievement award, she participates in a public discussion with a young black feminist, Msemaji Ukweli (Pascale Armand) who has quickly become the Millennial generation's most respected voice on the basis of a book she wrote about her experience of being raped. Theresa steamrolls over both Msemaji and the moderator, Kelly (Molly Camp), a young professor at the college where Theresa is a senior figure. Msemaji can't get a word in as Theresa expounds on her theories of victimization and the privilege enjoyed by white males. Theresa even explains to the black woman what black women are up against. But Msemaji turns the tables on her, seizing the opportunity to lambaste Theresa for being narrow-minded and proclaiming a generational shift to people like her. The moment goes viral on social media, with observers unanimously cheering Msemaji's monologue. Theresa has been outsmarted, outgunned, made to look like yesterday's news in *The Feminist Times*. Retreating to her hotel room for a drink with David (Richard Masur), her agent and former extramarital lover of seven years, she fumes and schemes for a way to re-establish herself as the leading sage of the movement.

Amid all the airy platitudes uttered by the antagonists, Lee doesn't quite clarify this detail, but he should: there is scarcely a hair's breadth of difference between the two women's politics. This is strictly a power struggle disguised as a principled intellectual disagreement. Theresa's plan to regain the upper hand is to expose her unexpected rival. It turns out that Msemaji's actual name is Tiffany Hall. She grew up on yachts, not in ghettos. Oh, and the rape story that made her name and fortune isn't quite accurate either. Hearing all this, David advises Theresa, "You can't win." What, because Tiffany/Msemaji is black?, asks Theresa incredulously. Yes, that is actually it, David informs her. Black, and young. Theresa is old, and white. There is no contest here. Unbeknownst to Theresa, David is plotting his next move: with the right spiel he might be able take on the younger woman as his next superstar client.

Lee has a sure grasp of what Leftist politics is these days: identity above all. Your arguments are secondary to your characteristics, and your characteristics are valued according to how much woe they imply. Being black, or disabled, or an illegal immigrant, or a rape victim, or genderqueer gives you relevance when radical politics is obsessively focused on who constitutes the best spokeswoman for anger and suffering. Tell anyone on the Left that their rhetoric is ad hominem and you'll receive blank incomprehension in return. As for Theresa's dream of scorching her unexpected foe with the truth, it's hopelessly antiquated. All that matters is "your truth," especially when you enjoy the support of an online echo chamber ready to amplify and enshrine whatever convenient fictions you may be selling the world today. Lee sees what's at the center of these characters, which is hollowness.

Art

Outliers at the National Gallery

by Karen Wilkin

Adventurous, progressive artists have always found unconventional "alternative" sources to be fertile stimuli for their work. In the mid-nineteenth century, the rebellious painters now known as the Impressionists rejected the certainties of the Academy's officially sanctioned Greco-Roman past in favor of the vagaries of the world around them. But they were also fascinated by Japanese prints—unfamiliar images that had been circulating for about a decade, ever since Japan had resumed trading with the West—finding fresh suggestions for composition, color, and expressive simplification in the woodblocks' compressed spaces, saturated hues, and clear shapes. In the same way, at the beginning of the twentieth century, daring young painters such as Henri Matisse, Pablo Picasso, and their American friend Max Weber, became entranced by the bold articulation and fierce emotional charge of African and Oceanic sculptures and masks, which they studied and collected, taking inspiration for their own innovations from the carvings' eloquent reinventions of anatomy and features. And then there was the work of Henri Rousseau, the self-taught, sublimely ambitious former customs official whose oddly formal, hieratic portraits captured Picasso's attention.

According to the Academy's rigid standards of high finish and meticulous fidelity to appearances, filtered through the legacy of the Classical past, the uninhibited directness and economy of Japanese prints, African and Oceanic sculpture, and Rousseau's paintings all failed to meet the accepted requirements of "high art." But that "failure" was exactly what excited their modernist admirers and continues to excite artists and viewers alike. Modernism taught us to value a broad spectrum of formal inventions that contravene just about all traditional ideas of "accurate" representation, finish, or technical facility. The result is that today, African and Oceanic sculpture and masks are regarded not as ethnographic curiosities but as significant works of art. (There's also a good deal of recent scholarship into the functions of these works within the societies that produced them, but that's another matter.) Today, as well, paintings and sculptures made by unschooled artists such as Rousseau are increasingly viewed not as anomalies to be considered in isolation, but as part of the continuum of twentieth-century art, to be seen together with the work of their schooled colleagues.

Now, the exhibition "Outliers and American Vanguard Art" at the National Gallery, Washington, D.C., along with its hefty, erudite catalogue, aims to define and clarify the complex history of the relationship of schooled American modernists to their unschooled peers from the 1920s to the present.[1] Organized by Lynne Cooke, the museum's senior curator for special projects in modern art, the exhibition is divided into three sections focused on specific decades within that span, each conceived to embody the attitudes of the period to the sub-

1 "Outliers and American Vanguard Art" opened at the National Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C., on January 28 and remains on view through May 13, 2018.

ject, with reference to the politics and social history of the time, and conceived, as well, to emphasize how those attitudes changed. Not surprisingly, some of the best-known self-taught artists are amply represented. There's a generous selection of the Chicago janitor Henry Darger's weird *Vivian Girls*, his saga of female children engaged in brutal warfare, and an informative group of exquisitely placed, eloquently pared-down figures and animals by the former slave Bill Traylor, made at the end of his long life. James Castle, born profoundly deaf in rural Idaho at the end of the nineteenth century, is represented by an impressive group of his moody interiors, evocative farmyards, playful constructions, and a mysterious word piece. Forrest Bess is lavishly accounted for, with a large selection of his haunting, ambiguous paintings and more than we need to know about his obsession with hermaphroditism and its grisly effects. Inexplicably, Thornton Dial, the brilliant, inventive African-American painter and sculptor from Alabama, is absent from the show.

The complicated history of the perception of the work of self-taught artists forms the exhibition's subtext. In the 1920s and '30s, schooled modernist artists often led the way in fostering the appreciation and understanding of unschooled art, not only by visibly responding to its formal and emotional implications in their own efforts, but also by collecting it. Forward-looking institutions of the time, such as the Société Anonyme, founded in 1920, and New York's Museum of Modern Art, founded in 1929, furthered the reputation of autodidact artists by selecting and exhibiting their efforts as part of the modern mainstream. Yet at other times, such work, variously termed folk art, naive, outsider, visionary, or self-taught art, was assigned to a separate category. Witness the awkwardly titled American Folk Art Museum, whose name provokes thoughts of weathervanes, cigar store Indians, and pottery, obscuring its ambitious, wide-ranging exhibition program. The phrase *art brut*, widely used in Europe, might have been used instead, but it's often attached specifically to art made by people with mental or developmental problems.

"Outliers" embraces a dizzying range of media and disciplines: paintings, sculptures (both hard and soft), constructions, assemblages, installations, photographs, quilts, dolls, some unclassifiable objects, and just plain accumulations, made by both schooled and unschooled artists. Major "outlier" constructions such as Simon Rodia's openwork architecture, Los Angeles's Watts Towers, or Howard Finster's paean to scripture, Paradise Garden, in Georgia, are shown in videos. In each section, works by self-taught and sophisticated artists of the period are presented together, usually with multiple examples by each.

The large first section of "Outliers," which treats the years *ca*. 1924–43, is the most engaging in many ways, in part because the issues it addresses seem fairly clear. The period is characterized as "when an interest in historic folk art developed in tandem with nativist desires to define a distinctively American cultural identity." (Think Thomas Hart Benton, Grant Wood, and the other American Scene artists—who do not figure in "Outliers.") Paintings by Charles Sheeler and Yasuo Kuniyoshi, who collected folk art and lent it to a pioneering 1924 show at the Whitney Studio Club, coexist with a celebrated portrait by an eighteenth-century limner; Sheeler, we learn, lived with a reproduction of the painting. Photographs from the Index of American Design, documenting such classic folk art objects as a carousel horse and a whirligig figure dressed like a Quaker, enlarge the context for Elie Nadelman's agile sculptures and Florine Stettheimer's lively paintings, both of which evidently emulate the formal language of the type of work in the photos. (Nadelman and his wife were major collectors and promoters of American folk art.) The narrative is expanded by works by self-taught artists shown at the Museum of Modern Art in its early years. MOMA's founding director, Alfred H. Barr, firmly believed that "modern primitives," as he termed them, were part of the history of the advanced, adventurous art that the museum focused on, a position illustrated in "Outliers" by a jungle scene and a squat child by Henri Rousseau, farm scenes and a confrontational

nude-to-the-waist self-portrait by John Kane, scenes of African-American life by Horace Pippin, and assorted animals by Edward Hicks and Morris Hirshfield. Many of the exhibition labels include acquisition dates, allowing us to track how eagerly and broadly MOMA was acquiring work by self-taught artists in the early 1940s. It's fascinating information, especially since, more recently, only Rousseau seems to have been fully integrated into the museum's story of modernism and exhibited on a consistent basis.

There's a fine group of chunky, rough-hewn stone sculptures by the Tennessee tombstone carver William Edmondson: a sturdy figure with splayed legs, angels with thick wings, a tower-like Noah's Ark, and a stubby, striding horse. In 1937, Edmondson became the first African-American and the first self-taught artist to have a solo exhibition at MOMA, evidence of acceptance that Cooke accounts for by pointing to the existence of a sympathetic context. Schooled art of the time that embodied formal values similar to those of self-taught art encouraged viewers to take self-taught art seriously, although not necessarily because the schooled artist's work responded directly to the concerns of "modern primitives" in the way that Nadelman's responded to the folk carvings he collected. "Outliers" illustrates the idea by flanking Edmondson's sculptures with directly carved, chunky pieces by William Zorach and John B. Flannagan, works obviously influenced by such "primitive" sources as Pre-Columbian and Romanesque art rather than American folk art, but that still might have helped to legitimize Edmonson's robust carvings.

Another kind of relationship is proposed by some of Marsden Hartley's fierce, frontal portraits of the Nova Scotia fisherman's family he cared so deeply about towards the end of his life. Their potent simplicity and hieratic symmetry remind us of Hartley's interest in German and Mexican vernacular devotional art, without specifically referring to the particulars of these sources. The same intensity and invention are not evident, alas, in the exhibition's group of this compelling but uneven painter's still lifes with Mexican *santos* figures.

The next section, spanning *ca.* 1968–92, departs from the fact that, after World War II, Abstract Expressionism dominated conceptions of how American identity could be expressed, provoking the separation of "outlier" art from the mainstream. After 1968, however, we are told that "with the rise of the civil rights, feminist, antiwar, and gay rights movements and the efflorescence of the counterculture," the art world's interest in unschooled artists revived. The period's burgeoning openness and acceptance of the other is reflected in the diversity of the works, both schooled and unschooled, in this section. There's emphasis on the raucous responses of Chicago artists such as Jim Nutt and Gladys Nilsson to the self-taught artists they admired and from whom they drew inspiration because of both their inventive imagery and their independence from the established art world. Nutt's disturbing, cartoon-like depictions and Nilsson's disquieting crowds of biomorphic forms and figures, along with related works by their peers and colleagues, enter into a conversation with the self-taught Joseph Yoakum's fantastic, crisply delineated landscapes and Martín Ramírez's immense, assured, but compulsive drawings, with their rhythmic, repetitive lines; Ramírez's huge *Untitled (Trains and Tunnels)* (*ca.* 1953), an evocation of his day job building railroads before he was institutionalized as a schizophrenic, is a knockout.

Self-taught African-American "visionary" artists of the rural south, including Sister Gertrude Morgan and Sam Doyle, are featured in this section. Their often text-heavy paintings on a miscellany of scavenged materials assert religious convictions, make prophesies, recount history, and/or depict important figures. At this point, it begins to be difficult to distinguish between the self-taught artists and their presumably more sophisticated peers. William T. Wiley's, Roy De Forest's, and Betye Saar's quirky assemblages of miscellaneous found objects, and Senga Nengudi's strangely elegant combinations of pantyhose, sand, and cardboard tubes, seem to explore territory very similar to the capricious constructions of the self-taught Lonnie Holley. Distinctions become wholly irrelevant when

we are confronted by the complex, mixed-media, nearly indescribable objects made by John Outterbridge and Noah Purifoy, artist/activists whose histories (and choice of scavenged materials) erase the boundary between the schooled and the unschooled.

The last section, devoted to *ca*. 1998–2013, appears designed to further dissolve any lingering distinctions by focusing on commonalities of materials and media. Yet placing some ravishing quilts made by Annie Mae Young and Mary Lee Bendolph, both of Gee's Bend, Alabama, together with fabric works by Al Loving, Alan Shields, and Howardena Pindell, seems to underscore their differences, rather than to unite them. The Gee's Bend quilts inadvertently share the aesthetic of hard-edge abstract color-based paintings, enriched by the textures of the component fabrics. Shields's and Loving's work, by contrast, seems motivated mainly by a desire to destroy the physical constraints of the traditional canvas, although Loving's layered, irregular cloth "hanging" can also read as a gritty riff on Cubist collage.

"Outliers" ends with artists, schooled and unschooled, who use photography in different ways and with different intents. Lorna Simpson's reenactments of rather amateurish fashion photographs of male and female African-American models are placed in proximity to Eugene von Bruenchenhein's obsessively repeated pin-ups of his wife and Zoe Leonard's *Fae Richards Photo Archive* (1993–96), an elaborately assembled set of photographs and documents purporting to record the life of a fictional but oddly plausible African-American actress. Cindy Sherman also figures in the mix. Nearby, we find one of Morton Bartlett's uncanny half-life-size figures, this one a dancer in a fairly convincing arabesque, along with some of the many photographs he took of her dressed in the different costumes he sewed. As we exit, pondering the elusive connections and distinctions among the works on view, we are confronted by a group of Greer Lankton's creepy dolls and creepier drawings, proof that an art school education is no barrier to weirdness or self-obsession (see: Forrest Bess).

The combinations of works in "Outliers" encourage us to make comparisons that, while probably intended to clarify the fraught connections among schooled and unschooled artists, ultimately provoke more questions than they answer. Should we think of the schooled artists' works as homage, emulation, rejection of convention, or all of the above? Does the uninhibited combination of disparate elements in—say—Lonnie Holley's work give a sophisticate like Jessica Stockholder permission to improvise or is she coming out of a modern tradition of Cubist collage that makes us appreciate Holley's composites in the first place? What about painters such as Edward Hicks, Joseph Pickett, or Paul Kane, who clearly aspired, like Rousseau, to convincing naturalism? Is the way they fell short of their ambitions what makes their paintings appeal to modernist taste or is something else at work? Are the similarities we see among schooled and unschooled artists happenstance affinities or manifestations of a pervasive Zeitgeist? And more. Whatever our conclusions, we leave the exhibition thinking about these relationships in new ways, which is certainly a good thing. Perhaps the strongest message we take away from "Outliers" is that self-taught artists are as various, individual, and unpredictable as their schooled peers. And the best of them are clearly significant players in the history of American art.

Northern exposure

by Brian T. Allen

Even the best-informed American art lovers will likely stumble when pressed to say more than a few sentences about Canadian art. Most scholars, dealers, and connoisseurs know something about the Group of Seven, an assortment of Ontario-based landscapists from the 1910s through the 1940s inspired by Tom Thomson (1877–1917), the best-known name in Canadian art. It's safe to say the art of Canada's indigenous peoples is a mystery. Considering our well-developed knowledge of Mexican art, it's odd we know next to nothing about the art of our other neighbor. Canada, after all, is our biggest trading partner. Most of its 35 million people share our language, our dominant Anglo culture, and our basic economic structure. It's next door! Simply because Canadians don't shout about their art doesn't mean we should know so little about how good their art can be.

A good starting point is the McMichael Canadian Art Collection near Toronto. It's a revelation, with a scholarly mission, a beautiful forest setting, and the best holdings of Canadian art in the world. Its log-and-stone façade makes it look rustic but, inside, it's a modern museum. Its founder, Robert McMichael (1921–2003) was, in his words, "obsessed with the desire to bring together a large collection of art with an unabashedly nationalistic flavor." McMichael made his money in the 1950s and 1960s in the field of wedding photography. His collecting of the work of Thomson, Lawren Harris (1885–1970), their Group of Seven friends, and, later, indigenous artists was always focused on a future museum. He and his wife, Signe, donated nearly two hundred paintings, their home in affluent suburban Kleinburg, and a special-made gallery to the Province of Ontario in 1965. The museum has grown to eighty-five thousand square feet and six thousand objects.

I recently visited the museum for the first time. It has an ambitious new director, Ian Dejardin, who led the Dulwich Picture Gallery in London for twelve years. Known for adventurous, intelligent shows, Dejardin arrived in 2017. At Dulwich, he passionately promoted Canadian art as part of his bold exhibition strategy. (Dulwich was also the first museum in Britain to mount serious shows on American Art.) His appointment shows the McMichael's trustees are serious about raising their museum's national and international profile.

