

The New Criterion

January 2019

A monthly review *edited by Roger Kimball*

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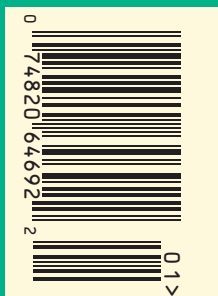
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Notes & Comments: January 2019

If Orwell were alive today . . .

It's time for another trip to Williams College. Regular readers will recall some of our earlier trips to that quaint, protected menagerie tucked away in the Berkshires where, for a mere \$69,950 per annum, you can—supposing you got the right grades in high school or check the right boxes—while away four years claiming to be oppressed and, if you enjoy pretending that you do not know whether you are male or female, try on a bizarre list of made-up personal pronouns announcing your indeterminacy. Wot larks!

Regular readers will also recall our words of praise for the so-called “Chicago Statement” a few years back. What made that document so unusual in the fetid atmosphere of timorous totalitarian conformity that is the rule at most academic institutions these days was its rousing defense of free speech. Everywhere from Yale to Berkeley, coddled students clamour to be protected from “offensive” ideas—that is, from ideas that challenge their taken-for-granted pieties about the world. It used to be that higher education was about expanding one's horizons and learning new things. More and more these days, it is about donning the ideological blinders so that no idea not certified to reinforce one's prejudices slips through to unsettle one's complacency. Into that humid atmosphere came a major university saying, Balderdash! If you want a “safe space” into which scary ideas will not intrude, the statement said, in effect, you should not come to

the University of Chicago. The essence of the statement is captured in these few lines:

In a word, the University's fundamental commitment is to the principle that debate or deliberation may not be suppressed because the ideas put forth are thought by some or even by most members of the University community to be offensive, unwise, immoral, or wrong-headed.

The good news is that some fifty-three universities, including such distinguished institutions as Columbia, Princeton, Johns Hopkins, Georgetown, Purdue, and Michigan State, have adopted the principles enunciated by the Chicago Statement. The bad news is that the adoption is often nominal and that fifty-three out of some 5,300 is a pretty small number.

Nevertheless, the Chicago Statement is a welcome beacon of sanity and principled tolerance in a landscape disfigured by febrile sloganeering and hectoring intolerance. It was with happy surprise, therefore, that we greeted the news this past autumn that some enterprising faculty at Williams had begun circulating a petition to adopt the Chicago principles of free speech and open debate. The key part of the document notes that “While there is an understandable desire to protect our students from speech they find offensive, doing so risks shutting down legitimate dialogue and failing to prepare our students to deal effectively with a diversity of opinions, including views they might vehemently disagree with.” Once upon a time, and not so long ago, such a statement would have

been unexceptionable, almost a cliché. Likewise this declaration:

We believe that Williams College, as an institution of higher learning, must maintain a strong commitment to academic freedom. We further believe that Williams should protect and promote the free expression of ideas. We should be encouraged to use reasoned argument and civil discourse to criticize and contest views we dispute, not to suppress these views and risk falling down the slippery slope of choosing what can and what cannot be discussed.

Some 125 people, about half the voting faculty, signed the document. Support cut across disciplines and ideological affiliation, which was heartening (especially since the ideological complexion of the Williams faculty, with only a tiny handful of exceptions, ranges from Left to far-far Left). The old liberal idea that the best way to counter ideas you don't like is through reasoned debate still found its partisans among the Williams faculty.

Not so heartening was the intervention by students to scuttle the petition. In the face of student hectoring ("Free Speech Harms," declared one set of posters), several brave souls (irony alert) among the faculty withdrew their names from the petition. It was originally intended to be sent to the Williams administration to be considered for adoption, but the contretemps forced, or at least led to, its withdrawal.

In one sense, this is just business as usual in a contemporary American college. A proposal for some laudable reform is drafted, circulated, and subjected to seemingly endless discussion by the faculty, which gives everyone an opportunity to posture and preen. Students claim that they are not being sufficiently consulted and then pout. We were surprised that classes were not canceled and the president's office was not occupied by minatory students. But what makes this episode in the bucolic hills of Williamstown noteworthy is the counter-petition written by "an amorphous group of students activists [*sic*] who came together to hex all fascists" and signed (when last we checked) by 363 students, about 18 percent of the student body. Addressed to "The Williams Community"

this curious document is notable partly for its illiteracies but mostly for its splenetic attack on the very idea of free speech.

The authors of this counter-petition were exercised that students were not brought into discussion about the original pro-free speech petition earlier. Was that not "completely antithetical to a free speech premise"? The answer, of course, is No, because the faculty and the administration enjoy prerogatives that students, being students, do not.

But the objection that students weren't part of the process was just a little preliminary throat-clearing. The ire of the student petition was directed chiefly at the idea that free speech and open debate are worthy ideals to pursue in an academic setting. Moreover, they assert, the idea of free speech articulated by the Chicago Statement is just a blind for supporting inequitable power relations. Consequently, they "take grave issue with the premises of [the Williams faculty petition supporting the Chicago Statement] and the potential harm it may inflict upon our community."

This is the latest political gambit in the debate over free speech: assert that what goes under the mantle of free speech is really no such thing. It works like this:

"Free Speech," as a term, has been co-opted by right-wing and liberal parties as a discursive cover for racism, xenophobia, sexism, anti-semitism, homophobia, transphobia, ableism, and classism. The creation of this petition at Williams cannot be separated from those dehumanizing associations.

Where does one begin? The authors of this little bijoux are full of histrionics—they speak darkly of the dissemination of views that "reject us, and our very right to speak/breathe," for example. But who or what is imposing these horrors? The Williams College faculty and administration? Is there a spot on earth more hospitable to racial and ethnic minorities and sexual exotics than a modern liberal arts college? Williams occupies a coveted place near the top of that food chain, with its charming campus, its \$2.8 billion endowment, its talented students and (mostly) distinguished faculty. Is there on

this side of Alpha Centauri a more coddled, protected, privileged, attentive environment for students than a college like Williams? Is there a less racist, xenophobic, sexist, etc., place on earth? Is there a more fatuous one?

“Diversity” is the great academic shibboleth of the day. The authors of this counterpetition make a big show of demanding greater diversity at Williams. But, as has long been obvious to anyone familiar with contemporary academic culture, calls for diversity are in the end calls for strict intellectual and moral conformity on any contentious issue. By this standard, a campus is more “diverse” the fewer traditional voices it tolerates. It is also worth noting that a commitment to “diversity” seems to be an impediment rather than a goad to intellectual curiosity, a habit that one might have thought was at the center of a liberal arts education.

A few years ago, the commentator John Derbyshire, an occasional contributor to our pages, was invited to Williams as part of its “Uncomfortable Learning” initiative. He was invited, but then promptly uninvited by then-President Adam Falk. What made Derbyshire “uncomfortable” to some were opinions he had expressed about race. Falk, bowing to student outcry, couldn’t bear the thought that someone with a different perspective about such matters should be allowed to pollute the sylvan purlieu of Williamstown. As a result, the students there were deprived of an opportunity to conjure with opinions that they might accept or reject but upon which they would surely hone the rigor of their own views.

The authors of the manifesto against free speech are aghast that anyone should have even considered inviting John Derbyshire to campus. Just think, if the principles of the Chicago Statement were to be adopted, then the evil Derbyshire would have been allowed to speak at Williams! Horrors. “John Derbyshire,” declared one student, “literally said that Black people are not humans.” Our January challenge to readers: provide evidence that John Derbyshire “literally said that Black people are not humans.” We don’t advise spending a lot of time on the project.

Here’s an interesting thought experiment: is it permissible on a contemporary college campus to ask whether traits such as intelligence are heritable? Is it permissible to ask whether there are cognitive differences that can be observed between the sexes? Is it permissible to ask why Hungarians or Indians or some other group might seem to be more clever at math than others? Those are among the questions we can imagine John Derbyshire might ask. To answer our first question: no, it is not permissible to ask such questions on most contemporary college campuses. But why? Because we don’t like the facts that the answers may compel us to acknowledge?

As we say, the Williams bulletin is just business as usual in Academia Inc. these days. In part, it is just the sort of angry playacting that students since the 1960s have indulged in to convince themselves that they are not wholly irrelevant. There is something faintly comical about the exercise, especially at a pampered institution like Williams. But what caught our attention about this latest example of radical playacting was its casual rejection of the very thing that makes education, as distinct from indoctrination, possible: free speech and open debate. In rejecting the principles of the Chicago Statement, Williams’s advocates for “diversity” embrace what is essentially a Leninist view of culture. Power, not persuasion, is the coin of that realm. It is as if they took Orwell’s *Nineteen Eighty-Four* as a how-to manual. Night is day, peace is war, and free expression is an insidious form of slavery.

The political philosopher James Burnham once noted that civilizations more frequently perish from suicide than from invasion. So it is in the contemporary academy. It took centuries to evolve a system where the pursuit of truth and culture could be conducted under the aegis of discussion instead of the aegis of coercion. The babies at Williams seem willing, nay, eager to jettison that for their favored prescriptive regime. Meanwhile, Maud S. Mandel, the new president of Williams, has convened a committee to study the problem. That’s more or less like convening a committee to discuss whether or not the college should commit suicide, but that’s how things are in the expensive redoubts of Williamstown *circa* 2018.

Permanent Things: Russell Kirk's centenary

by Roger Kimball

In essence, the body of belief we call "conservatism" is an affirmation of normality in the concerns of society.
—Russell Kirk, *The Conservative Mind*

Mark the uncanny hand of coincidence. When I began thinking about putting together a conference about the legacy of Russell Kirk last spring, I knew that we were in the middle of his centenary. We wanted to take advantage of that milestone, so we determined to hold the conference sometime in the autumn. After various deliberations and inspections of the calendar and other obligations, we settled, as if by accident, on October 19. I had no idea, when we proffered our invitations to the participants, that October 19 happened to be Kirk's birthday.