In examining the foundation of Canadian art, it's best to start with Thomson. Like many American artists and most Canadian artists, his background was in commercial art. He worked for Grip, Ltd., Toronto's biggest supplier of advertising and product packaging art. His best paintings, all from the 1910s before he died in a drowning accident, draw from Ontario's familiar rugged northern lakes, rivers, and woods. Canadians not only love their wild landscape, they also know it well through lifetime experience. It's never far. On my visit to the McMichael, I heard more than once that "Canadians will drive anywhere," and this says something about the aesthetic most comfortable to them.

Thomson's art isn't topographical. In looking at his paintings, we can't pick the spot. American landscapists tend to be much fussier about presenting exact locations. Artistic license allowed, the viewer gets the facts. Thomson's work is more experiential. His canvases are much more generic than American landscapes. His landscapes are felt. They're sensual, with thick, tactile paint and high-key color. Design is simple and strong, as it would be in commercial art. It's not coincidental his employer was called "Grip, Ltd." Good commercial art grabs and holds.

Even the most snowbound, whitest land has plenty of color, and it surprises people how bright that color can be. It's partly a function of light sharpened by crisp, dry air. Flora and fauna, even in spring and summer, might not be lush. Ontario's great northern wilds can be barren with acres of rock. Still, Thomson and his acolytes saw and painted the riot of ochre, purple, ultramarine, and viridian existing in winter, late fall, and very early spring. Thomson, A. Y. Young (1882–1974), Harris, and J. E. H. MacDonald (1873–1932) painted plenty of autumn scenes with lots of gold and crimson. They painted every other season and weather condition. Skies are rarely clear blue. Even in winter, we see plenty of clouds.

Harris's clouds as well as his trees and mountains have blunt contours. Nothing is soft and fluffy. The densely painted forms often feel like sculpture. They're spare, yet saved from a severity that might have oppressed his iridescent palette. Of the entire Group of Seven crew, he's the edgiest. Harris's contemporary Emily Carr (1871–1945) called his work "a little pretty and too soft, but pleasant," a brutal and unfair judgment. His landscapes have a distinctively neon palette that gives the otherwise unremarkable forests he paints some real zip.

Carr is a Canadian icon well represented at the McMichael, but I find her work obvious. She studied in France and became a Fauvist. Based in Vancouver, she looked closely at the design traditions of artists from First Nations or far western tribes. She absorbed the craggy forms and bright colors of totem poles. It's Canadian primitivism, I suppose. Carr belongs to a school that crosses national boundaries and is based in Seattle, and this is unusual for her period. The Group of Seven, for instance, is its own affair and insulated from contemporary American landscape. We can judge it on its own merits. Viewed along with other Pacific Northwest artists like her friend Mark Tobey, Carr is not very strong.

Outside the Group of Seven, one star shines brightly. David Milne (1882–1953) was the only Canadian artist in the Armory Show. He studied at the Art Students League, absorbed the zeitgeist of Gallery 291, and was represented by N. E. Montross, the Ashcan artists' dealer. He worked as a war artist during the First World War before returning to Ontario. His stark landscapes are beautiful. He makes the most of black and white as basic colors creating stick-like shapes. This deceptively simple formula empowers his other colors. His work looks like no one else's. That said, think "Mark Tobey meets Charles Burchfield." Clement Greenberg thought Milne was one of his era's greatest artists, though he and other American critics loaded their writing with stereotypes about Canada. Even in the 1960s, he was calling Milne and his contemporaries "prairie artists" despite the near-total absence of flat, dry expanse and nary a buffalo.

I visited the McMichael soon after its "The Art of Canada: Director's Cut" exhibition opened.[1] Selected by Dejardin, it's both an introduction to his leadership and a fine overview of the McMichael's collection. It's a beautiful show—Dejardin knows what he's doing—and very much his own transformative vision. A gallery of small, open-air oil sketches on board seems to capture the essential spirit of Canadian painting. These artists' response to the land, often using heavy paint, feels visceral rather than intellectual. It makes sense that most Canadian artists made their living as art teachers. Almost none supported themselves as full-time artists since the art market was never that well developed.

1 "The Art of Canada: Director's Cut" opened at the McMichael Canadian Art Collection, Kleinburg, Ontario, on December 9, 2017 and remains on view through November 18, 2018.

Their art is material-focused. Fine finish isn't a priority. The artist is always present. They loved painting outdoors.

Some colleges in the country offer a single survey course in Canadian art. Many offer nothing. This is telling. American art, on the other hand, is an academic specialty both widely and deeply taught. It's also enmeshed in group identity and gender studies programs. Through American Studies departments, it's learned via English, history, economics, and social studies disciplines. This makes for plenty of inside baseball, a take on art that's driven by intellectual and ideological minutiae and not by connoisseurship. This creeps into art criticism, art schools, the art market, and, finally, the studios of working artists. For better or worse, Canadian art keeps things simple and transparent. There's little ambiguity.

The McMichael began its history in the 1960s with a strong collection of First Nations, Metis, and Inuit art. The founder considered indigenous art as part of the art of Canada, a proposition that seems logical, but one that also diverges from the way Americans treat indigenous art. Native American art is often considered the province of anthropology or archeology. It's a distinct discipline from Anglo-American art. I think this is wrong headed. It's all American art, with so many historical and aesthetic crosscurrents that much is lost by building silos. Canadians don't have this problem, in part because the indigenous population is big, about 1.5 million people, and the six hundred reservations are all over the country. About half the country's aboriginal descendants live off-reservation.

Canada has also made a serious, ongoing effort to address and rectify some three hundred years of oppression, neglect, abuse, and mismanagement of indigenous people. The federal government established the Truth and Reconciliation Commission in 2008 to examine and remedy the terrible problems arising from the Indian residential school system. These included child abuse, bad schools, forced separation of families, and coerced assimilation starting in the 1870s. The commission's work evolved to embrace a broader reform campaign aimed at the legal system, housing, education, economic development, and the quality of reservation life. Though the commission was disbanded in 2015, the reconciliation mantra is now integral to all aspects of Canadian government, culture, and business.

This spirit of recognition has enhanced the respect given to indigenous art and artists. Their best art draws from everyday life, religion, and myth expressed in sculpture, usually wood or simple soapstone. It is both beautiful and real. Made with hand tools, it conveys an ancestral affinity for local materials. Less convincing is the work of more recent indigenous artists like Kenojuak Ashevak (1927–2013) and Norval Morrisseau (1931–2007). They worked in traditional Western media, mostly painting and printmaking. Their art isn't very good. It's derivative and comforting. There are plenty of jolly natives rendered as stick figures, suggesting the artists supplied what an Anglo public expected and what their dealers thought they could sell. Morrisseau was known as the "Picasso of the North." Both were famous and award-winning, possibly showing some tokenism as their work can be both predictable and unchallenging. Flat art just isn't their natural thing.

The McMichael collection isn't encyclopedic. There's some Quebecois art but not much. Canada's cultural bifurcation is well known. Quebec is different in countless respects from the rest of the country. This includes art. Far older, it produced in the eighteenth century an array of decorative arts like silver, furniture, textiles, and portraits, though never approaching the quality of work coming from Boston or Philadelphia. The rest of the country was wilderness. Anglo Canada's artists are internally focused. Most were trained locally. Quebecois artists looked to Paris, and it shows.

The museum's collection of the work of living artists is thin. It has never had an acquisitions endowment, and its collecting practices were driven by the founder while he was alive. Even after he died, keepers of the flame ran the place. Now, they're gone, too, presenting a big collecting challenge. The art scene in Toronto, Montreal, and Vancouver is vibrant.

Like living artists in the United States, Canadians are all over the lot in subject, style, and media. Little of this new work resonates with the core of the McMichael's collection. It's also expensive, and Canada has a supply of new museums specializing in the art of today. Big museums like the Art Gallery of Ontario and the Museum of Fine Arts in Montreal also collect it. Though different in many respects, the McMichael is like the Clark Art Institute or Dejardin's old home, the Dulwich Picture Gallery: small, focused, with the best of its kind. This institutional core can be augmented by temporary shows of contemporary art, but I wouldn't spend much money buying it.

McMichael wanted a collection of art with "an unabashedly national flavor." But that flavor is hard even for Canadians to describe. Brand Canada might begin with "well, we're not American." But it's clearer—and more profound—than that. Soundness, trustworthiness, and likability are key to the nation's sense of self. Canadians seem to prize consensus. America's Fourth of July celebrates a revolution and the primacy of individual freedom. Canada Day celebrates a union around common ideals hashed out in a conference. Canada wasn't founded by Puritans, slavers, or conquistadors. There's not much of a protest culture. Canadians take pride in believing their country is a safe, gentle place. They are patriotic and in wartime heroic. They'll fight to protect their identity. The trouble is that consensus, dependability, quietude, reticence, and tolerance don't make for cutting-edge art. Still, they can, and do, give us art of impressive dignity, harmony, and charm.

Burning Cole

by James Panero

If there were ever an artist in need of some re-evaluation, it must be the painter Thomas Cole (1801–1848). Cole's remarkable life has been long overshadowed by his outsize legacy in American art. Through his protégés Asher Brown Durand and Frederic Edwin Church, Cole famously inspired the "Hudson River School" of landscape painting. But this was a term Cole never knew in his lifetime. His own work, dense with allegory and narrative, shares less than one might expect with the more empirical American landscape artists of the second half of the nineteenth century. In his painted tribute of 1849, Durand immortalized his mentor in death, at forty-seven, as the "Kindred Spirit" of both the poet William Cullen Bryant and the American wilderness, as Cole and Bryant look out over Kaaterskill Falls and the wilds of the Catskill Mountains. But Cole was anything but a rustic, as one might assume, or an American provincial—or even, for that matter, American-born.

"Thomas Cole's Journey: Atlantic Crossings," an ambitious and scholarly exhibition now at the Metropolitan Museum of Art, reconsiders the New World paintings of the English-born Cole in light of his engagement with Old World art.[1] This engagement included the Old Masters, in particular Claude Lorrain, on through Cole's contemporaries J. M. W. Turner, John Constable, Thomas Lawrence, and John Martin—all of whom he met first-hand through repeated "Atlantic crossings." By exhibiting Cole's masterpieces such as *The Course of Empire* (1833–36) and *The Oxbow* (1836) alongside the very paintings that Cole saw in the exhibition halls and studios of Europe, "Atlantic Crossings" makes the case that this renowned American artist was enriched by a surprisingly modern and worldly view.

And such revisionism makes sense for anyone who has ever wondered about Cole's unusual body of work and his true place in American art. It has taken a transatlantic pair of curators to bring such questions to light: Elizabeth Mankin Kornhauser (American), the Alice Pratt Brown Curator of American Paintings and Sculpture at the Metropolitan Museum; and Tim Barringer (British), the Paul Mellon Professor of the History of Art at Yale University. The genesis for their exhibition emerged in 2013, when the two worked together for a time in the Met's American Wing. Christopher Riopelle, the Curator of Post-1800 Paintings at the National Gallery, London—where the exhibition will travel next—also contributes his own understanding of European paintings at the time of Cole's foreign sojourns, as well as the role of the plein-air oil sketch, which Cole adopted during his time in Florence in 1831.

"Cole's life was anything but insular," these curators write in their catalogue introduction. "Rather, it was marked by restless transatlantic travel and by a complex, often troubled, engagement with the traditions of European art

1 "Thomas Cole's Journey: Atlantic Crossings" opened at the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, on January 30 and remains on view through May 13, 2018. The exhibition will next travel to The National Gallery, London (June 11–October 7, 2018).

and thought, a commitment that countered, but paradoxically also heightened, Cole's abiding passion for the American wilderness."

Thomas Cole was born on February 1, 1801, in the factory town of Bolton-le-Moors, in Lancashire, England. The city was a center for textile manufacturing on the front lines of Britain's Industrial Revolution. In 1812, hand-laborers who had lost their livelihoods in spinning and weaving to mechanization attacked and firebombed the Bolton plants. Along with the general squalor and depredations of England's factory towns, these "Luddites," named after the folkloric character of "Ned Ludd," helped define Cole's dim view of industry and progress.

Far from the American wilderness we might expect, the first rooms of "Atlantic Crossings" are therefore filled with similarly bleak images of urban industry by Turner and Philippe Jacques de Loutherbourg. (Less propitiously, I should add, these rooms are also filled with the voice of the pop singer Sting, who has recorded the narration for an opening video. I am sure this celebrity selection sounded good when commissioned for the exhibition. The sound has a less salubrious effect when heard on repeat through the painting galleries. This latter-day Luddite critic simply asks that curators consider the disturbance of such noise in their shows.)

Up against Britain's new economy, Thomas Cole's father, James Cole, failed in a string of manufacturing ventures. Ultimately, these failures helped propel Thomas's successes. At thirteen, Thomas Cole found apprentice work in the production of calico fabrics, designing wood blocks used for printing patterns. A book of such patterns is included in the exhibition. Moving to nearby Liverpool, Cole then became an engraver's apprentice and was first exposed to the Old Master collection of William Roscoe, the "Liverpool Medici."

In 1818—two hundred years from the current exhibition, the curators note—the Cole family set sail for America. As James Cole attempted to establish, again unsuccessfully, a wallpaper printing business in Steubenville, Ohio, Thomas, now a young adult, worked as an engraver's assistant in Philadelphia.

In April 1825, Cole made his way north to New York. It was the year of completion for the Erie Canal, a defining achievement for the emerging world city. It also proved to be an auspicious moment for an artist who would become famous for painting the changing wilderness along the country's arterial waterways, in particular the Hudson River.

With little in the way of formal training, Cole rapidly scaled the heights of New York's burgeoning art scene. Paintings such as *View of the Round-Top in the Catskill Mountains (Sunny Morning on the Hudson)* (1827) announced his arrival. In "Atlantic Crossings," this stunning painting rises out of nothing, but it already displays many of the characteristics that defined Cole's body of work: steep, vertiginous perspectives with clear layers of fore-, middle-, and background; gnarled, anthropomorphic trees playing out a melancholy dance on a rocky stage as though illuminated in spotlight; slivers of the Hudson River along a high horizon line signaling deep distance. His dramatic painting *Scene from "The Last of the Mohicans," Cora Kneeling at the Feet of Tamenund* (1827) extends these compositional techniques, with theatrical trees replaced by a staging of James Fenimore Cooper's Leatherstocking bodice-ripper. Cole found ready patronage for his heroic local scenery among New York's growing collector class. Their interest in the state's dramatic sites was hastened by an emerging tourist trade, which brought a new awareness to both the natural beauty and rapid development of the upstate region.

In 1829, through the encouragement of his New York collectors, Cole set out to expand his artistic education back in Europe. He brought with him his sketchbooks of Niagara Falls and other New World wonders with which he hoped to interest Old World buyers. His sales strategy met with limited success, but it was enough to sustain a prolonged Grand Tour that began in London and continued through France and Italy from 1829 through 1832.

The artists Cole was able to meet along the way, all while still in his twenties, attest to both his manifest talents and his intense ambitions. He arrived in London in time to catch the 1829 summer show at the Royal Academy.

The exhibition included Constable's *Hadleigh Castle, The Mouth of the Thames—Morning after a Stormy Night* (1829) and Turner's *Ulysses Deriding Polyphemus—Homer's Odyssey* (1829), each now exhibited together again in "Atlantic Crossings," on loan from the Yale Center for British Art and The National Gallery, London, respectively. Cole attended salons with John Martin and joined Thomas Lawrence, the president of the Royal Academy, for breakfast at his home, followed by a tour of his studio.

But Cole was anything but starstruck. His writings tell of his often humorously low regard for the artists he met. Turner, whom he visited in his studio, was among his greatest disappointments: "I had expected to see an older looking man with a countenance pale with thought, but I was entirely mistaken. He has a common form and common countenance, and there is nothing in his appearance or conversation indicative of genius." The same goes for the paintings in the Louvre: "I was disgusted in the beginning with their subjects. Battle, murder and death, Venuses and Psyches, the bloody and the voluptuous, are the things in which they seem to delight: and these are portrayed in a cold, hard, and often tawdry style."

Cole returned to the United States in late 1832. Within four years he completed his most ambitious works: *View from Mount Holyoke, Northampton, Massachusetts, after a Thunderstorm—The Oxbow*, a longtime staple of the Met's American painting collection, and the five-canvas cycle of *The Course of Empire*, on loan from the New-York Historical Society.

The classical fantasy of *The Course of Empire* and the modern factualism of *The Oxbow* might seem worlds apart. Yet both came out of Cole's European travels, argues "Atlantic Crossings," and the visual evidence seems hard to dispute. The same swirling storm clouds of Turner's *Snow Storm: Hannibal and his Army Crossing the Alps* (1812) threaten the summit of Mt. Holyoke in *The Oxbow*. The ruined tower in the left foreground of Constable's *Hadleigh Castle* reappears as the overgrown column in *The Course of Empire: Desolation*. Even the classical columns in the central panel of *The Course of Empire* have an uncanny resemblance, as Tim Barringer points out, to Cumberland Terrace in Regent's Park, near Cole's London lodgings. Yet what's most remarkable, perhaps, is the result of a new study of *The Oxbow*. Advanced infrared imaging has revealed that this painting in fact began as an early canvas for *The Course of Empire*, which Cole painted over.

The same ideas of civilization's fall, spread over the five panels of *The Course of Empire*, are summarized in *The Oxbow*. An Edenic paradise becomes a decadent empire; an American wilderness gives way to the encroachment of farming and logging. This same millenarian view can be found embedded in most everything Cole painted, whether it be the ruins of *Aqueduct near Rome* (1832) or the ruined forests in the foreground of *River in the Catskills* (1843).

Born into the English Dissenting tradition and baptized in the fires of Bolton, Cole railed against the "copper-hearted barbarians" and "dollar-godded utilitarians," the "toiling to produce more toil—accumulating in order to aggrandize" in his writing and his art. His perspective was not that of forward projection but of cautionary reflection, with a message particularly aimed at his adopted homeland, where he became a citizen in 1834.

The painterly innovations Cole picked up in Europe, in particular the mechanics for plein-air oil sketching, inspired the florid naturalism of his American disciples. Yet Cole himself was always less and something more than a pure landscape painter. Unlike the later landscapes of Church or Durand, where nature speaks for itself, Cole used nature to speak for his ideas. Of course, all great landscape painting says something, but Cole's messaging was more explicit. His compositions were both allegories and real places. His landscapes were science fictions—science and fiction in equal measure. Cole's overt political messaging might help explain his recent resurgence, even as interest in the later Hudson River School continues to wax and wane. Yet Cole resists oversimplification. He was more than a proto-environmentalist immigrant railing against the populist politics of Jacksonian America. Beyond the political situation, he gave vision to the human condition.

Music

New York chronicle

by Jay Nordlinger

Whenever *Tosca* begins, I think of Tito Gobbi, the late, great Italian baritone—and a famous Scarpia (the villain of the piece). *Tosca* begins with Scarpia's entrance music. (Scarpia happens not to enter just then, but we'll leave that to one side now.) When it came time to write his autobiography, Gobbi printed this music from *Tosca*, right at the top. He said he couldn't begin without it.

At the Metropolitan Opera, the role of Scarpia was sung by Željko Lučić, the Serbian baritone. He fills one Italian role after another. Sometimes he is workaday, sometimes he is good, sometimes he is very good. On this night in *Tosca*, he was superb. He sang and acted Scarpia with chilling iniquity. I have seen and heard many more famous Scarpias (and flashier ones). I have never seen or heard better.

A brief, personal story. Last summer in Salzburg, I talked with a Serbian taxi driver. I brought up Lučić. The driver said proudly that he knew him—and showed me the "contacts" on his phone to prove it. I found that somewhat touching.

The headline stars of a *Tosca* are the soprano and the tenor, who play Tosca and Cavaradossi. At the Met, these were Sonya Yoncheva and Vittorio Grigolo. With the role of Tosca, you have a diva playing a diva. Floria Tosca is a celebrated singer—and a diva—and she has been portrayed by many real-life Toscas. Yoncheva filled the bill. She was not at her best in the Act I duet, blowing the big climax. It was not a climax at all. But she was admirable thereafter. In "Vissi d'arte," she was not prayerful or pure, as some are (especially when they sing this aria outside the context of the opera). She was scalding and imploring, which was just right.

Grigolo's worst moment was Cavaradossi's opening aria, "Recondita armonia." It was sloppy and swoony, even clownish. Grigolo sounded like a caricature of an Italian tenor. But for the whole rest of the opera, he was a model, not a caricature. He sang with both ardor and sense. His breath control in "E lucevan le stelle" was exemplary.

In the pit, Emmanuel Villaume conducted with just the right blood and sweep. The Met orchestra played like the top-drawer group of its reputation. On the stage was a new production, by Sir David McVicar. It looked and felt and smelled like a *Tosca*. There were some unusual and welcome directorial touches, such as in Act II: Tosca stabs Scarpia not once but twice, getting another bite at the apple. Yoncheva took advantage of this with gusto.

By the way, what a genius piece. If anyone ever gives you a hard time about Puccini, simply respond with two syllables: "Tos-ca."

The Royal Concertgebouw Orchestra of Amsterdam came to Carnegie Hall for a two-concert stand. The orchestra was led by its chief conductor, Daniele Gatti. On one side of Carnegie's stage was an American flag, on the other the Dutch. On the RCO's programs were four works—two on each night. The first night brought Wagner and Bruckner—the Prelude to Act III and Good Friday Spell from *Parsifal*, and the Symphony No. 9.

The Wagner was a study in seamlessness and horizontality. I was not aware of instruments

entering. I did not hear onsets. From nowhere, sound simply appeared. This is very hard to pull off, for both conductor and players. The music had a quiet churning. There was a chamber-like quality to the playing. When the music ended, I did not hear an "off," if I may put it that way. There was no real "stop." It's just that . . . the music wasn't there anymore, except in mind.

I suspect that Wagner imagined this music much the way we heard it in Carnegie Hall, from the RCO and Gatti.

The Bruckner Ninth was just fine, as how could it not be, given the forces at hand? Yet it was a little cool for me. I would have liked more warmth, and more emotion. I don't require bathos, heaven knows. I'm a big proponent of letting music "speak for itself." Yet I'm not sure it spoke in its full voice on this occasion.

The second of the RCO's concerts began with a popular violin concerto, Bruch's in G minor, played by a popular violinist, Janine Jansen, a Dutchwoman (to go with the orchestra). I found the performance surprising—because it was merely okay. Nothing special. Indeed, rather pedestrian. The Bruch Concerto is a much better piece than these performers let on. After intermission came a Mahler symphony, No. 1, the "Titan." It was fine, just fine. There was a surprising amount of smudging in the brass, but I reminded myself that "life is not a studio recording," as I sometimes say. Still, I might have expected a more powerful, more involving Mahler experience.

And I could not have told you, before the two concerts began, that the opening Wagner would be the peak experience of the stand.

The night after the Amsterdam orchestra left, Denis Matsuev arrived in Carnegie Hall, for a recital. He is a Russian pianist. He had programmed three sonatas: two by Beethoven and one by Tchaikovsky. The Tchaikovsky was—what else?—the Grand Sonata in G major. The Beethoven sonatas were the "Tempest," in D minor, and Op. 110, in A flat. Matsuev is a brawny, athletic pianist, loaded with testosterone. Does he have more than that?

Yes, he does. The first movement of the "Tempest" was bold and virile, but it was also thoughtful and sensitive. Matsuev employed some interesting pedaling, causing some interesting blurs. The middle movement, Adagio, was nicely sung. It was both tidy and free (somehow). The closing movement was "daringly slow," as we say. Rather, it was *allegretto*, just as the movement is marked. Matsuev did not forget the "-etto." And he made the music bristle all the same. This is a pianistic achievement. The music does not play itself.

In Op. 110, Matsuev proved himself a real Beethoven pianist. He had the right weight, the right lyricism, the right sense of structure. The closing fugue was beautiful, absolutely beautiful—not just big and thorny and brawny, but beautiful. And I'll tell you something.

I heard in Op. 110 something I had never heard before—the Ninth Symphony, clear as a bell. I heard the notes corresponding to "O Freunde, nicht diese Töne!" They are quiet, in the third movement, sometime before the fugue begins. Now that I've heard them, I will never *not* hear them, when this sonata is played.

From Matsuev, Tchaikovsky's Grand Sonata was grand, to be sure. But, in the first movement, it was also pounded and banged. There is a stateliness in this music that was missing. But the second movement, the slow movement, went better. Especially good were the repeated chords at the end. They were nearly transfixing. The subsequent Scherzo was nicely impish, but a little muddy—far from crystalline. And the Finale barreled capably home. On finishing the piece, Matsuev stuck his tongue out, as if to say, "What an effort!" And it is.

The pianist then offered a generous slate of encores, starting with the "Horowitz encore," "Träumerei," from Schumann's *Kinderszenen*. It was lovely. Then he played the Sibelius étude that many play as an encore now. I believe that Leif Ove Andsnes started this trend (and it's a good one). Then we had "In the Hall of the Mountain King," the Grieg favorite—but in an arrangement by Grigory Ginzburg (1904–61). It is a splendid, exciting arrangement, and Matsuev played it just that way.

Finally, he gave us his usual jazz, playing around with "Take the 'A' Train." It is a stupendous technique, a circus technique. Who else, in recent memory, has possessed such fingers? Cyprien Katsaris?

During the encores, people near the front had their phones up, taking pictures and making videos. Ushers policed the area the whole time (as they surely must). I wonder what can be done to mitigate this distracting scene for the rest of the patrons.

Two days after Denis Matsuev left, Janine Jansen was back in Carnegie Hall, with a number of partners—including Jean-Yves Thibaudet, the famous pianist. He is a keen chamber musician. He also likes to accompany singers. Jansen, too, is a keen chamber musician—but violinists sort of have to be, more than pianists do. Don't they?

The first half of this concert consisted of two violin sonatas—Debussy's and the second of Grieg. Sometimes the pairing of two stars, such as Jansen and Thibaudet, doesn't work out very well. Heifetz's regular pianist was Brooks Smith. He was no star, but, with Heifetz, he got the job done. Heifetz was comfortable with him (and obviously the boss). In any case, our two stars, Jansen and Thibaudet, got the job done—and more.

Ladies and gentlemen, the Debussy Sonata was perfect. It was shiveringly French. It was subtle, refined, exquisite, and delicious. It had a delightful French gauze, but it was never airy-fairy. It was totally alive. The two performers thought and played as one—every shiver, every nuance. I'm sorry I missed Thibaud and Cortot (that famed duo from the first half of the twentieth century). But, honestly, I would not trade what I heard from Jansen and Thibaudet for any other pairing.

On the second half of the program was one work, the Concert for violin, piano, and string quartet by Ernest Chausson. In this, Jansen and Thibaudet were joined by the Dover Quartet. Chausson's Concert is a fine work, which you and I would be proud to have written. But it made me think about how good the music of great, and near-great, composers really is. How wide the gap is between great or near-great music and music that is merely commendable, let's say.

Think of Schumann's Piano Quintet in E flat, or Brahms's Piano Quintet in F minor, or Dvořák's Piano Quintet in A, Op. 81. I don't raise this in order to put Chausson down. I am simply struck by the talent—the immense talent—of those other composers, to have written music of that higher order.

Once, a professor of music told me a story. A student of his said, "Isn't Mendelssohn a second-rate composer?" Probably the student thought of first-rate as Bach, Mozart, and Beethoven. The professor answered, "Why, yes, you could say that. But do you know how good that is?" I might add that third-rate is good too—dizzyingly good—if your second-rate is the likes of Mendelssohn.

Also coming to Carnegie Hall was the Cleveland Orchestra, under its music director, Franz Welser-Möst. They played Mahler's Symphony No. 9. Is that a full concert? It can be, lasting about an hour and twenty-five minutes. But some orchestras stick a short work at the beginning—which is what the Cleveland did. You could say that they played an OOMP, i.e., an obligatory opening modern piece.

It was by Johannes Staud, an Austrian (like Welser-Möst). Our program notes said, "Staud's music is intellectually based." Uh-oh. But they went on to say that "it is also grounded in a musical language that—though spanning a large horizon—includes connections to music's history and evolution." Whew. This particular piece was *Stromab*, inspired by a 1907 novella by Algernon Blackwood, *The Willows*. This is a horror story about a canoe trip down the Danube River.

Stromab is full of sound effects. It is busy, spooky, and meandering (like a river?). Staud uses the whole orchestra, and interestingly. There is lots of low brass, and lots of percussion. It was clear that the composer had learned his orchestration. His piece is also marked by playful, whimsical touches. I found the piece very interesting measure for measure (to borrow a phrase from Shakespeare). But I wasn't sure it worked as a whole. I wondered whether the pudding had a theme. Still, the music is unexpected and imaginative, and I would like to hear it again, before putting my thumb firmly up, down, or sideways.

Now to the Mahler Ninth. The Cleveland Orchestra is a wonderful, gleaming machine. The symphony was superbly executed, by the concertmaster and less-visible players.

The Clevelanders played beautifully and immaculately. Maestro Welser-Möst had a clear vision of the piece and executed it. (By the way, as my friend and colleague Fred Kirshnit pointed out many years ago, Welser-Möst *looks* like Mahler.) In general, the music was on the fast side and very straight. Unmilked. This is *an* approach to Mahler—and to Mahler 9—and there is much to be said for it. Welser-Möst delivered a highly intelligent reading.

But I must say—not for the first time in this chronicle—it was a little cool for me. A little Apollonian. I'm not saying it has to be Bernsteinian. You don't need to go the full Lenny. But I think that more feeling, more pathos, was in order. Am I becoming a big musical softy? I don't think so. Often, Mahler wears his heart on his sleeve, and it pays a conductor to follow suit. I also thought of something, from long ago.

When I was a teenager, I talked with a pianist, who was also a major teacher. I thought he was a wizened old sage—he was probably fifty-five or so. He said, "These days, I care only about beauty. When you're young, you care about the intellect and excitement and all that. The older you get, the more you care about beauty." I imagine that others have felt the same way.

Here is another story, of much more recent vintage. About a week after this Cleveland Orchestra concert, I got a text message from a young friend of mine. He is fifteen, I believe, the son of two musicians, who are old and dear friends of mine. All three of their boys are musical. The fifteen-year-old, the youngest, is drinking in music every day. Drinking it in by the gallonsful. He texted me, "After listening to Mahler 9 for the first time, I can say I'm now a different person." In my note back, I said, "It's pretty much the best thing ever written, right?" He answered, "Let's just say that everything Mahler wrote is the best thing ever written."

In the education wing of Carnegie Hall, Marilyn Horne gave a masterclass. This was part of her annual mini-festival, "The Song Continues . . ." She began it in 1997. Now the fabled American mezzo will hand the reins to a fabled American soprano: Renée Fleming.

Horne said that, when she began the festival, she was not using a cane, as she is now. "It's hard, getting old. No, what am I saying? It's hard *being* old." The first student in the masterclass sang "Bist du bei mir." This is a "chestnut," Horne said, "but we have to deal with the chestnuts, because they're chestnuts for a reason: they're the pieces that people want to hear." This one starts out, "If you are with me, then I will go gladly unto death and to my rest." "Everyone is terrified of death," Horne observes. "But the older you get, the more interesting it becomes."

Who wrote "Bist du bei mir"? "On *my* music, it said 'Bach,'" Horne notes. For many years, the song was indeed attributed to that master. Now it is attributed to Gottfried Heinrich Stölzel. At any rate, it is one of the greatest songs ever penned. "I used to think of it as a religious song," says Horne. In fact, it is a love song, "with religiosity in it," as she points out.

She insists that the student get the consonants right. Pronounce the "t" in "Bist" before singing "du." She also demonstrates the right kind of turn, or trill. Horne can really sing, at eighty-four. And she can produce a lot of sound, when she feels like it. Good sound, too.

Truly, she is a master teacher, finding ways to communicate, whether in words or in demonstration. If one way doesn't work, she'll try another, until the concept clicks in the student's mind. Horne's English is both eloquent and plain. To a pianist in Respighi's song "Nebbie," she says that the opening notes must be more distinctive—"like they're painful." That is *exactly* right. To a singer, she talks about secrets of the breath. "Tighten the boots and you'll get two more beats out of it." Or does she say *glutes*? Probably the latter. Either way, I love the phrase. Horne speaks from both her ample intelligence and her long, long experience in singing.

I have always thought she would make a fine conductor. In conversation with me, she has denied it, but I would like to see it tested. The conducting she does at a masterclass is natural and right. I wanted to hang on every word, and every gesture, and every sound, of this class. Horne is a treasury of knowledge, and flair. And when she appears before us no more? There are recordings—hundreds of them. Not the same, but better than nothing.

The media

Zip ties & media lies

by James Bowman

The headline of the month—just nosing out *The Telegraph*'s "Elon Musk: the saviour of mankind or a real-life Bond villain?" for the top spot—comes to us from *The Charlotte Observer* by way of the *Tampa Bay Times* and heads a first-person testimony by one Ruth Mayer: "I detest Trump, but a 'redneck' fixed my Prius with zip ties." It wouldn't surprise me if cultural historians looked back on that line, lifted from the daily paper, as the perfect summing up of the curious contradictions of the Trump era in America. But it wouldn't be quite the little gem it is without the quotation marks around "redneck" (indicating that the redneck in question had used the word of himself). Or the Prius. Or the zip ties.