In his charming book about coincidences, Father George Rutler notes that "odious" though "the superstitious misuse of coincidence is," that perversion is "only slightly less offensive [than] the underestimation of the significance of some" coincidences. The serendipity, if not the capital-P Providence, of the date of our discussion of Russell Kirk seemed appropriate for a sage who was so

"Permanent Things: Russell Kirk's Centenary," a symposium organized by *The New Criterion*, took place on October 19, 2018, in New York City. Participants were Brian C. Anderson, T. Kenneth Cribb, Jr., Mark Henrie, Roger Kimball, Daniel J. Mahoney, Daniel McCarthy, Jeffrey O. Nelson, James Panero, James Piereson, Jeffrey Polet, R. R. Reno, and Gerald Russell. Discussion revolved around earlier versions of the essays presented in this special section.

conspicuously attuned to the eldritch, the inexplicable, the uncanny. After all, Kirk has always been one of those figures whose example is an admonition against the ontological poverty with which we saddle ourselves in our surrender to the beguiling superficialities of a thoroughly disenchanting secular materialism.

It was no accident, as the Marxists like to say, that Kirk's biggest sales by far were in the demotic realm of ghost stories, a subject that James Panero deftly explores below. If ghosts and other non-quotidian manifestations loom large in Russell Kirk's spiritual geography, it is partly because he was not beholden to the exiguous dogmas of a self-declared age of enlightenment whose defining prejudice is, in Hans-Georg Gadamer's phrase, a prejudice against prejudice.

Indeed, one of Kirk's chief attractions is the amplitude of his worldview. He did not quite approve of Walt Whitman. But there was a largeness about Kirk's view of the universe that was Whitmanian in its insouciance regarding logical niceties, which can seem sterile when counterpoised against the rude pulse of living tradition. I do not say that Kirk, as Whitman boasted, contradicted himself. But he assuredly "contained multitudes." Regarding ghosts, I believe that Kirk would have appreciated, with a twinkle, what Margot Asquith said. Asked whether she believed in ghosts, the elegant wife of the Prime Minister replied that "appearances are in their favor."

Kirk, in short, was a thinker who coaxed us to enlarge, not diminish, the existential furniture

of our world. Catholic churches in this country have lately taken to ending the Mass with a prayer to Saint Michael the Archangel. Protect us in battle, we say, be our safeguard against the *nequitiam et insidias diaboli*, the wickedness and snares of the devil. Are those just words? Airy nothings gilded with a crust of sentiment, or sentimentality? Or are we talking about real things, *Satanam aliosque spiritus malignos*?

Hold that thought.

In Henry IV Part 1, Sir John Falstaff, a thoroughly modern rogue, asks, "What is honor?" and concludes, not without a bitter dram of contempt, that honor is but a word. And what, he asks, "is in that word 'honor'? What is that 'honor'? Air. A trim reckoning," he says, "a mere scutcheon."

Russell Kirk's life was a campaign against this species of existential depreciation. For him, honor was a reality, not "air," not nothing, and I suspect his pantheon of realities had plenty of room for angels as well.

The philosopher Roger Scruton once observed that Kirk showed that conservatism is fundamentally not an economic but a cultural outlook, and that conservatism "would have no future if reduced merely to the philosophy of profit. Put bluntly," Scruton said, "conservatism is not about profit but about loss: it survives and flourishes because people are in the habit of mourning their losses, and resolving to safeguard against them."

Bill Buckley is often credited with rescuing conservatism from political irrelevance and social ostracism. Buckley's force of personality, his languid if also bright-eyed and energetic demeanor, almost single-handedly injected life into the conservative project at a moment when the pieties of a regnant liberalism were nearly ubiquitous and, therefore, taken for granted.

But if Bill Buckley reenergized the political and social fortunes of conservatism, Kirk was the person most responsible for reinvigorating the intellectual heritage of conservatism in this country. Kirk, who died in 1994 at seventy-five, was a lonely voice in the wilderness when, in 1953, he published his magnum opus, *The Conservative Mind* (two years before the inaugural issue of *National Review*).

Only a few years before, in 1950, the literary critic Lionel Trilling famously wrote that "in the United States at this time liberalism is not only the dominant but even the sole intellectual tradition. For it is the plain fact that nowadays there are no conservative or reactionary ideas in general circulation." He explained, "the conservative impulse and the reactionary impulse do not, with some isolated and some ecclesiastical exceptions, express themselves in ideas but only in action or in irritable mental gestures which seek to resemble ideas."

In a single stroke, Kirk's book challenged that diagnosis. Kirk had set out to write a kind of elegy, commemorating a great but derelict past. In the event, *The Conservative Mind* not only recovered a neglected legacy of conservative ideas, but also trumpeted a conservative future. The edition I first read, back in the 1990s, was a seventh revised edition: who knows how many printings the book has been through by now?

From the moment it appeared, the book was a sensation. I still recall the thrill it gave me. "At last," I thought, "I have come home." Describing "an inclination to cherish the permanent things in human existence," Kirk issued a challenge to liberal pieties and provided a tonic for conservative thinkers and politicians.

John Stuart Mill had once referred to conservatives as "the stupid party." Kirk's book helped restore conservatism's patent of intellectual respectability. A brief introduction outlines the six touchstones of Kirk's conservative vision: "belief in a transcendent order"; "affection for the proliferating variety and mystery of human existence"; a commitment to ordered liberty; a recognition that "freedom and property are closely linked"; faith in prescription against the putative expertise of the "sophisters, calculators, and economists" that Burke memorably anathematized in *Reflections on the Revolution in France*; and the understanding that change is not synonymous with betterment. (Kirk would have liked Lord Falkland's observation that "when it is not necessary to change, it is necessary not to change.")

Over the succeeding five hundred pages, Kirk artfully develops these themes through an analysis of the work of various conservative thinkers and movements. He begins with Edmund

Burke, the *genius loci* of Kirk's philosophical outlook, moves through John Adams and the American Founders, the English Romantics (mostly good) and Utilitarians (suspect), Southern conservatives like John Randolph and John Calhoun, and on through the conservative pantheon and its liberal antiphony. Kirk ponders Tocqueville, Macaulay, Disraeli, Newman, Mill, James Fitzjames Stephen, George Santayana, Irving Babbitt, and T. S. Eliot, among others. It is a bravura performance, based on extensive reading but too engaged and passionate to be described as "scholarly." *The Conservative Mind* is a book that examines tradition in order to reanimate and inhabit that tradition. It is an inquiry in search of a credo, not a bid for tenure.

Headquartered for most of his prolific career at Piety Hill, his family's modest ancestral home in Mecosta, Michigan, Kirk wrote some thirty books—novels and those hot-selling ghost stories along with works of intellectual history—as well as countless magazine articles and lectures. His influence was enormous. He was, for example, an important part of the founding generation of Buckley's *National Review*. He was a friend of politicians from Barry Goldwater through Richard Nixon to Ronald Reagan. But Kirk's place in cultural history is as difficult to categorize as was the man himself.

Kirk left behind two memoirs, *Confessions of a Bohemian Tory* and *The Sword of Imagination: Memoirs of a Half-Century of Literary Conflict*, a book he completed shortly before his death. Like Caesar's chronicle of his exploits in Gaul, *The Sword of Imagination* is written in the third person, which gives the book a formal, almost stately, texture. Nevertheless, the book provides a vivid portrait of a life devoted to salvaging traditional—even antique—values in a world increasingly ruled by technological and economic imperatives. "There are no lost causes," Kirk observed, quoting a favorite *mot* from T. S. Eliot, "because there are no gained causes." Our sloth, our lethargy, in the face of the fragile dispensations we take for settled realities, tends to obscure that dialectic of loss and gain.

Among those who were likely to be vexed by his meditations, Kirk notes, are "enthusiasts for modernity, the global village, the end of

history, the gross national product, emancipation from moral inhibitions, abstract rights without concomitant duties, and what Samuel Johnson called "the lust for innovation." It was part of Kirk's charm to enroll modernity (what Walter Lippmann anathematized, as Daniel Mahoney shows below, as "the acids of modernity") and the GNP in his catalogue of vices and to cast "innovation," and *a fortiori* the *lust* for innovation, into his index of suspect attitudes.

Kirk was fond of quoting H. Stuart Hughes's observation that "conservatism is the negation of ideology." His own brand of conservatism admitted principles but regarded "positions" and "dogmata" (a nice Greek plural that was one of his favorite epithets) with hostility. He blended a nostalgic romanticism with a Burkean faith in the advantages of tradition and "sound prejudice." It was from Kirk, I believe, that I first absorbed Burke's idea that prejudice is not, as we have been taught *ad nauseam*, synonymous with bigotry, but, on the contrary, that "a just prejudice"—a "prejudging" based on convention, custom, and tradition is a good thing because it renders a man's "virtue his habit," a nugget of wisdom whose lineage goes back to Aristotle's teachings about prudence and habit in the *Nicomachean Ethics*.

Kirk was almost Chestertonian in his fondness for paradox. One of my favorite Kirkian observations is that he was a conservative *because* he was a liberal. What goes under the banner of "liberalism" today has so thoroughly cut itself off from such traditional animating liberal imperatives as free speech, disinterested inquiry, and advancement according to merit that it is easy to regard Kirk's declaration as merely paradoxical. But it was not paradoxical so much as it was admonitory, recalling us to springs of freedom that only an embrace of tradition can nourish. Like Burke, Kirk understood that an affirmation of the customary and conventional is the most reliable safeguard for individuality and fructifying idiosyncrasy.