Alas, Ms. Mayer, who is a development and communications consultant from Charlotte, describing an incident on her way home, with her teenage daughter, from the Women's March in Washington, doesn't get the joke in her own, or her editor's, inadvertent witticism. Although she writes that she found her experience with the redneck Good Samaritan "humbling," she was not humbled enough to regard his presumptive political views as worthy of any respect. She is left dangling at the end of her column between what she purported to see as a lesson in loving her neighbor and the virulent Trump-hatred she cannot let go of, and which she still parades as a sign of her own virtue.

Her lack of self-awareness has lately become something of an epidemic. In January, Scott Johnson of Power Line nominated James Comey as "the least self-aware man in the United States"—and that was before it was announced that Mr. Comey was to teach a course in "ethical leadership" at his alma mater, the College of William & Mary, next autumn. Another strong candidate for the same title would be Professor Sean Wilentz of Princeton University, who announced in the Sunday *New York Times* that it was, after all, *not* George W. Bush who was the worst president in the history of the Republic, as he had tentatively concluded during that Republican president's administration. Instead, the winner at being bad was (you'll never guess) *this* Republican president—none other than Donald J. Trump, who everybody else in the media thinks is top-notch.

Just kidding! The professor's opinion can have come as no shock at all to readers of *The New York Times*. All the same, they will have taken it as a gratifying confirmation of their own views—which, insofar as they have been shaped by the *Times*, tend to regard Mr. Trump as not a bad president, but, like those certain now-well-known figures in the FBI, a false president: a usurper and a Russian puppet, illegitimately installed in office by an as-yet-undiscovered conspiracy hatched between him or his henchmen and Vladimir Putin. Certainly this is what they *want* to believe, and the media culture of today is oriented around people's right to believe what they want to believe—not that the media themselves are aware of it. They are merely certain that what *they* want to believe must be true, just as what

Trump apologists want to believe must, *ipso facto*, be false.

If they had a sense of humor they might have a hope of coming to recognize their own ridiculousness, like that of poor Ruth Mayer, but of course they don't—a fact which Mr. Trump cannot have failed to notice, so regularly does he play upon it to make them look foolish to anyone who does not share their obsessions. Thus when he said in a speech in Cincinnati that Democrats in Congress who failed to applaud his State of the Union speech were "treasonous," he was clearly mocking Senator Cory Booker of New Jersey, who had used the same word to describe his congressional colleagues who had been seeking to release the Nunes Memo about the chicanery at the FBI over obtaining FISA warrants for surveillance of the Trump campaign. Senator Booker was as apparently serious as the FBI itself in purporting to sniff out potential treason in those who disagreed with him, but it was only Mr. Trump's remark, with the mockery taken out, that the media could see—and take seriously enough to bring on yet another apoplectic fit of indignation on their part.

For Trump sympathizers, his joke was doubly comical because it reminded them of the amusing spectacle at the State of the Union address of the entire Democratic caucus scowling and sitting on their hands during what were, to everybody else present, Mr. Trump's biggest applause lines. It turns out not to have been a good look for them. The television images were so unflattering to Senator Booker and his fellow Democrats that the Republican National Committee made a TV ad out of them, so it would have been understandable if they had merely resented being tweaked by the President for their ungraciousness. Instead they entirely missed the joke at their own expense—or pretended to miss it—because the absurd idea of the Trump secret police (come on, you know they must exist!) rounding up treasonous Democrats fit in better with the equally absurd media and Democratic narrative of Trump the autocrat and tyrant. And the absurdity was only increased as it became more and more evident from the Nunes memo and the Strzok–Page FBI texts that such secret police as there really are in America were actually working for the opposition to Mr. Trump.

Cory Booker was only the latest Democrat to descend to this kind of apocalyptic language, and it is not difficult to see why. He is also the latest Democrat—or he was so at the time—to be mentioned as a possible challenger to the President in 2020. Accordingly, as *The Washington Times* reported, "Cory Booker's incendiary rhetoric raises his profile in Democrats' 2020 race to the left." Well, that is how you raise your profile. But I wonder if it isn't more likely to be the case that the winner of the nomination, if not of the "race to the left," will be the Democrat who shows that he can take a joke at his own expense—if there are any such. There certainly don't seem to be any at *The New York Times*, where all are as po-faced as the reporter Mark Landler, who dutifully conveyed to that paper's readers that a Trump spokesman had "played down Mr. Trump's charges of Democratic treason as 'tongue-in-cheek.'" Such an adept use of quotation marks rivals even that of the *Tampa Bay Times*.

The Nunes memo that started it all proved to be yet another Rorschach test revealing the extent of political division in the country. Senator Booker's word "treasonous" was obviously related to the numerous other Democratic warnings that release of the memo would result in serious danger to American national security. Once it was released, however, and it became obvious that it was only the security of the FBI's anti-Trump bias which had been endangered, it suddenly became a "nothingburger," to use Bret Stephens's mocking description in the *Times*—even though it obviously could not have been both. To Trump supporters, on the other hand, it was conclusive evidence that the FBI had allowed itself to become the tool of Mr. Trump's political enemies. But merely recognizing what would seem to be this obvious truth not only puts one on the Trump team, so far as the anti-Trumpers are concerned, but it also makes one an accomplice in what they self-righteously call "Trump's Unparalleled War on a Pillar of Society: Law Enforcement."

The *Times*'s headline writer for one of Gail Collins's "The Conversation" columns, this one with Mr. Stephens, asked: "On What Planet Is the FBI Anti-Republican?" What was originally meant to be a good-natured clash of contrasting if not opposing opinions ended up, as it so often does in the media these days, in basic agreement of the putative antagonists on most points—especially on the point that the FBI are (now) the good guys because (obviously) Trump is the bad guy. As to the planetary question, it could only be on Planet Republican that the FBI had misbehaved. On Planet Democrat that was, axiomatically, an impossibility. As *The Washington Post*'s typically apodictical Glenn Kessler put it: "The GOP memo provides no evidence that the FBI spied on the Trump campaign." Who are you going to believe, folks, your lying eyes or *The Washington Post*'s "Fact Checker"?

Here, then, was a further instance of the by-now well-worn insight that the two parties inhabit different universes, or that each, from the point of view of the other, lives in an "alternate reality." That expression seems to me a contradiction in terms, "reality" being by definition that to which there is no alternative. Or none but unreality. But here we are. Alternate realities are the reality we're living with. But in which direction does the causation work? Are we all savaging those who don't agree with us because we live in alternate realities, or do we only seem to live in alternate realities because we—at least we of the politically engaged classes—are constantly savaging one another? I think I know the answer. I also think that our Rashomon politics is not an artifact of the Trump era but an inevitable outgrowth of an ever-increasing tendency to political moralizing, which itself arises out of identity politics as lately perfected by the Left, with the willing cooperation of the media.

"Is America Growing Less Tolerant on L.G.B.T.Q. Rights?" asked Jennifer Finney Boylan (formerly James Boylan) in *The New York Times* on the same day that Mr. Trump delivered his State of the Union Address. Writing of the most recent GLAAD "Accelerating Acceptance" survey, Ms. Boylan observed that,

> for the first time since the poll began, support for LGBTQ people has dropped, in all seven areas that the survey measured. They include "having an LGBT person at my place of worship" (24 percent of Americans are "very" or "somewhat" uncomfortable), seeing a same-sex couple holding hands (31 percent are uncomfortable) and "learning my child has an LGBT teacher at school" (37 percent are uncomfortable).
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> The increase in these numbers over years previous is not dramatic—3 percent in some instances, two in others. What's significant is not the margin of increase but the fact that the numbers are going up instead of down. In the life of this poll, that has never happened before. . . .
>
> The reason for the change is not hard to discern. Since Day 1, Donald Trump and his administration have sent out the signal that division and prejudice are now the coins of the realm. Week by week, tweet by tweet, Mr. Trump has normalized all of our worst impulses—and the routine expression of homophobia and transphobia not least.

One is, of course, sympathetic, but it occurred to me that there might be another way to interpret these data, always supposing that they are as "significant" as Ms. Boylan claims they are. Look, for instance, at some of her examples of how "Mr. Trump has normalized all of our worst impulses."

> Mr. Trump's administration sided with the right to discriminate against LGBTQ Americans in the Masterpiece Cake case before the Supreme Court; he declared a new policy removing LGBTQ people from the 2020 census; he failed to even mention gay people on World AIDS Day; and he attempted (although so far has failed) to ban trans people from the military.

Each of these cases assumes that LGBTQ status entitles (or ought to entitle) the bearer to special privileges—to automatic acceptance and even approval (in the case of the cake shop owners) of their "lifestyle" by their fellow citizens who, not themselves belonging to an approved vic-

tim group, can have no similar claim on them. Those of us who are not ourselves LGBTQ are presumed to be bigots and oppressors unless we sign on to every jot and tittle of the LGBTQ political agenda, in other words, and some of us just may be getting a little tired of being submitted to that kind of moral blackmail.

And other kinds too. Anyone, for example, who dares to express an opinion sympathetic to the enforcement of the country's immigration laws can expect to be labeled a racist—or, as we have lately been saying in order to goose the moral voltage of the charge, a "white supremacist"—as Mr. Trump himself was said to be for proposing the legalization of over a million illegal immigrants in exchange for better enforcement of those laws. Maybe a lot of those who put the President in a position to make such an offer did so because they, too, were tired of being called names ("deplorables," for instance) for not signing on to the open-borders agenda. Maybe, in other words, the phenomenon Ms. Boylan notices is part of a wider shift in the public mood against the Left's brand of identity politics—a shift of which Mr. Trump is not the cause but one of the symptoms.

The philosopher Mark Lilla expressed a similar view shortly after the 2016 election and was roundly condemned for his trouble—he was an apologist for racist-bigot-homophobes even if he wasn't one himself—thus further illustrating the extent to which the Left has become a stranger to self-criticism. Americans are a tolerant people, not that you'd know it from complaints like Ms. Boylan's. For a long time, they have been inclined to make allowances for the demands upon their indulgence from political spokesmen for sexual, racial, ethnic, or religious minorities, or for that minority of women who claim to be victims of male or "patriarchal" oppression and so entitled to redress of their grievances. Many ordinary, unpolitical Americans, even many conservatives, now use the word "sexism" to describe traditional ideas of sex-roles as if it referred to an obvious evil. Yes, the unpolitical middle Americans may think, these people are probably right about their sufferings at the hands of the majority. They *have* had a hard time, and so we should make allowances for them, and try to be nice to them to make up for it.

But, lo, half-measures and lip-service and "empathy" turn out to be not good enough. It's not just past wrongs or slights or prejudices they are demanding to be put right: it's the things you of the unmindful middle are yourselves doing to them even now—by voting for Mr. Trump, for example. And, in many cases, it's the things you believe in most deeply—the essential goodness of your country and its institutions, for example—that must be changed in order to satisfy them. How can they then be surprised if there are stirrings of resentment and resistance against such moral and political coercion among those whose most treasured freedoms include the freedom not to be conscripted into somebody else's political party against their will?

For the Democratic party is now the party of the grievance-mongers, the pointers of fingers at their fellow citizens, and the shouters of *J'accuse!*. To me the amazing thing is how many white, heterosexual, male Christians there still are who apparently *aren't* tired of being told that they're the reason so many of their fellow citizens are unhappy with their lives. The "redneck" with his ready supply of zip ties was as willing to help a victim of Trumpophobia as he would have been anyone else whose Prius was in distress. Imagine his astonishment, then, if every time he picked up a newspaper he was told that *he*, and what he believed, was what is wrong with the country. Neither Jennifer Finney Boylan nor anyone else should imagine that that state of affairs can continue indefinitely.

Books

Antique Romans

by Paul Dean

Rome was in Shakespeare's mind long before he wrote *Julius Caesar*. *Titus Andronicus*—most probably a collaborative work—was among his earliest plays, but is more of a historical fantasia, complete with horror-movie effects, and is understandably set aside by Paul Cantor in his latest book, *Shakespeare's Roman Trilogy*.[1] Elsewhere, the first history tetralogy has numerous references to classical Rome, including, in *Richard III*, the legend that Julius Caesar built the Tower of London, while *Henry V* presents its hero-king returning in triumph from Agincourt as another Caesar. Yet he is also, as he insistently reminds us, a Christian king. Paul Cantor's project involves an exploration of possible tensions between those twin images of classical and Christian regimes.

Cantor's engagement with these plays began in 1976 with his book *Shakespeare's Rome: Republic and Empire*, and has been pursued in numerous essays as well as an absorbing and entertaining course of Harvard lectures on "Shakespeare and Politics" which can be viewed on YouTube. (His interview with Bill Kristol about the new book is also recommended.) Recent scholarship has widened the category of "Roman plays" to include *Titus* and even *Cymbeline*, and has also considered the narrative poem "The Rape of Lucrece," which imagines the outrage that finally discredited the Roman monarchy (the rape is committed by the son of Tarquinius Superbus), but Cantor sticks with the traditional grouping of *Caesar*, *Coriolanus*, and *Antony and Cleopatra*. As his title indicates, he regards these as a trilogy, but the kind of continuity that that structure would lead one to expect is blurred by his decision to discuss them in order of the history they dramatize, rather than in order of composition. Thus *Coriolanus* (*ca*. 1608) is considered first, then *Caesar* (*ca*. 1599), then *Antony* (*ca*. 1607). Cantor's reason is that he wants to look at Shakespeare's ideas about the transition from one kind of political regime to another. Clearly, however, Shakespeare did not write *Caesar* with *Coriolanus*, a play he had not yet written, in mind. Cantor's citing of the two *Henry IV* plays and *Henry V* as a "unified story" is not a valid parallel, since Shakespeare wrote the plays in that order, and the development of his thinking is demonstrable.

Still odder than this ahistorical approach is Cantor's decision to include a substantial discussion of Nietzsche in what he frankly calls "a thought experiment." Like everyone else, it seems, Nietzsche read *Julius Caesar* at school, and wrote an essay, which survives, about the friendship between Brutus and Cassius. Cantor expounds Nietzsche's distinction between "master morality," which held—to quote Cominius in *Coriolanus*—that "valour is the chiefest virtue," and "slave morality," which was introduced by Christianity and inverted the classical ethical system whereby military prowess was the chief index of a man's claim to respect. Instead, Christianity stressed submission, humility, and forgiveness. All this has

1 *Shakespeare's Roman Trilogy: The Twilight of the Ancient World*, by Paul A. Cantor; University of Chicago Press, 302 pages, $30.

its interest, yet since there is no possibility of Nietzsche's having influenced Shakespeare, and since, as Cantor admits, Nietzsche's thesis already existed, in essence, in Machiavelli's *Discourses*, a work Shakespeare knew (as John Roe showed in *Shakespeare and Machiavelli*, 2002), the space devoted to Nietzsche seems disproportionate. Cantor himself concedes that, "In the end, the convergence between Shakespeare and Nietzsche is probably best traced to the fact that, when two perceptive minds go to work on the same subject, they may well come to similar conclusions."

Cantor argues that Shakespeare's sense of Rome was not mere window-dressing (setting aside a few well-known trivial anachronisms) and that his understanding of Roman political systems was both subtle and well informed. The plays examine the transition from republic to empire with the conversion under Constantine in the background, so that classical and Christian moral systems are contrasted. This seems justified, but it raises another objection to Cantor's ordering of the plays, for if *Caesar* had been preceded by *Henry V*, as I believe (although some scholars would put them the other way round), Shakespeare depicts Henry as the embodied synthesis of classical and Christian virtues and then examines how that synthesis might have come about in the Roman plays. Between *Caesar* and *Coriolanus* come *Hamlet*, *Othello*, and *Macbeth*, in which, as Cantor says, "the conflict between classical and Christian values becomes tragic," and this, in turn, helps to explain the darker tone of *Coriolanus* compared to *Caesar.* The latter contains submerged Christian allusions which are continued in *Antony* and elaborated in the Romances as part of Shakespeare's continuing preoccupation with the Mediterranean world.

That preoccupation has been distorted by what Cantor calls "the Americanization of Shakespeare studies," which has shifted scholarly and theatrical attention towards a dubiously relevant Atlanticism, so that, for example, *The Tempest* is now routinely read as a play "about" colonialism, its debts to classical Utopian writing being ignored. More generally, American critics, in Cantor's view, have underestimated Shakespeare's interest in the classical world because they subscribe to a progressive, Enlightenment interpretation of history which sees Shakespeare's age as the "early modern" period rather than the Renaissance, the age of the rediscovery of classical antiquity canonically defined by Burckhardt. This misplaced search for modish contemporary "relevance," which is essentially narcissistic in its assumption that our cultural trends are more important than Shakespeare's interests, blinds many in the academy to Shakespeare's "pull toward the past" of the Mediterranean. All that is well said, yet Cantor is not wholly immune from the trend he criticizes. In his last chapter he sees the seductive appeal of Egyptian hedonism for the Romans in *Antony* as an example of "a general principle about empire—the country that dominates the world is often altered just as much in the process as the world it tries to dominate." Perhaps the implied Plutarchian parallel need not be spelled out.

That brings us to Shakespeare's use of Plutarch's *Parallel Lives*, which afford such rich insights into the dramatist's methods of composition. Cantor rightly cautions that students can be misled by selective excerpts in anthologies into thinking that Shakespeare's knowledge of Plutarch was more limited than was the case. The Greek setting of *Timon of Athens* puts it outside Cantor's brief—as does its collaborative nature, with Thomas Middleton, which he ignores—but he notes that Plutarch paired Alcibiades, who appears in *Timon*, with Coriolanus, and that, conversely, the life of Timon could be found in Plutarch's life of Antony. He suggests that *Coriolanus* and *Antony* could both be sparked off by research for *Timon*, which is close in date to both of them. This is perfectly plausible, yet how can they be, as Cantor then argues, both "parallel lives in the Plutarchian sense" *and* "contrasting portraits of republic and empire"? More pertinent is the surprising amount of reference, in *Caesar*, to Greek philosophical systems; Epicureanism, Stoicism, and Cynicism are all included, and all viewed with a skeptical eye. No single way of looking at the world can adequately explain the complexity of historical change.

Shakespeare lived under a monarchy, but Henry VIII had declared that "this realm of

England is an empire" in the course of breaking with Rome, and the Holy Roman Emperor was still a person of European political consequence in Elizabeth's reign. Shakespeare's interest in republics is clear not only from the Roman plays but also from *The Merchant of Venice* and *Othello*. Andrew Hadfield, in *Shakespeare and Republicanism* (2005), which Cantor mentions, showed that there was a widespread and intellectually respectable strain of republican political theory in Shakespeare's day. Whereas the English history plays investigate the meaning of nationalism and statehood, the Roman plays are grounded in the city, and the relationship of the individual to this community is a key theme of Cantor's book. "He who cannot live in society," according to Aristotle in the *Politics*, "is either a god or a beast." This finds its most implacable treatment in *Timon*, but the dilemma of the military hero who is out of place in the peacetime world is central to *Coriolanus* and, in a different way, to *Macbeth* and *Othello*. (Shakespeare's audience would doubtless also have thought of Essex and Raleigh.) The accommodations necessary for social existence are seen differently in *Coriolanus*, where a system of checks and balances plays off one class against another, and in *Caesar*, where this arrangement is destabilized, first by the dominance of the title character, an ominous reminder of the monarchical system which the republic had overthrown, and then by the civil war. Subsequently, Antony's rejection of the old heroic ideals in favor of Egyptian decadence allows the imperial system, in the person of the purist (and Machiavellian) Octavius, to emerge virtually unchallenged.

One of the strengths of this argument is that Cantor sees how Rome itself is different in each play. Reviving an unfashionable view, he sees the city as a kind of tragic protagonist whose downfall is caused by its very success; as he puts it, Rome "dissolves into its own empire," a victim not of its enemies but of "a form of inner degeneration," a diagnosis actually made in ancient times by Cato the Elder, who saw foreign influences as unhealthy. Rome turns in upon itself; the plebeians, who play such a large part in both *Coriolanus* (where they have dignity, and a degree of political astuteness) and *Caesar* (where they are powerful but dangerously pliable) are completely absent from *Antony*, where celebrity politics is the order of the day. The people in a republic, with their representative tribunes, can feel they have something to contribute to the governance of the city; republics may be austere, Shakespeare shows, but they are sober and responsible. Empires behave more grandly but more wilfully; those who matter comprise an increasingly small circle. The triumvirate in *Antony* does not last long.

The tragedy of the Roman plays resides not in a simple opposition between right and wrong actions but in a clash of positions, both of which have something to recommend them. Self-fulfilment and social responsibility are perpetually at loggerheads. As I mentioned earlier, the obligations of citizenship do not come easily to Coriolanus, whose attempt to live "as if a man were author of himself/ And knew no other kin" is doomed to fail: he and Rome can live neither with nor without each other. Julius Caesar may be overweening and dictatorial, making himself virtually into a god, but after his murder Rome dissolves into chaos, and his ghost exacts revenge. Brutus is principled but naive, Cassius shrewd but sour, Mark Antony eloquent but unscrupulous. The love of Antony and Cleopatra is both exalting and demeaning; Octavius is a master tactician but cold and ruthless. In *Antony* we hear more of "the world" than of the city as the theater of operations, but Antony's assumption that he can drift between Rome and Alexandria, making a marriage of convenience with Octavia while carrying on with Cleopatra, leaves him without a power base and allows Octavius to seize the initiative. Shakespeare's imagining of Egypt is brilliantly syncretic; this is a cosmopolitan world, with branches everywhere but roots nowhere. Yet Octavius, or Augustus as he will become, has scant reason to feel complacent or morally superior. The Rome of Coriolanus, home of temperance and respect for protocol, is long gone. No character in a later play could match the insight of the citizens who, having given assent to Coriolanus's election as consul, begin to have doubts and wonder whether they can change their minds. One of them remarks,

"We have power in ourselves to do it, but it is a power we have no power to do."

Cantor is within his rights to limit himself to the three "classical" classical plays, but it is a pity that he neglects Roman plays by other dramatists. Thomas Lodge's *The Wounds of Civil War* (published in 1594 but probably written in the 1580s), which dramatizes the conflict between Marius and Sulla, is by no means negligible, and more weightily we have Jonson's *Sejanus* (1603) and *Catiline* (1611), the former at least a real achievement which, as I can testify, works well in the theater if sensibly cut. Shakespeare is known to have acted in *Sejanus*: would he not have had it in his memory when he came to write *Coriolanus*, and might it not be worth asking, in turn, how *Coriolanus* might have influenced the tone and style of *Catiline*? These are missed opportunities, but they should not detract from the fact that, despite some diffuseness and discursiveness, Paul Cantor makes his case for Shakespeare as an innovative, radical thinker about a political world that was so different from his own yet without which his own would not have existed.

A modern guide to crusading

Christopher Tyerman
How to Plan a Crusade: Religious War in the High Middle Ages.
Pegasus Books, 432 pages, $28.95

reviewed by Thomas F. Madden

During a hot and humid June in 1202, nearly twelve thousand Crusaders camped on the Lido of Venice, preparing to board a fleet of some four hundred major vessels bound for Egypt. They had taken the vow of the Cross many months earlier and had traveled from their homes across Western Europe to the city of the lagoons. Enthusiasm for their mission helped the warriors endure the heat and mosquitoes, for they had high hopes that they would soon disrupt Muslim power in Egypt and thereby restore Jerusalem to Christian control. But there was a rather large problem. During the preparations, the leaders of the Fourth Crusade (as it would come to be known) had contracted for a fleet and provisions sufficient for 33,500 Crusaders. Those hundreds of vessels and tons of foodstuffs now stood ready for departure. But the army that assembled in Venice was only a third of that projected size, which meant that the Crusaders lacked the funds to fulfill their contract with the Venetians. It was this colossal error in planning that would force the Fourth Crusade hopelessly off course. Rather than ejecting the Muslim rulers of Egypt and the Holy Land, the Crusaders ultimately sailed to Constantinople, the greatest Christian city in the world, and destroyed it.

Perhaps the leaders of the Fourth Crusade should have read Christopher Tyerman's new book, *How to Plan a Crusade*, and thus avoided their many problems. Actually, strike that. For despite its tongue-in-cheek title, this book is not a how-to, but a how-it-was. Spanning four centuries of crusading, it attempts to lay out the methods and practices that Europeans employed to prepare for their holy wars. With so broad a topic, the book is naturally thematically arranged, taking up the justification, propaganda, recruitment, finance, and logistics of crusading. It is, of course, a massive undertaking. Yet Tyerman is thoroughly equipped to tackle it, for there are few scholars today who could match his breadth of knowledge regarding the Crusades.

The book begins, however, by introducing a few straw men. The Crusades, it claims,

> have been portrayed as inept, failures of conception and implementation, hare-brained, feckless, extravagant mirages built on wishful thinking, not strategic reality, inspired by solipsistic cultural nostrums, not military or logistic common sense, and cheered on by self-serving religious sophistry. Crusade armies may have comprised men accustomed to war but, the legend insists, they were led by commanders whose self-regarding vanity, meretricious ideology, or greed were matched only by the absence of sound military intelligence or technological competence, the blind leading the deluded. What follows argues that in almost all respects this image is false.

The modern manifestations of this "legend" are unclear, and Tyerman offers no guidance for his reader. It is certainly true that the Crusades are frequently mischaracterized today. In popular media they are generally described as brutal wars of colonialism and religious zealotry waged by cynical connivers and pious thieves. Yet, it is difficult to conjure many modern works that describe the main body of Crusaders as loopy or careless idealists, marching off to the East without a thought for preparations.

In any case, a study of this caliber really needs no foil. It is filled to the brim with rich descriptions of the intricate planning and preparations that Europeans conducted before their Crusades. Every page teems with medieval rulers, warriors, saints, and sinners. The sheer weight of the events and the swarms of examples found in this work are astonishing. But a book such as this could also pose a problem. From its first pages it assumes a deep familiarity with medieval Europe in general and the Crusades in particular. For those who can meet that entrance requirement, a rich experience awaits. Others, however, may quickly find themselves cast adrift upon a sea of exacting prose sloshing noisily with vibrant erudition. Names, events, and concepts come and go with little exposition. Medieval Crusade enthusiasm, for example, is compared to "the 'terror' of 1064 that inspired mass pilgrimages towards Jerusalem or the revivalist 'Great Alleluia' in Lombardy in 1233 down to *la Grande Peur* in France in the summer of 1789." Readers who nod their heads knowingly at these examples will be right at home in this study. Others may wish to master the main events, people, and chronology of medieval Europe before attempting this dense book.

A banquet of information about the complex nature of Crusade preparations is laid out before the reader in successive courses. Tyreman energetically (and rightly) argues that medieval people were just as rational as modern people, albeit with less access to information. Medieval military leaders used reason and experience to raise funds, collect provisions, and muster troops. As one of the first major works on the logistics of crusading, this study carves out an important place in the historiography of the movement. It is an extremely solid piece of scholarship, serving as a capstone to decades of research by scholars worldwide into the practical side of religious warfare. In that regard, it is a real achievement.

Given its temporal and topical scope, the thematic structure of the book also makes good sense. Yet it has some drawbacks. Events from the eleventh and twelfth centuries are often pureed with those in the fourteenth and fifteenth. The centuries that separated the First Crusade, though, from the Crusade of Varna, brought enormous changes in the European political, military, and cultural landscapes—changes that often disappear in this work. This homogenization of periods is particularly surprising for Tyerman, who in an earlier piece of scholarship, *The Invention of the Crusades* (1998), argued that Crusades before 1200 were so unlike those that came after that these earlier iterations could not be considered crusades at all. The other bane of thematic approaches is repetition, although Tyerman largely avoids this by the sheer number of historical examples he offers. We do, of course, see rather a lot of Gerald of Wales. And Bernard of Clairvaux's contrast between *malitia* and *militia Dei* is punned repeatedly, with diminishing returns.

In the book's last section, "Grand Strategy," Tyerman seeks a wider plan for the Crusades and, ultimately, finds none. For a time the conquest of Egypt filled that need, yet it proved impossible to capture and was valued by Europeans only for its assurance of safe passage to Jerusalem. Tyerman wisely concludes: "Western Europeans seeking Jerusalem represented a strategic nonsense. Only as a religious exercise could it be justified." This could not be more correct. The Crusades must be the only movement in history that witnessed many thousands of warriors marching thousands of miles deep into enemy territory for no good strategic reason. Although most Crusaders hoped for plunder, it was not the impetus for the war. Plunder was available in abundance much closer to home. They marched because they believed that God called them to right terrible wrongs against His people, and that he would reward them for their service both in this life and in the next.

It is all the more surprising, then, that the religious preparations for the Crusades are only occasionally considered here. Tyerman explores crusader motivations and the techniques of crusade preaching, yet has little to say about the prayers, fasting, processions, and liturgies that supported the holy wars. Some of the most exciting new scholarship on Crusades today has mined the copious medieval devotional literature to better understand how prayers were organized to promote success in God's wars. From a medieval perspective, it was the prayers of Christians that brought victory to the Crusaders, for it was only God who could bestow that victory upon them. While Tyerman is right to point out the rational practicality of Crusade planners, it would be a mistake to conclude that they did not believe their successes lay within the providence of God. This strong, very medieval belief fills virtually all the Crusade chronicles and memoirs. When Crusaders won, it was always God's doing. When they lost, it was divine punishment for their sins. How Crusaders planned to acquire divine support is, therefore, a vitally important part of the story.

Tyerman is a virtuoso with the English language. He marshals his expansive vocabulary to paint a rich picture of the backstage activities of the crusading endeavor. There are a few discordant genuflections to modern pieties. For example, St. Bernard's support for a crusade against Baltic pagans is described as "racism," while Crusade preachers are regarded as "misogynist" for noticing that women occasionally opposed their husbands' decisions to crusade. Yet these are the exception, not the rule. Tyerman rejects the anachronistic modern characterizations of the Middle Ages as a time of irrationality, and offers up the Crusades—the longest and most ambitious project of medieval Europe—as proof of his thesis. It is utterly convincing.

And so, despite the title, this book will not help readers plan a Crusade—which is a good thing. For those with a firm grasp on medieval history, though, this erudite book will reveal some of the extraordinary preparations undertaken by western Christians in the Middle Ages to support their many Crusades. And that too is a very good thing.

Our man in the Vatican

George Weigel
Lessons in Hope: My Unexpected Life with St. John Paul II.
Basic Books, 368 pages, $32

reviewed by Mary Eberstadt

The energetic renascence of anti-Catholicism in Western precincts has been making itself felt for a while now, with some instances more visible than others. There was the low-water mark of 2004, for example, when the Italian intellectual Rocco Buttiglione was nominated as a justice minister of the European Commission—only to be forced to withdraw on grounds that, as an orthodox Catholic, he could not be trusted to uphold ever-changing secular imperatives concerning sex. There are the more farcical reverberations in our own time and place—like Senator Dianne Feinstein's recent declaration to an impeccably qualified Catholic candidate for judicial appointment that "the dogma lives loudly within you." And then there's what might be called the hidden hand of this hardy prejudice, the kind that shapes outcomes without showing its face.

The majority of prestigious magazines and journals, for example, will only rarely review books by writers outed as unapologetic Catholics, and almost wholly ignore volumes published by religious presses (unless to mock them). Omertà regarding Catholic thinkers also seems the watchword for gatekeepers of top-flight secular literary prizes and related awards. Reflecting all of the above, the bias of the times is also manifest in the fact that George Weigel is not the household name he would have been, had he been living in an age more elevated in mien and less determinedly ignorant of all things Church.

Eppur si muove. For several decades now, Weigel has produced an extraordinary oeuvre of books, articles, essays, and other commentaries illuminating a range of political, social, religious, and literary ideas, and has penned lasting and entertaining appreciations of momentous people and places—all this, in addition to the two books about Pope John Paul II for which

he is most renowned: the monumental biography *Witness to Hope* (1999); and the sequel, *The End and the Beginning* (2010), detailing the final years of the Pope and amplifying his struggle against Communism based on then-newly uncovered documents. These now form a literary triptych in which *Lessons in Hope*, the new book and third panel, "flesh[es] out the portrait of John Paul II, and of many of the notable people around him."

Lessons in Hope is not only one more performance by a writer at the top of his game. It is also a virtuoso *literary* performance, a daring act of narrative innovation simultaneously premodern in its metaphysics and postmodern in its playfulness. Here, the author unspools the fascinating backstory of his involvement with the late, great Pope by using Providence as the referent—intermittently reading his own life backward, the better to discern in retrospect the events and encounters that prepared him for the future role of papal biographer. In *Swann's Way*, Marcel Proust famously unleashes the associations conjured by a madeleine—an ingenious device, but one that can't help elevating the random over the systematic. In this sense, Proust's madeleine is a poor man's Providence.