Edmund Burke is a respectable conservative icon, and Kirk did a great deal to reintroduce Burke to an American audience innocent of his work in *The Conservative Mind* and his 1967 book *Edmund Burke: A Genius Reconsidered*. As an ambassador from the territory of bygone

ideas and sentiments, Kirk can seem like a respectable conservative icon himself. In some ways he was. But we do him a disservice, I think, if we insist on making him too respectable. If he was a "Tory," he was also, as he put it, a "Bohemian" Tory. He was correct in observing that his was not an "Enlightenment mind" but a "Gothic mind, medieval in its temper and structure." Those ghosts, that suspicion of modernity and its heralds, "calculators and economists."

This feature of Kirk's temperament made for some striking, not to say eccentric, conjunctions. Like other conservatives, Kirk affirmed that "freedom and property are closely linked." But what he said of Wilhelm Roepke was also true of himself; Kirk was "no apologist for an abstract 'capitalism.'" He was no doctrinaire disciple of Friedrich Hayek or Milton Friedman, and he frequently inveighed against "our fetishes of creature comforts and material aggrandizement." Kirk rarely used the word "Progress" without a sarcastic initial capital.

The automobile, he wrote—and he always wrote "automobile," not "car"—was a "mechanical Jacobin," an "instrument of civic and familial undoing," different from the guillotine, he implied, chiefly because it lacked a sharpened blade. In his view, "industrialism was a harder knock to conservatism than the books of the French equalitarians."

Although Kirk was a friend and avid supporter of Ronald Reagan, he had nevertheless voted for the socialist Norman Thomas in 1944 to "reward" him for his anti-imperialist stand before Pearl Harbor. Later, in 1976, he lodged another protest, voting for Eugene McCarthy. Although he was a fervent patriot, Kirk believed that all the wars fought by America, the Revolutionary War included, "might have been averted." I do not think he would have been pleased by a Secretary of Defense whose nickname is "Mad Dog." At the same time, Kirk was no isolationist. As Daniel McCarthy observes in his essay below, "Kirk was not a defeatist, a quietist, or a reactionary alienated from his country and its political struggles. He was a conservative in full, who gave priority to faith and culture while nonetheless embracing politics as necessary and, within proper limits, good."

Kirk did not hesitate to enunciate forbidden opinions: "There ought to be inequality of condition in the world," he wrote. "For without inequality, there is no class; without class, no manners and no beauty; and then people sink into public and private ugliness." Fortunately, Kirk was not running for office or looking for a position in an American university.

Generally, Kirk's boldness was refreshing. Occasionally, though, he trespassed into crankishness. In 1988, for example, he wrote that "not seldom has it seemed as if some eminent Neo-conservatives mistook Tel Aviv for the capital of the United States." In my view, that judgment bespoke not a current of anti-Semitism, of which he was accused at the time, but rather was an extension of his commitment to local filiation and the integrity of national allegiance.

Although Kirk came late to religious belief—he was not received into the Catholic Church until 1964—he always believed that "political problems, at bottom, are religious and moral problems." The very first of his six "canons" of conservatism, remember, was the conviction that there exists a "transcendent order, or body of natural law, which rules society as well as conscience." He would have agreed with Irving Kristol that "All people, everywhere, at all times, are 'theotropic' beings, who cannot long abide the absence of a transcendental dimension to their lives." It is a Burkean point. "Man," said Burke, "is by his constitution a religious animal." Consequently, as Kirk wrote in a reflection on T. S. Eliot, "When religious faith decays, culture must decline, though often seeming to flourish for a space after the religion which has nourished it has sunk into disbelief . . . no cultured person should remain indifferent to erosion of apprehension of the transcendent." Kirk's life and work was a testament to that conviction, and I suspect that it may be his most precious legacy to this technology-besotted world. Kirk wielded his sword of imagination not so much to influence policy but, as he said, "to rouse the political and moral imagination among the shapers of public opinion." Few will agree with all of Kirk's opinions. But all conservatives must be grateful to him for recalling us to values that are as precious as they are besieged.

Conservatism & the politics of prudence

by Daniel J. Mahoney

All profound political movements draw their strength from some earlier body of belief: twentieth-century socialism from the Marx of the middle of the nineteenth century; Russian revolutionary violence from French Jacobinism; radical liberalism from Rousseau, whom Burke had called “the insane Socrates of the National Assembly.” Kirk’s source of wisdom was Edmund Burke.

—Russell Kirk, *The Sword of Imagination: Memoirs of a Half-Century of Literary Conflict* (1995)

No one can read the Burke of Liberty and the Burke of Authority without feeling that here was the same man pursuing the same ends, seeking the same ideals of society and Government, and defending them from assaults, now from one extreme, now from the other. The same danger approached the same man from different directions and in different forms, and the same man turned to face it with incomparable weapons, drawn from the same armoury, used in a different quarter, but for the same purpose.

—Winston Churchill, “Consistency in Politics” in *Thoughts and Adventures* (1932)

Now and again, Burke praises two great virtues, the keys to private contentment and public peace: they are prudence and humility, the first pre-eminently an attainment of classical philosophy, the second pre-eminently a triumph of Christian discipline. Without them, man must be miserable; and man destitute of piety hardly can perceive either of these rare and blessed qualities.

—Russell Kirk, *The Conservative Mind* (1953)

No student of the thought or statesmanship of Edmund Burke can ignore the contribution of Russell Kirk to the renewal of Burkean wisdom in the twentieth century. As Kirk freely acknowledged, Burke was largely the source of Kirk’s own political wisdom, and Kirk, from the early 1950s onward, did much to draw out the conservative resonances of Burke’s thought and action. Kirk first wrote about Burke in the summer of 1950 in a *Queen’s Quarterly* article tellingly called “How Dead is Edmund Burke?” Kirk very much believed that Burke was relevant to addressing modern discontents and that the Anglo-Irish statesman’s wisdom and “moral imagination” (a Burkean phrase from *Reflections on the Revolution in France* much beloved by Kirk) could play a central role in renewing Western and Anglo-American civilization. This was at the beginning of the Burke revival marked by the scholarship and advocacy of Ross J. S. Hoffmann, Thomas Copeland, Francis Canavan, Peter Stanlis, and Robert Nisbet, among others. Kirk was at the center of this Burkean constellation even if he was less a Burke scholar than a learned and eloquent partisan of Burke’s contribution to the sustenance and renewal of the conservative mind. Kirk’s own writings on Burke are particularly sparkling and have their share of Burke-like aphorisms and bon mots. They are memorable and eminently quotable and are among the part of Kirk’s work that will surely endure.

Like Winston Churchill, himself a profound admirer of Burke, Kirk fully appreciated the unity and consistency of purpose underlying

Burke's thought and action. As Kirk writes near the beginning of *The Conservative Mind*, Burke was at once a liberal as well as a conservative—"the foe of arbitrary power, in Britain, in America, in India" (and, one might add, in Ireland, where the Catholic majority of the late eighteenth century was still subject to brutal repression under the increasingly archaic Penal Laws). Kirk reminds us in several places that in 1789, Paine, Mirabeau, and others expected Burke the liberal, the critic of arbitrary power, to lead the fight for a regime of pure popular sovereignty in England and to express robust sympathy and support for the French Revolution as it attempted aggressively to destroy all remnants of the old regime.

They did not understand that Burke, the conservative-minded liberal, adamantly opposed the intrusion of abstract theory into practice (like the "little catechism of the rights of men" that dominated French Revolutionary doctrine and rhetoric with increasingly destructive results), and the brutal assault on the inherited wisdom of the ages. Burke did not hesitate to defend sound "prejudice"—the reason inherent in tradition and collective wisdom. He was a friend of political reason or prudence ("the god of this lower world," as he called it in the "Letter to the Sheriffs of Bristol") but the deadly enemy of every form of abstract Rationalism. He denounced the excesses of King and Court, as well as the marauding and brutal Warren Hastings of the British East India Company, precisely for their "innovations" and their disregard of old and well-established liberties and customs. At times, Burke would appeal to "common humanity" and "the eternal laws of justice" (as in the decade-long impeachment of Hastings).

But in doing so he was appealing to what Kirk suggestively calls the "universal constitution of civilized peoples": respect for tradition and inherited morality, support for equality under God but only under God, and fierce opposition to "doctrinaire alteration" of the rules of civilized existence. Burke abhorred slavery and injustice but did not try to remake long-established societies in a stroke. He supported reform as a means of conservation as long as the changes promoted by reformers

were largely so gradual as to be insensible and therefore not destructive of the continuity of society. Burke thus carefully kept his conservatism and liberalism in balance, each reinforcing the other. Paine and Mirabeau (among others) initially mistook Burke for a doctrinaire man wholly at home in the Enlightenment. This was a mistake they would come to regret, as Burke became their fiercest and most gifted rhetorical enemy. Like Churchill, Kirk appreciated that conservative ideas underlie even Burke's liberalism and his accompanying struggle with arbitrary power in all its forms. It is these "conservative ideas" on which Kirk puts particular stress in *The Conservative Mind* and in his 1967 biography of Burke, *Edmund Burke: A Genius Reconsidered* (which was republished by ISI Books in 1997).

As Kirk was careful to note, Burke never made natural right the direct foundation of political life and political judgment. That was too revolutionary and too doctrinaire, and it risked separating the rights of man from one's equally important duties as a human being and member of the social order. But he defended a traditional system of morals indebted to Aristotle, Cicero, the Fathers of the Church, and Hooker and Milton. Burke claimed no originality in this regard, as Kirk points out. But through his eloquence and fiery Irish spirit, he "put new warmth into their phrases, so that their ideas flamed above the Jacobin torches." He thus renewed old and enduring wisdom, what Kirk, following Eliot, called the "permanent things." It is in this limited sense that Burke's politics of prudence perfectly coheres with the "natural law," understood as moral verities that largely transcend historical change and cultural variation. As Greg Weiner argues in an impressive forthcoming book on Burke's and Lincoln's views on prudence, Burke believed that political judgment was essentially circumstantial but that moral truths came closer to reflecting unchanging truths about human nature and the divine and natural "constitution of things." So understood, Burke is both a partisan of prudence (not to be confused with fearful timidity or "the false, reptile prudence" that Burke denounced in the

Letters on a Regicide Peace) and the moral law as articulated by the moral traditions of the Christian West and by other civilized peoples. This moral consensus is related to “the universal constitution of peoples” mentioned above. To affirm a politics of prudence is not to deny a common “moral constitution” that belongs to man as man. In that limited sense, Burke is as “universalist” as Aristotle or St. Thomas Aquinas. And Burke adds, as Kirk is right to observe, a note of Christian humility before the moral inheritance which is among the great gifts of classical and Christian civilization.

Kirk made two additional contributions to Burke studies, both of some significance. Kirk stressed that Burke was among the first to see the limits, all the limits, of social contract theorizing. Choice and consent play some legitimate role in politics (guided by humane and prudent judgment), but they should never obscure obligatory duties that are not a “matter of choice.” Parents, citizens, neighbors, and children all have “burdensome duties” (as Burke puts it in *An Appeal from the New to the Old Whigs*) that they are obliged to carry out with grace and a sense of responsibility. Likewise, Kirk noted, Burke believed that every member of a political community was “obliged to obey the laws and sustain the state.” Choice plays an important role in politics (and marriage), but it cannot be the basis of every aspect of life. Duty is as fundamental as consent. Kirk stresses the multiple ways in which Burke’s conservative liberalism was decidedly un-Lockean: while defending the rights of property, Burke never believed that civil society arose from a pre-political “state of nature.” Men and women are not truly born “free and independent,” and the only true social contract is “between those who are living, those who are dead, and those who are to be born.” That is the great primeval contract that Burke so eloquently invokes in the *Reflections on the Revolution in France*. In the quarrel of the ancients and the moderns, he sides with the classics and the Christians against full-blown modern “individualism.”

Kirk is surely right that such a “conservative” basis of the social tie would unnerve classical

Whigs from John Locke in the seventeenth century to Thomas Babington Macaulay in the nineteenth. Unlike Burke, they were blind, or at least inattentive, to what I have called, in a book of that name, “the conservative foundations of the liberal order.” This is especially true of John Locke. In his most “reactionary” moments (I do not mean this formulation as a criticism), Kirk hopes for the restoration of a “society guided by veneration and prescription.” That is too much to hope for societies profoundly transformed by the individualist premises at the heart of Lockean liberalism. There is seemingly no going back to the world of prejudice, prescription, and presumption, all understood in the elevated Burkean meaning of those terms. Burke and Kirk are right: the “spirit of religion” and the “spirit of the gentleman” were in large part responsible for the greatness of Western civilization. As Harvey Mansfield has compellingly argued, modern bureaucrats, technicians, and ideologues are no substitute for the noblesse oblige and the humane and prudent judgment of the gentleman at his very best. But the moral capital represented by religion and the gentleman is fast eroding and cannot become the explicit foundation of Western societies, at least in a world consumed by the “acids of modernity” to borrow a phrase from Walter Lippmann. Yet Lockean premises remain woefully inadequate for understanding the sources of the Western spirit and the true grounds of moral and political obligation.

Kirk argued, not wholly convincingly, that Burke is “not Outside the American experience.” There is something vaguely un-American about Burke: he emphasizes tradition and duty to a degree that is not palatable to rights-obsessed Americans. Yet Kirk is certainly correct to argue in his biography of Burke that “to seek political wisdom from Burke is no more exotic for Americans than it is to seek humane insights from Shakespeare or spiritual insights from St. Paul.” Burke embodies that paradox: the theorist of the limits of doctrine or abstract theorizing who nonetheless articulates the enduring features of a politics of prudence. All defenders of the arts of prudence ought to draw on his wisdom. And as

Kirk repeatedly argued, Burke became particularly relevant in the age of ideology, when new forms of “armed doctrine” threatened the bodies and souls of human beings in a truly unprecedented way. The Communists and Nazis made the Jacobins look like amateurs, a mere dress rehearsal for a much more thoroughgoing totalitarian assault on decency, liberty, and human nature. In some profound way, Burke saw it all coming.

For Kirk, Burke was above all the prudent and humane advocate of ordered freedom. Liberty entails limitation, order demands respect for the liberty and dignity of human beings, especially those long rooted in the social and political life of a free people such as the English. In *The Conservative Mind*, Kirk makes clear what order is not for Burke. He quotes the *Regicide Peace* at some length: Burke forcefully attacks the Jacobin assault on individuality, its militarization of social life, and its “dominion over minds by proselytism, over bodies by arms.” Kirk observes that this lucid and compelling description is even more true of the totalitarian “elites” of the twentieth century, the National Socialists and Communists. In his biography of Burke, Kirk has a splendid chapter on Burke’s war with the “armed doctrine” unleashed by French Jacobinism. Today, we call such “armed doctrine” ideological or utopian fanaticism. It was the scourge of much of the twentieth century, as Kirk fully appreciated. Burke’s prudence entailed a recognition that “politics is the art of the possible” and is incompatible with violent revolution and sweeping plans for political innovation. Modern-day utopians and ideologists succumbed to a brutal “Moloch of the future”: a belief in inevitable Progress that systematically wars with human nature as it is. Modern ideologists confuse fallible men with gods who are free to remake the world at a stroke. As Roger Scruton has written in his autobiographical *Gentle Regrets*, Burke is the wisest and most lucid critic of “the unscrupulous belief in the future that has dominated . . . and perverted modern politics.”

Since promethean impatience will always haunt modernity, Burke will remain our

indispensable contemporary. We need his intellectual and moral resources, his exemplary mixture of courage and moderation, to resist new and unpredictable eruptions of the totalitarian temptation. Burke resisted the Jacobin threat to decency, moderation, and liberty with the same insight and determination that informed Solzhenitsyn’s resistance to Communist totalitarianism in the twentieth century. Leo Strauss, who otherwise profoundly admired Burke, once claimed (in the final pages of *Natural Right and History*) that Burke did not sufficiently appreciate the nobility of last-ditch resistance—“guns blazing and flags flying” against manifestations of true political evil. In his biography of Burke, Kirk countered that throughout the 1790s in England, Burke was the “last-ditch resistance,” a modern-day Cato crying in the night that the curse of Jacobinism must be erased from the face of the earth. On this matter, Strauss, like the proverbial Homer, nodded. Burke is the first and greatest enemy of the proto-totalitarianism that arose in France in the 1790s. He had nothing but contempt for excessive timidity or “false, reptile prudence” even as he honored the true moderation which remained faithful to the ample and humanizing moral and political resources of the Western tradition.

The great French political thinker Raymond Aron, half liberal and half conservative himself, spoke suggestively in a 1957 essay on conservatism in modern industrial societies about the two ways of reading Edmund Burke today. Burke’s polemics against the French Revolution

can be read as definitive condemnations of political rationalism—or of ideological fanaticism. As a defense and illustration of the hierarchy of the Old Regime in its particularity or as a demonstration that all society implies a hierarchy and only prospers in the reciprocal respect of rights and duties. Burke has either pleaded against democratic ideas, or for wisdom.

The French word *sagesse* (wisdom) is also synonymous with prudence in the high sense of that term. In which of these two ways did Kirk approach Burke? An argument can be made

that he promoted him as more of a “traditionalist” than as wise or prudent in an essentially democratic society. At certain moments, there is something musty about his Burke. But that is not the dominant note in Kirk’s approach to Burke.

Above all, Kirk read Burke as a lover of liberty who was fully cognizant of liberty’s dialectical dependence on a traditional or classical moral order. Kirk certainly established that Burke provides powerful arguments and insights for opposing ideological fanaticism in all its forms. In any case, Kirk fully acknowledged that our world was much more explicitly and emphatically “democratic” than the liberalizing and modernizing world in which Burke lived. In a little-noticed passage in *The Conservative Mind*’s section on Tocqueville, Kirk argues that Tocqueville “excels his philosophical master,” Burke, in one crucial respect: in *Democracy in America*, the great French statesman and thinker gave “an impartial examination of the new order,” democracy, “which Burke never had time or patience to undertake.” Kirk may be going too far in stating that modern

democracy had already “taken distinct form before Burke’s death.” Kirk thus prudently concedes that Burkean wisdom must adopt to a democratic world with which Burke had never fully come to terms. This is a most striking concession on Kirk’s part about the need for admirers of Burke to bring his old and enduring wisdom to a democratic world that he did not truly inhabit or explore. Of course, this would in no way entail a capitulation to the forces of radical democracy.

Almost twenty-five years after his death, Kirk remains the best guide to the conservative ideas that inspired Edmund Burke’s unsurpassed “politics of prudence.” To celebrate and honor Kirk is to celebrate and honor Burke, the greatest source of his political wisdom and moral imagination. Both thinkers remain indispensable to the sustenance and revival of a tradition of ordered freedom, an order at odds with every manifestation of moral nihilism, social anarchy, and ideological fanaticism. May the wisdom of Burke, as mediated by Kirk, long endure.