For unlike the madeleine, Providence allows the author to move purposefully and with deep narrative logic between biography and autobiography, personal and impersonal history, as he recounts the experiences that in retrospect would prove necessary to accomplishing the mission handed to him by the Pope. These include Weigel's third-grade classroom in Baltimore, in which he and other children were instructed to pray for the conversion of the Polish dictator Władysław Gomułka, thus "planting in me a seed that would finally flower into a passion for Polish history and literature"; the sometimes-unorthodox, but salient, apprenticeships in academia and journalism; his decades-long adventure in ghostwriting for the powerful Congressman Henry Hyde, which could not help but sharpen the skills needed for later work behind the scenes at the Vatican and elsewhere; and other examples of encounters that seemed unremarkable in prospect, but laden with meaning on looking back. Even the last line of *Witness to Hope*, spoken by the Pope ("I like to watch the sun rise"), appears to the author as providential; it was his response to Polish friends visiting Castel Gandolfo, upon being asked why he was awake so early.

Weigel's own story seems to have equipped him in another way for becoming the prism through which many others would come to view that Pope. His decision as a young man to leave the seminary, and his consequent marriage and family, make him a fellow traveler of a particular sort to Wojtyła's most formative spiritual community: the largely married, lay society of adults, drawn from subversive circles like the Rhapsodic Theater and other early literary and personal associations in Krakow. Weigel's encounters with these religious comrades later in life, and their recollections of the future pope as a young but already titanic spiritual presence, read like a detective story-within-a-story, especially absorbing tales in a rich compendium.

In addition to the Vatican raconteuring, these pages are also a guide through not one, but two, remarkable life stories. Who *wouldn't* have wanted to be present one day for a discussion within the Pope's innermost circle concerning which of Solzhenitsyn's novels were most important, and similar world-beating conversations; or at meals with the later saint, within the Apostolic Palace and elsewhere ("*risotto con funghi porcini* and veal cutlets, followed by a sesame seed tart that the Pope, true to form, ate to the very last crumb"); or at one adventure after another, in one country after another, as the biography makes its way around the world, and its author continues to distill the ongoing legacy of one of the greatest popes in centuries?

This centrality to world events, in all its headiness, *de facto* transforms Weigel's three books on the Pope into wider guides to the times, including snapshots of what totalitarianism really wrought. In his visits to the lands of Communism past and present, the putrescence of the material world becomes synecdoche for moral rot within. Of Warsaw in 1989, he observes that "if there is anything worse than having your capital destroyed by Nazis, it's having

it rebuilt by communists and then allowed to crumble during decades of neglect." Moscow, 1990: "We were housed in the Hotel Belgrad near the foreign ministry, a gargantuan structure of Stalinist provenance that looked vaguely like a sinister wedding cake." Krakow, a treasure today even measured against any capital in Europe, in 1991 still bore the smudges of brute socialism, decades in the making: "dirt and grime still muted the brightness of its Main Market Square; many people wore the plastic shoes that were an emblem of consumer life under communism; there was only one passable restaurant in the Old Town."

As for Havana in 1998, he notes "the telltale signs of communist economic catastrophe: government office windows held together by duct tape; streets and sidewalks crumbling; pharmacy shelves bereft of even aspirin." In the Museum of the Revolution, "its most obscene object was the burlap bag in which Che Guevara had been carried through the Bolivian jungle after his execution, displayed in obvious imitation of the Shroud of Turin." Following the publication of *Witness to Hope*, Weigel—who has Cuban-born relatives in Baltimore—was delighted to learn that Fidel Castro was provoked by its descriptions into a denunciation faxed around the world by Cuban diplomats. Here as elsewhere, impishness lightens the necessarily heavier realties authored first by an inhuman Communism, then repurposed by Weigel as essential to understanding the Polish pope.

Despite the singular record of which *Lessons in Hope* is the latest proof, Weigel remains underappreciated here and there by two sorts of critics—those inside and outside the Church who fail to understand that "neo-con" is an epithet, not an argument; and those within the flock itself who resent the fealty to Church teachings shared by John Paul's biographer and his subject. As of this latest book, readers may wonder whether sloth, too, might play a part in the occasional niggardly reckoning. In an age of declining literacy, readers religious or otherwise may be less likely to take pleasure in references like the "Jamesian figures in the carpet"; or the sly dig in one chapter title, "A Pride of Curialists"; or the metaphorical punctuation of points throughout by references to subjects as varied as *Lonesome Dove*, Polish poetry, the intricacies of Eastern Christianity, baseball, sacred music, plus any number of papal encyclicals; or the other allusions, metaphors, and devices assuming working knowledge of literature, history, philosophy, and theology. And, of course, fillips in Latin, French, Italian, Polish, and other flourishes can't help but make itinerant appearances, as the author finds himself thinking in them.

In the end, the Pope's biographer presides over a philosophical and literary record without peer—acknowledged or not, fathomed in full or not.

Just as Saint John Paul II appeared always to have grasped that his religious vocation would become essential to the proscenium required to re-tell the world's story, so does his biographer seem to have known all along exactly what he was put on earth to write. That rare fact, too, continues to render George Weigel one of the most enviable, albeit insufficiently appreciated, literary figures of our time.

Jewish for the jokes

Jeremy Dauber
Jewish Comedy: A Serious History.
W. W. Norton, 364 pages, $28.95

reviewed by Harry Stein

As an habitué of Ford's Theater, John Wilkes Booth knew the line in *Our American Cousin*'s third act sure to get a laugh so huge it would drown out the crack of a Derringer in the presidential box. "Well," the play's plain-spoken protagonist sneers at a shameless social climber, "I guess I know enough to turn you inside out, old gal—you sockdologizing old man-trap."

How much has American humor changed from that time to this? The kind of joke that once made a theater full of sophisticates roar is found today, if anywhere, on reruns of *Hee Haw*.

So what happened? Simple—with the rise of mass culture, Jews took over the humor business. As noted Steve Allen, who many would be surprised to learn was *not* Jewish, in today's America comedy is "a sort of Jewish cottage industry."

This is the story, or part of it, that Jeremy Dauber tells in *Jewish Comedy: A Serious History*. Dauber is a professor at Columbia, and in some ways it is a highly irritating book. He is at once intellectually show-offy, exhaustively seeking to root the likes of Lenny Bruce and Sid Caesar in Jewish Biblical and social tradition, and ever eager to come off as hip, "with it," and non-judgmental. Yes, he reveres the Talmudic canon and the patriarchs, but he also loves a good dirty joke! He's a big fan of Lena Dunham and Jon Stewart, and—does anyone have to ask?—takes cheap shots at Fox News. Then, too, pathetically ignorant secular Jew that I may be, Dauber gets enough wrong on the familiar contemporary stuff that it's hard to take his Old Testament expertise at face value. Mike Nichols was famously a refugee from Nazi Germany, not Russia. And even the most indifferent Woody Allen fan knows the old lady in the classic *Annie Hall* scene who turned Alvy Singer into a Hasid was *Grammy*, not Granny Hall.

Still, along the way, there's plenty that's thought-provoking in the book, even if they're not always precisely the thoughts Dauber hopes to provoke. Like, for example, the relationship of Jewish humor to contemporary politics.

In the twenty-first century, Jews—and in all that follows, we're talking secular Jews—occupy a unique position in American life. We are as a group inordinately successful professionally, and especially influential in those spheres that shape public perceptions and mores: entertainment, journalism, and academia. We are generally regarded as smart, and Jewish men are widely seen as good husband material. (Jewish women have a somewhat dicier reputation, largely due to Jewish male comedians). Indeed, it is fair to say that today seemingly no position of influence or power is beyond our reach, up to and including the presidency. (Bernie Sanders's Jewishness was the least of his problems.)

And yet, to a remarkable degree, we insist on seeing ourselves as outsiders, imagining ourselves to be secretly, or not so secretly, scorned by the larger community.

If nothing else, this intense sense of alienation has always made for laughs. As the Marx Brothers' mayhem was invariably at the expense of the WASP establishment of their day—poor Margaret Dumont, Groucho's perpetual foil, reportedly never even got the joke—so, too, and even more explicitly, is the robust humor of figures as diverse as Larry David and Philip Roth often grounded in Christian misunderstanding of Jews—and very much vice versa. It is as if the intervening decades never happened.

The difference, of course, is that at one time Jewish defensiveness was entirely reasonable. In a time when anti-Semitism was both pervasive and potent, there was real resonance to the joke about two Jews before a firing squad. When one asks for a blindfold, the other whispers "Shh, don't make trouble."

Back then—we're talking the period between the wars—Jews were getting it on both ends, simultaneously portrayed, as Dauber observes, "as secret capitalists who controlled the world's economies and the anarchist communists dedicated to overthrowing those economies." (Why, reading that, did my mind wander to some of today's progressive entrepreneurs in Silicon Valley?) And that's before we got to the Ivy League quotas and—this was within my Boomer memory—the Westchester communities and country clubs that barred Jewish admission.

But the change was dramatic and, in retrospect, remarkably swift. While 1947's *Gentleman's Agreement*, in which Gregory Peck's reporter went undercover as a Jew, may have stretched credulity—the film's moral, cracked Ring Lardner, Jr., was "never be mean to a Jew, because he might turn out to be a Gentile"—the film had great impact, winning the Oscar for Best Picture.

The arrival of television around the same time not only increased the Jewish presence on the popular culture scene but, more meaningfully, vastly amplified the Jewish urban sensibility. This was nowhere more the case than on Saturday nights on NBC, where the Sid Caesar show was must-viewing for an ever increasing audience. That classic show's roster of writing talent is enshrined in myth: among others, Mel Brooks, Neil Simon, Carl Reiner, Larry Gelbart, Woody Allen—full disclosure: also

my father, Joe Stein—and they were almost all young, first-generation New York Jews who grew up poor, knowing only others like themselves. Now, out of nowhere, they were flashing their smarts not just for one another but for millions nationwide. Brash, ironic, quick on the uptake, and more than a little cynical, as steeped in the popular culture of the day as would be the Not Ready for Prime Time Players a generation later, they not only parodied commercials, other TV shows, and current films—including, amazingly, *foreign* ones, in convincing Italian or Japanese double-talk—but made light, gently, of societal norms and institutions, including marriage. Mild as it was by today's standards, such irreverence was revolutionary at the time.

Indeed, they established a template for humor that we continue to abide by today: the notion that *anything* can be funny, *nothing* is by definition off limits. (Brooks, the most gifted of the bunch, repeatedly tested that dictum over the decades that followed, shocking/delighting audiences with material like "Springtime for Hitler" in *The Producers* or the cowboys breaking wind around the campfire in *Blazing Saddles*; and he has a worthy successor in Larry David.)

Part of the reason they got away with it, aside from the fact it was *funny*, is that to the naked, untrained eye, none of it *seemed* especially Jewish. And why would it? Proud as they were of their Jewish roots, the creators of this comedy, most of them recent veterans of the war, were just as proudly American. Liberal/Left as were their politics, in the blacklist era there was never a hint of this fact on the tube. If they were remaking popular culture in their own image, they were doing it so subtly even they didn't know it; it was an inadvertent by-product of their fierce intramural competition to produce the best work.

Of course, by then there was a long tradition of what Dauber calls the comedy of Jewish disguise—one which in its most obvious manifestation turned the likes of Leonard Alfred Schneider, Jack Roy Cohen, Mendel Berlinger, and Allan Stewart Konigsberg into Lenny Bruce, Rodney Dangerfield, Milton Berle, and Woody Allen. But starting in the fifties, entire sitcoms were populated by Jews in mufti. Perhaps the most obvious of these were a pair of classic shows created by the brilliant Nat Hiken, *Sergeant Bilko* and *Car 54, Where Are You?*, wherein assorted wise-ass veteran Catskill comics reconvened in, respectively, an army motor pool and a New York precinct house. But there was also Carl Reiner's legendary *Dick Van Dyke Show*, explicitly based on the writer's room of the Caesar show, in which every attitude and impulse is identifiably New York Jewish, but not a single character. Indeed, the impulse to pretend Jews weren't on screen persisted into the nineties when, as Jerry Stiller observed of *Seinfeld*, there was "a Jewish family living in the witness protection program named Costanza."

But then, again, not only was that show's title character Jewish, but the fact was sometimes a key plot point. For by then TV executives, mostly Jewish themselves, had long since come to recognize that, far from snapping off the tube at the sight of a Jew passing for Jewish, many viewers saw Jewish-inflected comedy as guaranteeing a certain minimal level of smarts. For instance, *Taxi* was a show with a distinctly Jewish feel; *Married with Children*—uh-uh.

Still, it is a measure of how pervasive Jewish influence had become in the universe of network half-hour comedy that not only were *both* those shows created by Jews, but running down the roster of the past half-century's classic sitcoms—*The Mary Tyler Moore Show*, *The Odd Couple*, *Cheers*, *Family Ties*, *Roseanne*, *Friends*, *The Office*, *Everybody Loves Raymond*, *Arrested Development*, *Modern Family*, *The Big Bang Theory*—it's hard to come up with any that weren't.

Dauber points to a surprising transitional figure in the audience's growing acceptance of overtly Jewish material: Allan Sherman, whose shtick album, *My Son, the Folk Singer*, was a breakout comedy smash in 1962. He also makes note of another vastly influential popular phenomenon of the time, one which quietly planted the seeds of irreverence and insubordination that would shortly blossom into outright generational rebellion: Harvey Kurtzman's *Mad Magazine*.

At a time when *Shh, don't make trouble* was increasingly a relic of a happily bygone era, a number of Sherman's comedic contemporaries—Lenny Bruce, Mort Sahl, Mike Nichols and Elaine May, and Tom Lehrer—emerged

as sharp social satirists, unburdened by the diffidence of their forebears. Quick-witted and endlessly original, working on the assumption their audience picked up on references that once would have been considered arcane, they were engaged in the vital enterprise of throwing off the mental shackles of gray flannel–suited, conformist America.

Vietnam greatly accelerated the politicization of humor, with a pair of veteran comedy writers–turned-producers on the cutting edge. In 1971, Norman Lear's *All in the Family* changed the very character of the sitcom, unapologetically going full bore after the blue-collar Nixon voter, in the person of the bigoted, muddle-minded Archie Bunker. A year after that, *Caesar* vet Larry Gelbart created the straightforwardly anti-war *M*A*S*H*, which arguably had an even greater long-term impact on the public mind.

Indeed, over the years since, comedy in its various manifestations, disproportionately created by Jews, has had much to do with maintaining the Left's stranglehold on popular culture.

Like many politically conservative Jews, I am as disproportionately vexed by this as my non-Jewish conservative friends tend to be baffled. I have grown so weary of trying to explain the inexplicable—why Jews are so overwhelmingly on the Left—I've taken to telling them to just pick up Norman Podhoretz's book on the subject. Let *him* try to convey some sense of our confreres' self-hating compulsion to identify with even the most rabid "underdog," or their ludicrous fixation, in the age of BDS, on the perpetual threat of *right*-wing (and especially Christian!) anti-Semitism!

While we're on the subject, no one from without can fully grasp that, sophisticated as urban Jewish cognoscenti take themselves to be—think the characters in a Woody Allen film or, hey, Woody himself—they are as provincial as the small-town Southerners they reflexively scorn.

Well, no, I guess Saul Steinberg's iconic drawing of New Yorkers' view of the world from Ninth Avenue did a pretty good job of explaining that one.

What to do? How to mobilize humor in the service of the other side? Short of getting the Koch brothers to buy up a network or two, and giving us rightwing Jews a crack at, say, a sitcom set on a contemporary college campus, I don't see it. Our opposite numbers on the Left are hardheaded and will learn, if they ever do, only the hard way. There's a joke in the book that applies. It is post-revolutionary Russia—a revolution, lest we forget, widely supported by Jews—and an anti-Semite yells "Jew bastard!" at a Jew peaceably walking down the street. "Ay," mutters the Jew, "if only there were meat in the shops, it would be like czarist times."

The saving grace, as always, is that even when liberal Jews are desperately, pathetically wrong—hell, even when *we're* the target—they can still be funny. Take the popular internet meme these days called Yiddish Curses for Republican Jews. It solemnly decrees: "May your child give his bar mitzvah speech on the genius of Ayn Rand."

White heat

J. M. Coetzee
Late Essays: 2006–2017.
Viking, 297 pages, $28

reviewed by Jeffrey Meyers

The cosmopolitan J. M. Coetzee has lived and worked on four continents—Africa, Europe, America, and Australia—and may be the only great writer who has earned a Ph.D., a degree that usually extinguishes the creative spirit. An expert in German, Dutch, and French, he's mastered European literature. He lectures each year at his Chair, the Cátedra Coetzee in Buenos Aires, and edits his *Biblioteca Personal* with the Argentine publisher Hilo de Ariadna (Ariadne's Thread). His introductions to single works translated into Spanish, when he cannot assume the knowledge of sophisticated readers, are mixed in *Late Essays* with more heavyweight reviews of multiple works for *The New York Review of Books*.