Russell Kirk, worldly conservative

by Daniel McCarthy

Next to denouncing others on the right, the surest way for a conservative to win respect from liberals is to retire or die. Once in the grave, professionally or literally, a conservative leader becomes a standard by which to judge all who come after him as deplorable. Barry Goldwater was a maniac with a twitchy finger reaching for the nuclear trigger when he ran for president in 1964. Upon leaving the Senate in 1987, he became an elder statesman trying to exorcise Jerry Falwell from the GOP. Ronald Reagan earned a partial rehabilitation when George W. Bush was in office, and now that Donald Trump is president, the younger Bush's sins are forgiven. He had been a fascist; now the current Republican president is a fascist, and the last one is a model of civility.

Writers no less than politicians may be accorded this strange new respect. William F. Buckley Jr. is now every concerned liberal's conservative idol, an angelic counterpoint to the diabolical likes of Tucker Carlson. Buckley is remembered as the man who rid the Right of the extremists, but only so that today's conservatives can be dismissed as extreme, unless they are named Max Boot.

Russell Kirk has not yet been posthumously press-ganged into the ranks of "the resistance," but certain misunderstandings about the Sage of Mecosta and the conservatism he championed must make him a tempting target. Kirk was a man of letters who at times depreciated politics as "the preoccupation of the quarter-educated" (a phrase adapted from George Gissing). He was a man of Old World charm

and reserve; surely he would find the conservatives of the Trump era uncouth. Last but not most important, Kirk stands as a symbol of traditionalist conservatism—he was ever trenchant in his criticism of libertarians—yet today's America, including the Right (as liberals insist), simply has no place for tradition. The Kirk conservative of the twenty-first century should thus abjure politics, condemn right-leaning populists, and divorce himself from a modern, wicked America.

Already, without the political Left having to make the case, there are a few conservatives who believe this. And there are many more who, in looking to Kirk for a respite from Twitter wars and cable news cacophony, find in his works some justification for withdrawal. "Taken alone," Bradley J. Birzer writes in his biography *Russell Kirk: American Conservative*, "his books offer a blatantly apolitical or antipolitical conservatism."

Yet Kirk was not a defeatist, a quietist, or a reactionary alienated from his country and its political struggles. He was a conservative in full, who gave priority to faith and culture while nonetheless embracing politics as necessary and, within proper limits, good. What is more, in practice Kirk favored something very much like the "America First" approach that has characterized President Trump's foreign policy, economics, and opposition to multicultural ideology. What Kirk would have made of Trump's personal qualities is anyone's guess. But he was quite prepared to support Richard Nixon and continued to regard him

warmly long after he had resigned from office, as shown in his correspondence with the ex-president. Far from being a man whose conservatism is unsuited for our time, Russell Kirk's spirit and politics are more apt than ever. He does indeed provide a tonic for the degraded state of our public discourse, but he also offers the antidote to traditionalists' occasional pessimism and apolitical perfectionism.

To begin with, Kirk was never ill at ease with his country or its political tradition. One sign of that was his lifelong residence in his home state of Michigan. He was very much a Midwesterner. He had a skeptical streak, apparent early on in youthful agnosticism—he considered himself a Stoic rather than a Christian. In maturity, this would become the bedrock of his disdain for ideology. He preferred the near to the far, a disposition that in Kirk's time and in ours is often miscast as "nativism" or "isolationism." The element of frontier individualism in the American character did not horrify him, and at first Kirk himself was sympathetic to a non-ideological libertarianism. He read Albert Jay Nock's *Memoirs of a Superfluous Man* while stationed at a chemical weapons proving ground near Salt Lake City during the Second World War and corresponded with the author, who was well acquainted with the upper Midwest, about a mythical beast called the "hodag."

From the beginning, Kirk's scholarship was directed toward revealing that America had a native conservative tradition. His first book, which had been his master's thesis at Duke University before the war, was a study of the Virginia congressman John Randolph of Roanoke, an ally turned critic of Thomas Jefferson and an avowed American disciple of Edmund Burke. The subsequent book, *The Conservative Mind*, which made Kirk famous, was likewise an exploration of a Burkean philosophy that found expression in American as well as British statesmen and thinkers. The work was a refutation in advance of the claims Louis Hartz would make in *The Liberal Tradition in America*—published in 1955, two years after *The Conservative Mind*, but consisting in part of arguments aired earlier—that the United States had only ever had a liberal philosophy. In the post-war

era, the American Right embraced many émigré intellectuals, from Ayn Rand and Friedrich Hayek to Eric Voegelin and Leo Strauss. But conservatism was not simply a European import, an exotic transplant to our soil, as Kirk demonstrated. John Adams, Fisher Ames, Orestes Brownson, and other Americans down to Irving Babbitt and George Santayana in the twentieth century, belonged alongside British conservatives such as Burke, Sir Walter Scott, and Samuel Taylor Coleridge.

Kirk wrote about conservatism as a body of thought. Yet he had a concern for conservatism in practice as well. He had been a staunch critic of the New Deal, and in post-war politics he was a supporter of the Ohio Republican senator Robert Taft. Had Taft won the GOP presidential nomination in 1952, Kirk wrote in his 1995 memoir, *The Sword of Imagination*, he would have gone on to usher in "an intelligently conservative presidency—founded in foreign policy upon a realistic understanding of the national interest, in domestic policy upon a humane apprehension of the needs of a society disrupted by the War and by tremendous technological and demographic changes." In 1967, fourteen years after the senator's death, Kirk honored his memory with a short book, *The Political Principles of Robert A. Taft*, co-authored with the political scientist James McClellan.

Taft was at most a lukewarm Cold Warrior: he opposed the creation of NATO as well as Harry Truman's intervention in the Korean conflict without authorization from Congress. And though neither man was a pacifist or dismissive of the Communist threat, Kirk strongly sympathized with Taft's penchant for military restraint. It might be thought, then, that Kirk would be leery of Barry Goldwater, who was commonly perceived as a hard-liner in foreign policy. Goldwater was thought of as a libertarian, too, a sort of anti-government extremist, both in the propaganda of the Left and even in the excessively enthusiastic imaginings of some on the right.

Yet Kirk's conservatism was so far from being at odds with Goldwater's that Kirk in fact wrote two speeches for the Arizona senator's 1964 presidential campaign. Kirk was no big-government conservative, even if he had no love for gigantism

in business, either. In *A Program for Conservatives*, Kirk's 1954 follow-up to *The Conservative Mind*, he had even warned that a federal school lunch program was a dangerous step towards socialism. As for foreign policy, Kirk was above all a realist, and he knew that Goldwater was no more of a warmonger than he was himself an isolationist. He did not buy the ideological caricature of the senator from Arizona.

As early as 1955, Kirk had found cause to praise Henry Kissinger. At that time, it was Kissinger's work on Metternich and conservatism that had attracted Kirk's attention. "It is the task of the conservative," Kirk quoted from Kissinger, "not to defeat but to forestall revolutions." In a 1972 letter, Kirk described Kissinger as "a disciple of Metternich primarily, a well-read and clever man, sound on all counts, so far as I can tell." (His regard for Nixon's national security adviser had not been diminished over the intervening years by Kissinger's acceptance, while at Harvard, of a Kirk essay on Woodrow Wilson for the journal *Confluence*, which Kissinger edited.)

As Kirk read Kissinger, Richard Nixon read Kirk, taking note of his syndicated newspaper column and books, including *A Program for Conservatives*, with which Nixon showed some familiarity in a 1972 meeting with Kirk. (When Kirk revealed that he was now a Catholic—he had converted before marrying Annette Courtemanche in 1964—Nixon reminded him that he had called himself a Puritan in the book.) Nixon had first sought out the writer in 1967 as he contemplated his run for the White House the following year. Kirk at that time advised Nixon with respect to the Vietnam War, "We must do what the admirals call 'going to Haiphong'"—that is, closing the only port under North Vietnamese control to deprive the Communists of supplies. When Nixon invited Kirk and his wife to the White House in 1972, Kirk had advice of a more literary kind for the president: he commended to him T. S. Eliot's *Notes Towards the Definition of Culture*.

Kirk the Taft Republican and Goldwater speechwriter was also a Nixon Republican. He saw no contradiction in this, for his conservatism was not rigid or unworldly. He wrote to Nixon in 1971:

[S]ome rather doctrinaire conservatives of our acquaintance . . . tend to forget, from time to time, that conservatism is not a strange set of immutable rules of policy, fixed as the laws of Lycurgus, but instead of a way of looking at man and society: a cast of mind and character, governed indeed by certain sound general principles, but capable of prudential application in different ways in varying circumstances.

A month after Nixon resigned the presidency, Kirk wrote to tell him, "I believe the historians will decide that you were treated with injustice, as was President Andrew Johnson; and Johnson did not have television to prejudice the public against him."

Kirk was not absorbed by conservatism as a political movement, and still less by the Republican Party itself. He lived in Mecosta as an independent scholar, and he was quite willing to criticize the GOP or to praise a Democrat when he thought it right to do so. About one Democrat of whom he was fond, Kirk wrote in *National Review*, "Senator Eugene McCarthy, in his primary assumptions, is conservative; certainly, he quotes Burke." Kirk was on to something there: while McCarthy would become best known as a critic of Lyndon Johnson's conduct of the Vietnam War, in later life he was an immigration restrictionist. Kirk endorsed McCarthy for president as an independent candidate in 1976.