His fourth book of criticism is composed of chapters arranged by neither chronology nor country. He begins with Defoe and Hawthorne, jumps to Ford Madox Ford and Philip Roth,

goes back to the Germans Goethe, Hölderlin, and Kleist and ahead to the Swiss Robert Walser, leaps to Flaubert and Irène Nemirovsky, shifts to Spanish and Argentine writers, and adds Tolstoy before considering the modern Polish poet Zbigniew Herbert. He includes four chapters on Beckett, the subject of his dissertation; overpraises three writers from Australia, where he now teaches in Adelaide; and ends anticlimactically with the most obscure writer, a nineteenth-century African-Namibian guerrilla warrior and diarist who wrote in Dutch.

Coetzee is intelligent, insightful, and humane. He provides useful biographical, historical, and cultural backgrounds before analyzing the books. As a working novelist he knows how novels work and can speak with authority about technical faults. He sees the work from the point of view of the novelist as well as of the critic, and expertly suggests how to rewrite novels and develop short fiction into longer works. He is impatient with writers, such as the unnamed Anthony Burgess and Iris Murdoch, who compromise their work by "starting a new project before the old one was properly finished."

He offers perceptive observations throughout this book. Flaubert's "*Madame Bovary, c'est moi*" means that "in the white heat of creation the individual self of the artist is consumed and absorbed into his creative self." Ford, who revered Flaubert for "his uncompromising quest for *le mot juste*," paradoxically published many novels with careless structure, uninteresting plots, and shallow characters. He notes that "regret at a life not fully lived . . . becomes a gnawing theme in Herbert's late poetry," but does not note that this is a dominant theme in the fiction of Henry James.

Coetzee also makes fascinating digressions from Goethe to Ossian, Beckett to *Moby-Dick*, and Patrick White to Kafka and literary wills. But he does not mention that Beckett's hero Samuel Johnson, struggling against the contemporary tide of enthusiasm for the bogus epic poems of Ossian, took a belligerent stance and declared, "I believe the poems never existed in any other form than that which we have seen. The editor, or author, could never show the original. . . . Stubborn audacity is the last refuge of guilt." In his aborted play *Human Wishes*, Beckett used Johnson's religious doubt, melancholy, and fits of insanity to express his own sense of futility.

Coetzee, who wrote a variant of *Robinson Crusoe* in *Foe*, could have connected Defoe's ironic pamphlet arguing that "the best way of dealing with troubling Dissenters was to crucify them" to Swift's "A Modest Proposal," which suggests that superfluous Irish babies should be eaten. He perceives that Roxana finds "seduction more erotically fulfilling than the [sexual] act itself." Freud also believed the more difficult the sexual obstacles, the greater the satisfaction when they are overcome. Sexual fantasies allow unlimited imaginative freedom, which reality is rarely able to match.

In his elegy on Yeats, Auden famously observed, "poetry makes nothing happen." But Goethe's influential novel *The Sorrows of Young Werther* allegedly made romantic suicide, often for thwarted love, a fashionable plague throughout Europe. He was so weary of being interrogated about the novel that he "cursed these stupid pages/ that exposed my youthful suffering to the masses." Goethe's defense of the German *Sturm und Drang* movement, and his attack on stifling French literary models—"their criticism destructive, their philosophy abstruse yet unsatisfying"—sounds exactly like the defects of modern French literary theory.

Coetzee is illuminating about the reputation of the poet Friedrich Hölderlin, who maintained a precarious hold on sanity. He was forgotten for nearly half a century, then praised by Nietzsche and the poet Stefan George, and later co-opted into Nazi ideology by the philosopher Martin Heidegger. Coetzee argues that Kleist's puzzled narrators in "Michael Kohlhaas" and "The Marquise of O" are driven by inscrutable action and "struggle to work out what has truly happened." The characters in *Werther* and Beckett's *Murphy* are fictional suicides; Kleist killed himself in real life. Kafka observed that "Kleist, when compelled by outer and inner necessity to shoot himself [in a suicide pact] on the Wannsee, was the only one to find the right solution" to marriage. Hölderlin, Kleist, and Robert Walser all had mental breakdowns. In his asylum Walser exclaimed, "I'm not here to write, I'm here to be mad."

Kafka is the spiritual presence hovering over this book. In Beckett, as in *The Metamorphosis*, a creature wakes "into a situation which is ineluctable and inexplicable." Beckett's *Watt*, like *The Castle*, inspires a religious reading. Coetzee writes that the hero also has "an inarticulate and unexpressed vision of the household: that Mr. Knott is in some sense a deity and that he, Watt, has been summoned to serve Him." He notes that Kafka left his unpublished manuscripts to Max Brod, asking his friend to destroy them, yet knowing they would not be destroyed.

Coetzee's most intriguing remarks on other writers are really about himself. He states that true artists, like Kafka, are outsiders who don't fit into conventional life. He celebrates Tolstoy's *The Death of Ivan Ilyich* for "the remorseless pace of its narrative and the stripped-down texture of its prose." Philip Roth, at his best, also has "expressive power and intellect." *Barley Patch*, a sinking title by the Australian novelist Gerald Murnane, has—like Coetzee's *Boyhood* and *Youth*—recollections of his "family, childhood, and early manhood." Coetzee admires works in which "the creative flame is burning at white heat, or the author is being stretched by his material."

Beckett's Molloy, "needing to ride a bicycle with only one leg," foreshadows Coetzee's *Slow Man* in which the bike-riding hero loses his leg in a road accident. Beckett's bleak outlook and pared down, elliptical style had a negative influence on the desiccated prose and bloodless characters—all intellect and no heart—of Coetzee's early works. But he achieves a high standard in his greatest novels: *The Master of Petersburg* and *Disgrace*. In the latter, the white heroine absorbs the guilt of her native South Africa and deliberately sacrifices herself to atone for the extinction of indigenous culture.

In *The Good Soldier* Ford asks: is it possible for men and women, driven by sexual passions, to live a good life? In the Tolstoy chapter Coetzee asks, "How could artists, who . . . were usually bad and immoral people, act as moral guides to humankind?" Though a few rare authors—Henry James, Chekhov, Steven Crane, and perhaps Coetzee himself—have admirable characters, it is a familiar paradox of art that bad people are often moral guides.

Talmudic titan

Barry W. Holtz
Rabbi Akiva: Sage of the Talmud.
Yale University Press, 248 pages, $25

reviewed by Daniel Asia

Barry Holtz is a storyteller, educator, translator, and professor at the Jewish Theological Seminary. He has also demonstrated his mastery of writing books, at a rate of about one a decade, with previous works that include seminal texts such as *Your Word Is Fire* (with Arthur Green), *Back to the Sources*, *Finding Our Way*, *Textual Knowledge*, and now his newest book, a "biography" of Rabbi Akiva, which is scholarly, yet eminently approachable. This book will be of great interest not only to Jews, for whom Akiva is the architect of the Jewish enterprise from his time to today, but, as Akiva lived right around the time of Jesus, also for Christians of all stripes who wish to get a better sense of the Jewish world at that time.

The word biography is in quotes above because no personal effects, letters, or legal documents of Akiva's remain. There are, however, 1,341 mentions of him in the Babylonian Talmud, the primary source for our knowledge of him. So while there is no "proof" that Akiva lived, Holtz believes that he did:

> I cannot know whether every story about him and every utterance attributed to him reflects what he did or said, but I do know that editors who established the texts that have come down to us from long ago chose to preserve certain stories and teachings in Akiva's name and that despite the complexities of transmission, it is possible to discern a portrait of his life.

Holtz was trained in English literature, and loves a good story. He approaches the history of his subject through rabbinic sources and anecdotes. Akiva was born around 50 A.D. and died about eighty years later, yet nothing is known of his parents or where he lived his life. This is therefore an intellectual biography that relies on interactions with others—his wife, his students, his community of fellow

rabbis—that shed light on the man and his thought, with little actual biography. Holtz's use of the word "portrait" is most telling. A portrait is, after all, the way one man is rendered by another, which is far different from the verisimilitude that a photograph might provide. This portrait provides a sense of the emotional landscape, the inner sense of the man.

The first chapter, "Akiva's World," reviews the period from the destruction of the first Temple in 586 B.C. by the Babylonians to the following exile and return of the Jews eighty years later. Herod became king with the support of the Romans in 40 B.C., ending over a century of Hasmonean rule. His reign was marked by the expansion of the Second Temple and Jerusalem. If Akiva was born in Jerusalem at this time, he found himself in a cosmopolitan and wealthy center of the world. A new institution, the synagogue, was just forming, which may have had multiple purposes, including a space for praying and for reading the Torah, studying, and meeting. But what did it mean to be a Jew then? It was a nation and a people who worshiped one God, in the Temple in Jerusalem, and followed the laws of the Torah. This was radically altered after the destruction of the Second Temple by the Romans in 70 A.D., which engendered questions of an existential nature: "Where was God and what was God's power in light of the disaster? What is the meaning of worship in a world without the temple? How can the Torah be understood in the aftermath of this tragedy? These were among the most powerful issues that would confront Akiva during his lifetime."

Akiva was not alone in trying to answer these questions. The new term "rabbi" was applied perhaps to fifty to one hundred men. It was a flexible designation, connoting someone who thought well. It was applied to a loose band of men and was non-hierarchical, informal, and non-institutional. They might have met in a wealthy patron's home or a public gathering place; or maybe the rabbis themselves were well-to-do and formed a kind of aristocracy. "In essence," Holtz writes, "the 'rabbis' were simply a small circle of friends."

The first Talmudic mention of Akiva states that he only began the study of Torah at age forty. Everything prior to that is of no concern. He was an unschooled man of the earth who could not read or write, but after studying for twenty years, no one knew more than he. He was a genius just waiting to happen, who quickly confounded his teachers with his brilliance and brought a new way of interpretation to the Torah. This method includes a detailed "interrogation of Torah, interpretation at its deepest and . . . at its most optimistic core."

A second biographical story is more romantic. A wealthy young woman spied him as a young shepherd and understood his talent. She betrothed herself to him—against all societal norms—married him, and lived in poverty while he went away to study. Only when he returned after twenty-four years as the leading rabbi of his generation was he reunited with his wife and finally accepted by his father-in-law.

These biographical traditions are at odds with each other, but have some overlap. In both, Akiva is poor and without ancestry or a family name. His learning and mastery of texts make him a man of importance. Thus begins the Jewish paradigm of acquiring knowledge for its own sake.

Akiva's "growth as a scholar" was not easy. He was antagonistic to scholars in his younger years and made mistakes in his formative stages, not realizing that "Jewish practice may not always conform to one's understanding of the 'right' thing." One cannot rely on intuition, but must join in the conversation, and be around learned people and imitate them. Jewish learning is about a way of being, "a way of thinking and a way of living." Scholarly relations are not always gentle, as even a beginner can challenge a master. In one Talmudic reference Akiva is referred to as a "forgiving person," while another famous teacher, Rabbi Eliezer, is not. It would seem Akiva had a deep spiritual and modest nature to go along with his brilliance. He was both a student and a teacher at the same time, but at some moment became one of the sages, if not *the* sage.

"Among the Rabbis" presents Akiva's mature years. One of his major contributions was

to suggest that Torah study required attention to every detail of the text. Talmudic stories tend to emphasize his interpretive creativity and compassion, and to balance two aspects of rabbinic culture: the need for both authority and to respect minority opinions. Judaism is as much about the discussion, or the intellectual journey, as it is about the final conclusion. Akiva forges a new paradigm for status, replacing money and family with intellectual ability and accomplishment.

"In the Orchard" presents a mysterious story, recounted in numerous sources, about a mystical vision had by four rabbis in an "orchard." The other three are damaged as a result, while Akiva returns unscathed and enlightened. For Holtz, the question is: "Who is the Akiva who emerges from the various traditions of the pardes [Hebrew for orchard] story?" Akiva's survival puts him among a select group, maybe only with Moses, who saw the back of God, or spoke to Him "face to face." He is a spiritual master who obtained insights into the workings of Divinity. Not only is he the ultimate scholar, but also "the role model for all those down through Jewish history who wish to attain that kind of intimate and direct connection to the divine."

While little is known of Akiva's middle years, there are detailed stories of his death, which is assumed to have taken place in the early part of the second century A.D. The Bar Kokhba Revolt of 132–135 A.D, looms large because, while there is nothing in the historical record, many legends connect the two. With the crushing of the rebellion, the teaching of Torah was banned. Akiva continued to do so, and was caught by the Romans. While his flesh was raked by iron combs, he recited the Shema, thus asserting two things: "his religious commitment and at the same time rejecting the legitimacy of the Roman kingdom for the kingdom of God." He followed this with an interpretation of the Torah, thus ending his life with a teaching moment, an act central to his understanding of what Judaism is.

Akiva has lived on for almost two thousand years in the memories of his people. He pushed for study, argumentation, and the doing of good deeds. The order of priority of these was left undecided and is still a matter for discussion. He left us with the great principle of the Torah, "Love your neighbor as yourself," and with his passionate yearning for a connection to the Divine.

Akiva is remembered as the rabbi who was martyred, but whose final words were redemptive; or as the scholar who set the path for Jewish existence through the millennia. Holtz offers a third possibility:

> I think of him among the sages, part of that small community . . . of teachers and disciples, arguing, conversing, agreeing, and disagreeing, sitting at meals, at prayer, or teaching and learning . . . . That multi-vocal assembly of voices recognizes Akiva's genius, but he is not the only teacher, and at times he is in fact a student. This is where Akiva shines, where his heart sings—in the give and take of learning and debate . . . part of a community of companions, even the ones with whom he disagrees . . . a man in the community of the sages, talking about Torah, setting the stage for the future.

This is a warm-hearted, clear, and elegant meditation on the legacy of Akiva. It is almost Talmudic in that.

Charles in charge

Leanda de Lisle
The White King: Charles I, Traitor, Murderer, Martyr.
PublicAffairs, 464 pages, $30

reviewed by Jeremy Black

"The Man of Blood" to his opponents, a man who had killed the Lord's People, and was tried and executed accordingly, emerges unusually sympathetically in *The White King*, Leanda de Lisle's engaging and well-written biography of Charles I of England, king from 1625 until 1649. This biography is one that puts personality first, and, in doing so, devotes due and excellent attention to the role of women, particularly Charles's dynamic French wife,

Henrietta Maria. Indeed, Charles repeatedly appears in this account as the blinkered prey to the ambitions of others, notably the Duke of Buckingham; Henry, Earl of Holland; and Lucy, Countess of Carlisle. The king emerges as honorable and uxorious, but a withdrawn and rigid individual who lacked the flexibility and intelligence necessary to avoid the problems that stemmed from the partisan and divisive policies he supported.

To be a successful monarch required both character and talents, and Charles was insufficient in both. His inheritance was a promising one, and if the reign of James I (r. 1603–1625) had been troubled in England and, as James VI (r. 1567–1625), even more so in Scotland, there had at least been no collapse into civil war. Charles, however, lacked common sense and pragmatism, and could prove both devious and untrustworthy. Moreover, Charles's belief in order and in the dignity of kingship led him to take an unsympathetic attitude to disagreement. After encountering severe problems with Parliament over his financial expedients, especially the forced loan of 1626, Charles dispensed with the legislature in 1629 and launched his "Personal Rule."

In this, Charles proved isolated from the wider political world, and the informal channels of royal authority did not work well. There was tension over his novel financial demands, especially the extension of Ship Money, the levy paid by coastal areas in support of the navy that Charles decided to extend inland in 1635, but most did not follow John Hampden in refusing to pay. The toleration of Catholics at court was very unpopular; so was the Arminian tendency within the Church of England associated with William Laud, whom Charles made Archbishop of Canterbury in 1633. Arminianism was seen as crypto-Catholic and thus conducive to tyranny by its critics, and Charles could be harsh towards critics. He saw difference as subversive, and equated Puritanism with Calvinism, and the two with opposition to due authority. His political thought and manner were divisive. Prerogative courts under royal control, especially the Star Chamber and High Commission, gave out savage penalties. Most people, however, were reluctant to enter into rebellion, and it was a tribute to Charles's political incompetence that he transformed dissent into political disaster.

The outbreak of civil war in England in 1642 reflected a spiral of concern arising from Charles's mishandling of serious crises in Scotland (1638) and Ireland (1641). In Scotland, Charles proved a poor political manager. His commitment to religious change—towards a stronger episcopacy and a new liturgy—and his aggressive treatment of Scottish views led to a hostile national response. Instead of compromising with the 1638 National Covenant (an agreement to resist ecclesiastical innovations unless they were appointed by the General Assembly), Charles tried to suppress the Scots in the Bishops' Wars (1639–40). This was the start of the Civil Wars, and it was symptomatic of the whole period of conflict: Charles mishandled the situation and lost, and religion played a major role in the war.