He may have done so in part because his preferred Republican candidate, Ronald Reagan, had failed to defeat the incumbent, Gerald Ford, in that year's battle for the GOP nomination. By his own account (*The Sword of Imagination* is written in the third person), "Kirk took next to no part in Reagan's successful presidential campaign" four years later, but Annette Kirk would serve on the new president's National Commission on Excellence in Education, where she argued for the primacy of the family in educational matters. Kirk, for his part, became a frequent speaker at the Department of Education and at The Heritage Foundation. In his Heritage lectures, he did not shy away from subjects controversial among conservatives. He devoted one talk in 1988 to

criticizing neoconservatives for, among other things, “pursuing a fanciful democratic globalism rather than the true national interest of the United States.” An unnecessary remark about “some eminent neoconservatives [mistaking] Tel Aviv for the capital of the United States” opened him up to accusations of anti-Semitism, though few conservatives accepted them.

Kirk had a difference of principle with the neoconservatives and with the foreign policy of the George H. W. Bush administration. He opposed the first Gulf War in strong terms, and accordingly he supported Patrick Buchanan’s 1992 populist right-wing primary campaign against Bush. More than that, Kirk served as Buchanan’s Michigan campaign chairman. In the last two years of his life, Kirk was as deep in the political fray as he had ever been. He was no campaign junkie; Kirk involved himself in politics from the days of Taft and Goldwater to those of Buchanan because his conservatism, literary and philosophical though it was at heart, had to have a political corollary, however inexact. The tradition he had masterfully delineated in *The Conservative Mind* was itself a thing of culture and politics together, not a quest for moral perfection apart from the perils of the world.

Kirk found allies in national politics in many forms. The practical side of the conservatism he advanced has notable parallels with the

program, or at least the themes, that Donald Trump has advocated since he launched his campaign for the White House. Like Trump, Kirk was a critic of U.S. foreign policy, especially in its more interventionist forms. But like Trump, he was no opponent of all use of force—as his counsel to Nixon indicated. In domestic politics, Kirk was adamantly against the federal Leviathan and believed decentralization to be the most important objective for the political Right. He would undoubtedly have some sympathy with President Trump’s battles against the federal bureaucracy or administrative “Deep State.” And while it is easy to imagine Kirk objecting to the president’s language and use of Twitter, Trump’s refusal to truckle to the demands of political correctness might well have heartened the author whose final work published in his lifetime was titled *America’s British Culture*.

In an *Atlantic* essay published on Kirk’s centenary last October, Matthew Continetti warned of “the limits of Kirk’s approach as a guide to concrete political action, and of the dangers of nostalgia and of a literary contempt for politics.” There is indeed a danger on the right to be found in a literary—or moralistic and anti-politically ideological—contempt for politics. But Kirk had no such contempt: he was a conservative of the perishing world, as well as of the permanent things.

The unwritten constitution

by *Gerald J. Russello*

The battle over the confirmation of Brett Kavanaugh to the Supreme Court is only the most recent—if perhaps one of the more disturbing—examples of how important control of the law has become in the ongoing, never-quite-dead culture wars. In a sense, the merits of this particular candidate did not matter much. Liberals and progressives were going to oppose any pick for the Court—remember the left-wing group that accidentally issued a prewritten opposition to Trump’s pick with the name of the candidate blank? The opposition was so fierce because what was at stake was not only a Court seat, but a vision of the nation itself.

That vision is one in which judges, and in particular five justices of the Supreme Court, lead us all into a promised land. Russell Kirk called this vision “archonocracy,” or rule by judges. Before the election, liberal elites openly defended the idea of the Supreme Court as an agent of social change. In 2016, for example, the liberal law professor Mark Tushnet famously argued that liberals should abandon a “defensive” liberalism and instead use the courts aggressively to advance their causes. Those who opposed such social engineering should realize, according to Tushnet, that conservatives lost the culture wars, and the victorious liberals should treat them as a defeated enemy. Even earlier, in a book called *Making Our Democracy Work* (2010), Justice Stephen Breyer characterized the acceptance of judicial supremacy as a “habit” that has developed in the American people. This habit

not only accepts that the Supreme Court must pass on the Constitution’s meaning, but also that its interpretation is superior to those of Congress or the president. This supremacy must be recognized because only the courts can protect the “rights” they have discovered in the constitutional text; left to the other branches, freedom would dissipate under the threat of majoritarian tyranny.

This position echoes the 1992 decision *Planned Parenthood v. Casey*—not the famous “mystery of life” passage, but one that is just as troubling. The Court said that the belief in Americans as a people “is not readily separable from their understanding of the Court invested with the authority to decide their constitutional cases and speak before all others for their constitutional ideals.” Archonocracy, indeed.

Of course, now that has all apparently changed. Liberals are calling for the expansion of the Supreme Court’s membership, or some other way to dilute the Court’s power. Funny what an election will do to principle. Now the cry is to hold democracy sacred—protected by the elites against the wrong kind of populism. But these calls for upending judicial structure are only a temporary diversion from the issue of what the law is and what it is supposed to do. Those who hold views such as Tushnet’s have not discovered states’ rights or originalism, and they have not abandoned the progressive effort to move the nation to the left partially through elections but mostly by capturing the judiciary. On this view, the arc of history bends towards justice, but that

arc is bent by liberal justices and held there even if it is over the people's throats.

Kirk and Orestes Brownson can help us respond to this legal progressivism. For those who may not know him, Brownson was an American original. After spending three days visiting with Brownson, Great Britain's Lord Acton wrote to a colleague, "Intellectually, no American I have met comes near him." He was praised by Arthur Schlesinger Jr. (who wrote a short book about him) and Woodrow Wilson. Kirk placed him "in the first rank of American men of ideas" and wrote about him as early as 1954.

Brownson lived mostly as a writer and a preacher; his collected essays and articles, including those from *Brownson's Quarterly Review*, which he edited and almost completely wrote, total more than twenty volumes. His most famous book-length work is the political treatise *The American Republic*, published in 1865. After Alexis de Tocqueville's *Democracy in America*, it has been called the best book on American democracy. Brownson employed two terms to understand American legal culture: territorial democracy and the unwritten constitution.

Territorial democracy is based on the conviction that political power must be centered on a geographic unity, a territory, within which the people participate in governance. Thus, when separating from the United Kingdom, "in the Declaration of Independence [the colonies] declared themselves independent states indeed, but not severally independent. The declaration was not made by the states severally but by the states jointly, as the United States. They unitedly declared their independence; they carried on the war for independence, won it, and were acknowledged by foreign powers and by the mother country as the *United States*." Democracy is "not territorial because the majority of the people are agriculturists or landholders, but because all political rights, powers, or franchises are territorial."

As Robert Moffitt of the Heritage Foundation notes in an article on Brownson and federalism, "Acting in convention, the sovereign people authorize a dual system of government,

federalism, which assures national unity and yet secures their liberty and diversity: This division of the powers of government . . . rendered possible and practicable by the original constitution of the people themselves, as one people existing and acting through state organizations, is the American method. . . . The American method demands no . . . antagonism, no neutralizing of one social force by another, but avails itself of all the forces of society, organizes them dialectically, not antagonistically, and thus protects with equal efficiency both public authority and private rights." Brownson himself describes it this way:

The general government governs supremely all of the people of the United States and territories belonging to the Union, in all their general relations and interests, or relations and interests common alike to them all; the particular or state government governs supremely the people of a particular state The powers of each are equally sovereign, and neither are derived from the other. The state governments are not subordinate to the general government, nor the general government to the state governments. They are coordinate governments, each standing on the same level, and deriving its powers from the same sovereign authority. In their respective spheres neither yields to the other. In relation to the matters within its jurisdiction, each government is independent and supreme in regard of the other, and subject only to the convention.

On this view, the general government is able to protect individual rights against state oppression, while at the same time state independence serves as a bulwark against an encroaching central government. And even within states, both Brownson and Kirk note the need for strong local government to protect against state power. Thus a territorial system of democracy can protect against what Brownson sometimes called "humanitarian democracy" which was the concentration of power in a centralized, national government pushing for a pure egalitarianism. This humanitarian democracy "scorns all geographical lines, effaces all individualities, and professes to plant itself on humanity alone, has acquired by the war

new strength, and is not without menace to our future.” It is a menace because it brooks no opposition to its organizing principle of equality and would destroy actual rights developed through the common understanding of a political society. Kirk, writing in the 1950s, said that the humanitarian would not stop at erasing geographic boundaries or local rights and privileges. Presently, he would also attack the family and assail private property as unequal.

Kirk explains that “Brownson distinguishes between the old American territorial democracy founded upon local rights and common interests of the several states and smaller organs of society, and the pure democracy of Rousseau, which later writers call ‘totalitarian democracy.’” This pure democracy is characterized by centralized administration in the name of an abstract “People,” with little authority or freedom at the local level. For Kirk, this meant the dissolution of true democracy. The conversation Kirk envisions among the democratic localities, indirectly democratic states, and a representative national government was the genius of the American system. “If the federal character of American government decays badly, then American democracy also must decline terribly, until nothing remains of it but a name; and the new ‘democrats’ may be economic and social levellers, indeed, but they will give popular government short shrift.”

But a constitution cannot be sustained simply through its written form; indeed, for Brownson as for Kirk, that would not be possible. How the Constitution reconciles state with national interest, and individual rights with our obligations toward our community, relies on another feature of American society. That was the “unwritten constitution,” which supplements and pre-exists the written Constitution. The unwritten constitution includes all the mores, customs, and ways of life that together form American political culture and support the written Constitution. As Kirk explained, “[N]o matter how admirable a constitution may look upon paper, it will be ineffectual unless the unwritten constitution, the web of custom and convention, affirms an enduring moral

order of obligation and personal responsibility.” Bruce Frohnen argues that “Brownson recognized that the unwritten constitution of a people is primary in that it constitutes the customs (e.g., a common culture and the common law) necessary to make a written constitution work, and because we must look to its customs and practices to understand the meanings and purposes of the written constitution’s text.” In other words, the unwritten constitution is not the progressives’ “living Constitution,” through which elites conform political practice to their norms by means of a kind of top-down command.

Kirk in his writings on the law understood that if the customs of a people change, then the law changes as well, even if written texts remain the same. So it was important for citizens to be mindful of and preserve those traditions that supported local government and established practices and understandings. And as Kirk noted, a thoroughly secular state was not a neutral one, and combined with its increasing powers would seek to act on its own vision of the common good. The unwritten constitution, in Kirk’s usage, has both a spatial and temporal aspect. Geographically, state and nation overlap, but each territory has its own historical imagination and narrative of itself, which is necessary for self-government and a stable social order. Kirk only hints at what the other aspects of these customs might be, but they include such things as the tradition of voluntarism, private associations, a rough-and-ready American tolerance, and so on, refracted through the particular circumstances in communities across the nation. We can also point to such things as the traditional deference lawyers have for the procedures of the law and its officers, something increasingly less in evidence in some of our law schools.

Without those attachments, self-government suffers. And those attachments are only partially attributable to reasoning from abstract rights. We have become too Lockean. We understand ourselves as rights-bearing, autonomous individuals entering the public square to which we give our contingent consent. It is unclear whether our constitutional structure can survive on such a thin basis, especially when our notion

of the rights that an individual bears expands endlessly. When that happens, especially when not accompanied by a shared sense of responsibilities, the only solution to prevent disorder is to let government be the continued and repeated arbiter of disputes. The law therefore becomes an instrument in a power struggle as groups compete for recognition of their rights against others, a situation that is itself a form of disorder.

Brownson and Kirk rejected this Lockean formulation. As Peter Lawler writes, Brownson agreed with Locke that there were natural rights, but he based them on an anti-Lockean principle. The reason that “one man . . . can have in himself no right to govern another” is that a “man is never absolutely his own, but always and everywhere belongs to his Creator.” That is, we can reasonably affirm that the natural law originates with a Creator, and that we are dependent on Him for all that is and all that we are. It is this affirmation—the virtual antithesis of the Lockean principle of self-ownership—that provides the proper foundation of human equality, or the doctrine that we have “equal rights as men.” All governments that truly protect individual rights depend on the assumption that man is not God. A political society is not a contract but a kind of covenant.

Progressives have tried their own version of the unwritten constitution. Indeed, the prominent law professor Akhil Amar in 2012 published a book with that title. But that is a world away from what Brownson and Kirk meant. For Amar and those who agree with him, law is a source of rights divined by experts, then circulated through the population by judicial fiat. But as Ted McAllister puts it: “law is not the source of higher-order goods, but rather the means of pursuing those goods. Law is normative in the sense that it reflects and sometimes expresses (or crystallizes) social norms. Rooted, therefore, in concrete social experience, laws emerge out of existing social arrangements and practices.” Particular and imperfect, these laws reflect “the integrations of historical expectations—rooted in

circumstance and practice—with permanent principles stemming from the order of reality, or natural law; it is best understood as historically grounded normative reasoning.” The law encompasses what Allen Mendenhall describes as “a mode of preserving and transmitting knowledge about the human condition that develops out of ascertainable facts rather than abstract speculation. It is bottom-up, reflecting the embedded norms and values of the community as against executive command or legislative fiat.” In Kirk’s phrase, the purpose of the law is relatively simple: to keep the peace.

For Amar, however, the unwritten constitution is a tool to undermine those customs and practices and to serve as a mode of disruption rather than an instrument of civil peace. It is used to change “the written constitution according to the values and desires of powerful contemporary elites in charge of propagating meanings and even civil religious doctrine.” Indeed, Amar has a series of documents and events he calls the “symbolic” Constitution. Now, symbols are something conservatives are comfortable with, but his are all of a piece, promoting a progressive view of the Constitution. Those who disagree with these symbols are on the wrong side of history. In this Amar is in the line of liberal justices such as William Brennan, for whom the law was primarily a weapon available to the individual against the community.

Kirk, in contrast, saw the danger in allowing that weapon to be used only according to the dictates of judges; to do so would risk rendering the unwritten constitution meaningless and would reduce the court to an “infallible and omniscient body of moral authorities,” an absurd result. While there may be universal human rights, these cannot substitute for the actual political rights filtered through the historic practices of a particular community; Kirk warned that the assertion of those rights should be done “only as a last resort, ordinarily.” Why? Because he wished to avoid the situation that we have now, where law is a weapon of my rights against all others, and private judgment as to what I “am entitled to” rules the day.

With his usual prescience, Brownson saw individualism as a threat to American self-government. Individualism sees government as the agent of particular individuals who comprise it, and not the collective sense of the community. If that is the case, government becomes merely a tool to express our rights—which necessarily leads to disorder as everyone determines how much they may choose to provide to the government. Thus, the rights of the individual can properly be understood and maintained only in community, particularly a community whose members share similar beliefs as to what constitutes a right. Indeed, Kirk essentially rejected the idea of “human rights” as improperly descended from the dangerous abstractions of the French Revolution. True rights grow from “old custom, usage, and political tradition, and from judges’ common-law decisions.” The Constitution, in part, protects individual rights by allowing a space for community standards of morality. Adam White wrote a

piece elaborating on Justice Alito’s Burkean constitutional vision, which is “attuned to the space that the Constitution preserves for local communities to defend the vulnerable and to protect traditional values.” Abstraction of either the Left or the Right will ultimately disempower citizens and eliminate the space for free self-government.

As Lawler writes, “the freedom of the person that territorial democracy supports accounts for the richness of personhood as seen in man’s spiritual, political, familial, and economic relations, which must be supported and protected by the authority of the state. . . . A good polity will connect and reconcile the free and relational person with self-government and law and thereby engender devotion to the common good.” In other words, the law is more like a tool to assist in constructing a stable social order than a weapon. But to use a tool properly, you have to know what it is for, and what you are trying to build.

The politics of the imagination

by R. R. Reno

I first came upon Russell Kirk thirty years ago when I was foraging among political philosophers for some help in understanding why I was rejecting the liberalism that only recently had seemed to me so obvious, sensible, and right. Kirk gave me little satisfaction. He's an essayist, not a theorist, a man of letters by his own description, not a builder of systems. I was a graduate student at the time, and I had yet to read deeply in John Henry Newman, making me susceptible to the lure of theory and system. As a consequence, Kirk's reliance on aphorism, image, and episode led me to dismiss him as a journalistic, occasional writer rather than consider him a philosophical heavyweight.

I have not changed my judgment of what sort of writer Kirk was. In his wonderfully quirky memoir, *The Sword of Imagination*, he describes himself as a literary knight errant, slaying dragons, hacking orcs, and freeing beautiful maidens as best he could for over a half-century. What has changed is my sense of what drives politics. As Richard Weaver wrote in the first sentence of the first chapter of *Ideas Have Consequences*, "Every man participating in a culture has three levels of conscious reflection: his specific ideas about things, his general beliefs or convictions, and his metaphysical dream of the world." By Weaver's reckoning, the distempers of our time flow from the poverty of our dreams. In this Kirk agreed, which is why he devoted himself to the politics of the imagination. He was right to do so. After all, we can only vote for what we can imagine.

I am not a Kirk scholar and cannot pretend to be a reliable interpreter of his vast body of work. Instead, I propose to draw upon Kirk to essay my own reflections on the state of our political imagination.

It is my reckoning that populism, the term given to a current strain in American politics, reflects a rebellion, not so much against particular policies or principles but against the dominant dreams of the post-war consensus. George H. W. Bush emphasized one of the leading motifs of this consensus in his speech to the United Nations shortly after the fall of the Berlin Wall. The Soviet empire was crumbling, and Bush envisioned a new future: "I see a world of open borders, open trade, and, most importantly, open minds."

The notion of freedom as openness and a limitless horizon dominated the imagination of the West for more than seventy years. Bush, a veteran of World War II, was formed in accord with the standard convictions of his generation. Fascism, Nazism, and Japanese militarism arose from closed-minded forms of life and thought. The same was thought to be true for communism in the East. Though political resolve and military action may have been necessary to defeat enemies and deter threats, the deeper response was thought to require a cultural reconstruction of the West. We must banish narrow-mindedness and cultivate a spirit of openness. The post-war consensus held that instead of piety and loyalty, we needed critical questioning. Society should loosen up and allow for greater freedom and experimentation.

The spirit of openness played an obvious role in the 1960s, but it was widely evident from 1945 onward. The literature of the 1950s featured criticisms of middle-class conformity. In *The Lonely Crowd* (1950), David Riesman and his fellow researchers anguished over the ascendancy of the other-directed personality and its impulse toward conformity. *The Organization Man* (1956) was another bestselling title. In the years after World War II, social scientists created ersatz theories about the existence of an “authoritarian personality,” popularized in a widely cited book by that name that purported to explain fascism. These theories called for a new pedagogy to ensure that the rising generation of Americans would be open, flexible, and non-judgmental. The Freudian theory and dreadful methodology behind the pseudo-science published in *The Authoritarian Personality* (1950) are today indefensible, but its conclusions are largely accepted as dogma. Fascism, communism, and racism are not caused by fervent belief in falsehoods, we are told. They arise when people have fervent beliefs, full stop. Therefore, if we care for the future of humanity, we must educate the young toward unbelief and non-judgmentalism. Our job is to cultivate in rising generations a negative piety, as it were, one that prizes the open mind as the highest good.