To help deal with the crisis, Charles summoned Parliament in England, but this "Short Parliament" refused to authorize money until grievances had been redressed. The impatient Charles dissolved it after only three weeks, infuriating many MPs. Threatened with bankruptcy as a result of the Scottish invasion, Charles then had to summon what became the Long Parliament. The period of "Personal Rule," however, had generated a series of grievances and much fear about Charles's intentions. Previously loyal gentry turned against the king, making it difficult to settle or ease serious disputes over politics and religion.

When civil war broke out, Charles received significant support because he was the focus for powerful feelings of honor, loyalty, and duty. Charles, nevertheless, lost. Once imprisoned from 1646, he showed himself untrustworthy, and this helped undermine the chance of any agreement. In 1648, his stance and policies encouraged the outbreak of the Second Civil War, in which both the Royalists and Scots were crushed.

The army followed up this war by purging Parliament in order to stop it negotiating with

Charles. It then tried and executed Charles for treason against the people, declaring a republic. Thanks to religious zeal, the army had not been intimidated about confronting their anointed king. It claimed that Charles had given his word of honor not to fight again, and that he had broken it when he encouraged the Second Civil War.

Sad but firm in the portrait at Antony House, painted at his trial by Edward Bower, Charles refused to plead. He claimed that subjects had no right to try the king and that he stood for the liberties of the people. Charles was executed at the center of royal power, outside the Banqueting House in Whitehall. The execution made compromise with the Royalists highly unlikely, and entrenched the ideological position of the new regime.

Leanda de Lisle ably captures the drama of the reign. She is *parti pris* in favor of Charles, but that is not itself a flaw. The preface, with Charles arriving in Paris in 1623 en route to Madrid, nicely captures the international context of the reign that she discusses so well. The book also presents much of the physicality of the age, its splendor, and the role of individuals in what was very much a court society.

Charles is seen as a keen family man, his many children with his wife a contrast to his predecessor, James I, and successor, Charles II. In that respect, as with many others, there is a clear contrast between father and eldest son. Instead, Charles I was more similar to his rigid second son, James II. That both monarchs ended their reigns in defeat and failure raises interesting questions about the circumstances of monarchy in Britain in this period. This was also of relevance for Americans as the overthrow of the Stuarts also meant the overthrow of their rule in their North American colonies. Charles's failings and failure look less unusual in the context of monarchs elsewhere. Take Louis XIII and Philip IV, both of whom he met in 1623. To note that all monarchs faced challenges does not free Charles from blame, but it does help explain his difficulties.

Louis faced aristocratic factionalism, opposition within the royal family, and armed resistance by Protestants. He had to campaign in person. Under his successor, Louis XIV, uprisings from 1648 to 1653, called the *Frondes*, forced the government to flee Paris. Louis XIII's two predecessors, Henry III in 1589 and Henry IV in 1610, were both assassinated by Catholic fanatics. In 1640, Philip IV faced rebellions in Catalonia and Portugal, the latter leading to independence. Under his father, Philip II, aristocratic factionalism at court had become literally murderous. So also elsewhere. In Russia, the "Time of Troubles" earlier in the century led to assassinations—including that of the Tsar—pretenders, rebellions, and foreign invasion.

In China, in 1644, the last Ming Emperor was overthrown by a combination of foreign invasion and domestic rebellion. He hanged himself as Beijing came under attack, bringing to an end a dynasty that had ruled since the fourteenth century. In Japan, the Emperor was pushed into the shadows. These and other failures raise questions about the very weaknesses of monarchy as a system, and even in a pre-democratic age the flaws of the individual could lead to the overthrow of the dynasty and also of political order. Looked at differently, our assumptions may be misplaced. The notion that politics should be peaceful may say more about aspiration than reality. At any rate, Charles should be judged in the context of his age.

I am less certain of the author's claim that this "is a story for our times, of populist politicians and religious war, of manipulative media and the reshaping of nations." Instead, alongside arresting similarities, the differences between the ages emerge clearly. A perfect book for a relaxing, but interesting, dip into a fascinating period of history.

Notebook

Gavin Stamp, 1948–2017

by Clive Aslet

Gavin Stamp, who died a few days after Christmas last year, was well-named. As an architectural historian, he was as ready to give battle as his namesake, Sir Gavin, one of the boldest knights of King Arthur's Round Table. And he would stamp if he had to—with energy, absolute conviction, and a disregard for other people's toes.

The stamping was not an expression of bad temper so much as rage, directed against the destruction of Britain's built heritage of railway stations and red telephone boxes, war memorials and churches (even if obscure). Gavin rode to the rescue of these comely structures, the great and the everyday, by fearlessly attacking the dragons of redevelopment into whose clutches they had fallen. Architects and philistines alike writhed beneath his pen.

A tall man, whose long, slab-like face recalled an Easter Island statue, Gavin would not have looked out of place in one of Oliver Cromwell's parliaments—and he had the same kind of certainty in his opinions. People who met him in the flesh were overcome by his charm, diffidence, and erudition. But to the architectural establishment he was a scourge, as fervent in his denunciations as a seventeenth-century Leveller or Anabaptist. He published several scholarly books and gave innumerable lectures, delivered in a bravura style, with sometimes a couple of hundred images and never any notes. He gave freely of his time to pressure groups and learned societies. But he reached a wider audience as a journalist, and it's for his writing that Britain—and the world—will chiefly miss him. Who else will there be to defend us from the greedy developers who are seeking to wreck Britain's cities, or the conceited, time-serving architects who do their bidding? "Architecture," wrote Gavin in one of his last books, *Anti-Ugly*, a collection of essays written for *Apollo* magazine, "is the only art you cannot escape." To him the enemies of beauty were simply evil.

There were innumerable diatribes, fewer paeans of praise for living architects, whom he tried to avoid meeting in person—to do so would have spiked his rhetoric. Being humane at heart, Gavin softened his criticism of the works of those he knew personally, and indeed brought himself to like some of them, particularly those who enjoyed a sociable drink. Although the Anglican church was quietly important, Gavin's moral voice derived ultimately from the Victorian thinkers John Ruskin and William Morris. He also stood in the vituperative tradition of Evelyn Waugh and especially the travel writer and controversialist Robert Byron ("I find Byron's comparative obscurity a puzzle," he wrote in *The Spectator* in 1981). But the fulminations were always informed by Gavin's scholarship. For all his energy and knowledge, he never produced the big narrative history for which his admirers hoped; he once told a friend that his natural length was the sprint, not the marathon. But the cumulative effect of his journalism and other writing, over more than forty years, was prodigious.

Gavin's passion for architecture began at Dulwich College, the private school in south

London—Gavin won a free place—built in the Victorian era that he loved. A great-uncle was Lord Stamp, a chairman of the Midland and Scottish Railway, but Gavin's home circumstances were not rich; his father failed to make a success of the grocery chain he inherited and instead became a driving instructor (which may be why Gavin never learned to drive). By the time he went to Gonville and Caius College, Cambridge, in the turbulent year of 1968, his stance—not merely anti-Modernist but anti–modern life—was fully formed. This was a time of long hair and marijuana, and Gavin's right-wing tutor John Casey remembers his appearance in Victorian dress as being "like the Relief of Mafeking." He could be seen, in starched collar, painting backdrops for theatrical productions; he also decorated a café called Waffles, from shop front to menu cards.

I first knew Gavin in the mid-1970s when he was teaching a course at Cambridge; his towering, watch chain–wearing presence, clad in tweeds and corduroys of Edwardian cut, added to the individualism of the History of Art Department, already remarkable for the immaculate pinstripes of David Watkin and the brightly colored snakeskin jackets of Robin Middleton. He was living in an attic flat rented from a Victorian church, now demolished, in what was then the little-colonized south London borough of Southwark. Each of the many steps—indeed every surface—was piled high with books, often dating from what he regarded as the zenith of architectural publishing, the turn of the twentieth century. Without the benefit of Amazon or AbeBooks, these volumes had to be hunted down in secondhand shops, but the prices had yet to rise.

On the table would be the tools with which Gavin made bookplates, posters, and Christmas cards, in the black-and-white style of his early-twentieth-century heroes F. L. Griggs, William Nicholson, and Frank Brangwyn. For Gavin was a talented illustrator. A notable friend, colorful even by the standards of the circle in which Gavin moved, was the architect Roderick Gradidge (he wore a gray kilt, for reasons, as he would explain in an embarrassingly piercing voice, of ventilation, as well as a pigtail: the combination made him look like a sailor on a man o' war). When Roddy designed a columbarium for the ultra-High Anglican church St. Mary Bourne Street, Gavin drew the lettering. Both Gavin and Roddy were pillars of the Art Workers Guild, a Morris-inspired meeting place for artists and craftsmen that dates from 1884. In later years Gavin may have neglected his artistic gifts, but he remained intensely practical—expert at the putting-up of the bookshelves that were needed in great quantity.

In those years, Gavin was still researching his Ph.D. on the mentally troubled Victorian architect George Gilbert Scott Junior, son of the titanic Sir (George) Gilbert Scott; the latter was the architect of the Midland Hotel at St. Pancras Station, among other buildings—it was in a room there that, by a horrible, perhaps intended, irony, the younger Scott died of cirrhosis of the liver. Gavin's choice of subject—a forgotten, minor figure with an intriguing story—was characteristic, for his knowledge of Victorian architecture was encyclopedic, and he enjoyed exploring the brooks and tributaries of architectural history as much as the main stream. In time his taste would move into the twentieth century, and he became chairman of the Thirties (later Twentieth Century) Society.

One landmark on this aesthetic journey was the 1981 Lutyens exhibition, held in London's Hayward Gallery. Sir Edwin Lutyens was a bête noire to the zealots of the Modern Movement; they hated his romanticism, Classicism, and (as the architect of the Viceroy's House at New Delhi) imperialism. His reputation was restored by the exhibition, for which the concrete bunker of the Hayward was transformed into a series of domestic spaces by the postmodern architect Piers Gough: Gavin wrote a catalogue essay on the Viceroy's House and some of the captions—such as one to a photograph of Lutyens on an elephant tended "by his faithful mahout Reyner Banham." (Banham was an aging architectural guru, famous for writings on Los Angeles and Brutalism.) Spoofs greatly appealed to Gavin's sense of humor. He invented the Arnold B. Mitchell Society, named after an Edwardian architect:

the joke of which was that it did not exist. There was always a lot of fun.

Effervescence was not incompatible with a lofty seriousness. This was demonstrated on the numerous tours that he led for the Victorian Society and the Twentieth Century Society, always to an agenda that seemed to include more than any reasonable enthusiast or bus driver could accomplish. There was no time for dawdling, and anyone who could not keep up with the stride of Gavin's exceptionally long legs would just have to miss out or be left behind. The pace may have suited Gavin's own restless energy. The knowledge that Gavin freely poured into the notes accompanying these trips was immense. Often the descent of a group of architectural enthusiasts, with Gavin at the helm, caused astonishment to the people in the country-house-turned-nursing-home or cinema-now-bingo-hall that was being visited. The fashionable inhabitants of the sixteenth arrondissement in Paris looked on in amazement as a phalanx of eager, eccentrically dressed Anglophones ignored the elegance of the quartier to study a 1930s fire station, built from reinforced concrete. (For the sake of absolute accuracy I should add that this weekend was not masterminded by Gavin, although his presence—outwardly grave, inwardly amused—added to the improbability.) I did not go on the tours he led to New Delhi. I wish I had.

On coming down from Cambridge, Gavin had gotten to know Sir John Betjeman, the Poet Laureate who had become a television personality championing steam trains, Victorian architecture, and the suburbs. They shared a passion for conservation. It led Gavin to be recruited by the fortnightly satirical magazine *Private Eye* to take over the column started by Betjeman: "Nooks and Corners of the New Barbarism." Under the nom de guerre Piloti—from the piers that lift Corbusian buildings from the ground—he would continue to write it for the next four decades. Together with signed articles for *The Daily Telegraph* and *The Spectator*, the column savaged the promoters of Modernism, at a time when British architecture was at its nadir. Betjeman had been inclined to whimsicality; Gavin's tone was that of moral outrage and disgust. An early target was the History Faculty Building at Cambridge by Sir James Stirling; Richard (now Lord) Rogers and Norman (now Lord) Foster were equally in his sights. Scarification was not, however, reserved for them. One might have thought that architects ostensibly more congenial to Gavin's (initially) High Tory point of view, such as the classicist Quinlan Terry, would have been spared—but no. They weren't good enough to meet Gavin's expectations; few were.

To the individuals on the receiving end of Gavin's wrath, some of whom were surprisingly thin-skinned, considering their eminence in the world, the columns must have been irksome. The targets should have been big enough to take it—and besides, didn't they deserve the mauling they got? If nothing else, Gavin made Britain, a country that has traditionally valued the word and music above art and architecture, take its built culture more seriously. It was not enough to stop the tide of uglification that has overwhelmed parts of Britain, particularly what used to be countryside. But standards of architecture, and the public's awareness of it, are now far higher than in the arrogance of the 1970s. Gavin's influence should stand beside that of the Prince of Wales—a figure whom, typically, he scorned—as one factor among others in this improvement.

There was a time when Gavin was seen principally in the company of other men, but it became clear that he was also attractive to women, and they to him. In 1982, he married the witty, irreverent, decidedly un-domestic journalist Alexandra Artley, whose contributions to *Harpers & Queen* were flashes of brilliance. They bought a house in what was then the rundown area of King's Cross, not yet cleared of prostitutes, where they dispensed non-stop hospitality to their literary and artistic friends. This was the Thatcher decade, and privatization caused one of Gavin's most memorable campaigns: a defense of the iconic red telephone box, designed by Sir Giles Gilbert Scott, son of G. G. Scott, Jr., which the newly created British Telecom wanted to replace wholesale, largely for reasons of corpo-

rate image. It planned to sweep all but a few dozen red boxes from the land. Gavin began a program of documentation, photographing red boxes wherever they could be seen—on hilltops; half-submerged by sand dunes on the Scottish coast; standing like guardsmen (both the 1926 K2 and 1936 K6 or "Jubilee" kiosks) in serried ranks on prominent city streets. Others joined the campaign, and 2,500 boxes were protected through listing. Alas, this was but a proportion of the whole, and the despised off-the-peg Continental booths arrived—and are still with us, cluttering British streets, even though public telephones of any kind have been superseded by mobile technology.

During these years, Gavin supported the household, which now included two daughters, Agnes and Cecilia, by freelance writing for newspapers and periodicals. Impossible now, it was not an easy way to earn bread and butter even then. Security came from an unexpected quarter: Glasgow, where he was offered a post at the Mackintosh School of Architecture at the famous School of Art, designed by Charles Rennie Mackintosh, and where he became a professor. Here was recognition, and the Stamps burned their bridges by selling their St. Chad's Street house; it was now 1990 and Gavin was appalled by the unbridled materialism of the "loadsamoney" capital. In Glasgow, he practically became an honorary Scot.

Initially Gavin loved the place. Architecturally, he adored the nineteenth-century city, buying the house that the Glaswegian neoclassicist Alexander "Greek" Thomson had built for himself in 1861. He founded a Greek Thomson Society, and organized an exhibition on his work, with a catalogue. He liked teaching young people. Always happy in the company of an older generation, he enjoyed meeting old Modernist architects, whose work he came to understand. He mellowed. Disgusted by the excesses of the City of London after the financial deregulation of Big Bang, he wavered in his Toryism. He warmed to the romance of Scottish Nationalism. By the end of his life, he had become, unexpectedly, European in outlook, vehemently denouncing Brexit. He also looked back with fondness to the Britain of his childhood in the 1950s, and the idealism of the newly created welfare state.

Glasgow became also his prison. The restoration of the Greek Thomson house was a herculean task; his marriage foundered. It was said, perhaps unfairly, that Gavin's fearless speaking of truth had offended too many people in a city with a small middle class. But the cost of London property, which had soared during his absence, made it difficult for him to return to old haunts. A two-year fellowship at his old Cambridge college, during which he worked on a never-completed history of British architecture between the Wars, provided a respite. Afterwards he bought a flat in an Edwardian mansion block in leafy Forest Hill; one attraction was a long corridor which he could line with books. He had by now met the author Rosemary Hill, who was writing what would be an acclaimed biography of A. W. N. Pugin: on first meeting they hotly debated his death, which may or may not have been caused by syphilis. In 2014, they married.

Unlike his friend and fellow architectural historian Dan Cruickshank, Gavin never conquered the dominant medium of the age: television. He was not commissioned to make more than a few travel programs. He left two substantial books: *An Architect of Promise: George Gilbert Scott, Jr.* (2002), on the subject of his Ph.D. thesis, which condenses his ideas about Victorian architecture, and *The Memorial to the Missing of the Somme* (2006). The latter was a masterpiece, combining Gavin's love of Lutyens with his romantic preoccupation with the tragedy of the First World War. But it is above all as a life force—funny, argumentative, indomitable, original, an unmissable sight above many a crowded room when a party was on the go—that he will be remembered by friends. And there were many, many friends.