A similar project of promoting ever greater openness has been at work in our economic thinking. By the 1980s we became convinced that regulations needed to be relaxed and tax burdens lowered so that the animal spirits could drive economic growth. After 1989, this consensus gained momentum. Borders should be made more porous, open to commerce, most of us thought. “Innovation” and “creativity” became the business school equivalents of the cultural motifs of “diversity” and “inclusion.” They evoked actions that knock down old boundaries, old limits, and midwife an open-ended future.

We tend to think of cultural transgression as a left-wing phenomenon, while the motifs of openness in economic life are thought to be right-wing. Silicon Valley represents their explicit fusion, which has always been latent. Facebook’s early motto was “Move Fast and

Break Things.” By this way of thinking, technological progress and spectacular financial success require rulebreaking that doesn’t wait for the regulators to catch up, just as transgression in art, literature, and culture is thought to promote a more diverse and inclusive society. From the 1990s through today, leading opinion has insisted that these motifs of openness are essential for the spiritual, moral, and economic well-being of our country.

It would be tedious to recount the trajectory from a defensible emphasis on critical thinking to today’s pedagogies of deconstruction. It’s enough to observe that while our universities have at times suffered from indigestion, for the most part they’ve happily swallowed every aspect of anti-Western and multicultural ideology. That’s because, though sometimes regretted as too extreme, radicalism and transgression suit the post-war imagination, which prizes openness and freedom from limits and wars against constraining permanence and dutiful obedience. This also explains why our academic and cultural establishment treats libertarians such as Tyler Cowen as clubbable, while the slightest hint of insufficient support for gay marriage gets you blackballed. In our cultural politics, it’s the metaphysical dream of life without limits and behavior without boundaries that governs, not particular party allegiances.

When it comes to the economic sphere, I’m not interested in debating the merits of economic deregulation, lower tax rates, free trade deals, or other efforts to open up our economy, all of which I have supported at various stages since the 1980s. It’s not my purpose to hammer out a party platform for 2020. Instead, I simply wish to draw attention to the shape of our public imagination in these early decades of the twenty-first century. To a striking degree, we’ve coalesced around motifs of openness: critical thinking, diversity, creativity, and innovation. Though we may have reservations here and there, for the most part we thrill to George H. W. Bush’s vision of open trade, open borders, and open minds. In the service of these motifs of openness we’ve largely adopted a deregulatory prejudice, one that consistently gives priority

to loosening things up. The center-Left emphasizes cultural openness, while the center-Right emphasizes the same ideals in the economic sphere. But the metaphysical dream is the same. This imaginative consensus is extremely powerful, so much so that those of us committed to preserving the authority of tradition in higher education naturally gravitate toward arguments for academic freedom or call for “viewpoint diversity”—further variations on the theme of openness.

As Americans, the allure of this metaphysical dream is understandable. We’re shaped by the open horizon of the frontier, the open, often raucous debates in our electoral system, and the open personality encouraged by our democratic culture. Nevertheless, it’s important to see how one-sided and dysfunctional our political imagination has become. Here Russell Kirk can help us, because his outlook on life was based in a positive, affirmative piety, not a negative and critical one. He prized love, which seeks to close upon its object, not openness and the lure of the limitless.

On one occasion, Kirk wrote, “The conservative impulse is a man’s desire to walk in the paths that his father followed; it is a woman’s desire for the sureties of hearth and home.” Here’s my way of putting this insight: True conservatism is nourished by our perennial human desire for a noble inheritance, a patrimony worthy of honoring, serving, and passing down to the next generation. Conservatism expresses our desire for a place of repose, a home in which we do not need to earn or merit our right of residence.

Home and inheritance are not political principles. They are objects of the imagination, the poetic outlines of things that fire our political vision, picturing both what we fear losing and what we desire to preserve, restore, and enjoy. To them I would add a further, transcendent affirmation. As Kirk puts it in one of his canons of conservatism, “a divine intent rules society as well as conscience.” The affairs of a nation touch upon ultimate things. In a conservative’s imagination, our common home and shared inheritance are perfumed with a sacred aroma. They evoke the more-than-rational loyalty that goes by the name of piety.

As I look back over the last three years, I’m struck by the salience of Kirk’s characteristic emphases. It’s obvious that an open-borders globalism runs against the desire for a secure home and that multiculturalism seeks to convince us that our inheritance is ignoble. In more subtle ways, today’s wonkish, economics-fixated public culture reduces politics to interests, ignoring or even ruling out the reality of our sentiments, which are, as Kirk recognized, more social than Bentham and his many epigones will allow. Our sentiments are archaic, too, as Kirk also perceived. The imagination is quite capable of heroic ardor, as well as vulnerable to debased passions. It is religious, aspiring toward the highest good, even if only in the natural sense of that term, untutored by revealed truths.

One does not need a Ph.D. in political science to see that Donald Trump has exploited the growing unpopularity of the motifs of openness that George H. W. Bush took for granted. Trump’s promise to build a big, “beautiful” wall on the Mexican border poses a powerful symbolic threat to our ruling class and its loyalty to motifs of openness. The wall is a challenge to the imagination of those in positions of power; it is not a policy proposal over which to wrangle. Trump’s relentless rhetoric about the wall concretizes the question of borders, boundaries, and limits, which the dominant post-war imagination cannot help but picture as sad, even wicked constraints upon the limitless potential of the open society. This is a major reason why Trump’s ascendancy is treated as such a profound threat to “democratic norms,” which the post-war consensus equates with its metaphysical dreams.

Trump’s assaults on NAFTA and other trade deals are less purely symbolic. They have immediate policy implications. But, for the most part, commentators recoil in horror, for here, as well, Trump dissents from the ideals of limitless openness. His ostentatious violations of political correctness, the punitive cultural regime best understood as obligatory and enforced openness, offer another example of his heretical imagination. Even more telling has been Trump’s almost complete rejection of the images and vocabulary of the open future. In

contradistinction to nearly every other twenty-first century American politician, Trump allies himself with old-line, dying industries—paradigmatically coal—rather than with the new, vibrant, creative, and globalized sectors such as media and technology. He does not celebrate diversity or innovation, two of the leading motifs of openness that fill the pages of university and corporate propaganda. (One easily imagines the boilerplate: “Stanford University promotes diversity, ensuring for its students the creative educational culture needed to form them as leaders of an innovative and inclusive future for the whole world.”) And, of course, the “Make America Great Again” slogan is a direct appeal to the desire for a noble, heroic inheritance.

A similar pattern is evident in Trump’s major speeches. At the Republican National Convention, Ted Cruz gave a classic, conservative-inflected speech in praise of openness. He must have used the word “freedom” one hundred times. Trump’s nomination acceptance speech barely mentioned the word. He emphasized reconsolidation and solidarity.

On his 2017 visit to Poland, Trump gave an extraordinary address in Warsaw. Between 1939 and 1945, that city witnessed some of the most brutal episodes of the war. The ascendant political imagination of the post-war era dictates speaking of those times as lessons about the dangers of totalitarianism, nativism, anti-Semitism, and other perversions, all of which call for the West to rally around the virtues of open societies and open minds. Trump did the opposite. He used the occasion to praise the heroism of the Polish resistance that rose up in that city in a futile effort to earn their own freedom rather than receive it from the advancing Soviet army. It was a speech meant to satisfy a Pole’s desire to “walk in the paths that his father followed,” paths all the more to be cherished because sanctified with blood. (Trump’s unself-conscious use of the image of blood as a sacred seal in a speech in Eastern Europe was itself a shocking transgression of post-war taboos.) His more recent speeches praise the self-interest of other nations, a gesture toward the desire we have for a home of our own.

I have no interest in claiming Trump as a “true conservative,” whatever that is. My point is analytical. When we step back from the kabuki dance of denunciation, the protests about his supposed unfitness for office, and the elaborate, pseudo-legal battles surrounding his administration, it’s obvious why Trump generates outrage. He presses a Kirkian agenda of home, inheritance, and patriotic loyalty, which, as Kirk knew, is entirely at odds with dominant, liberal ways of thinking. Home, inheritance, and piety—in the post-war imagination, these are always reframed as authoritarian, crypto-fascist temptations. Not surprisingly, since 2016 we’ve seen an explosion of tweets, articles, and books evoking some version of Hitler’s return. The alternative to openness is not love’s devotion, but instead tyranny and death camps, or so we are told.

Last year, Trump tossed a hand grenade into the establishment bunker by calling out professional football players who would not stand for the national anthem. His political intuition was simple: plenty of people who vote want to see our flag honored. The political imagination that dominates our ruling class sees things otherwise. It regards protest and transgression as always positive. They make society more open, more accepting, more diverse, and thus more just. “There’s nothing more American than the spirit of protest,” we’re told. And in any event, Trump’s criticisms are dog whistles for racists, we’re also told. The political imagination of elites does not see in this controversy a fitting desire for home and inheritance. Instead, it sees nativism and racism.

Kirk saw himself as a defender of the imagination. That’s certainly true. But he misjudged the true nature of the political terrain in the post-war era. He thought the liberal adversary advocated politics without imagination, a tendency supported by what he called the “vulgarized pragmatism” born of a utilitarian habit of mind and “the drug of ideology,” which promises a machine-like social mechanism that brings justice automatically. These are both dangers, to be sure. But economic liberals have an imaginations, too, as George H. W. Bush’s hymn to openness makes clear. It is at root a metaphysical dream of anarchic

order, a society without authority, life without obedience. The multiculturalist can be pragmatic or ideological, and even both at once. But at a deeper level, he imagines a future without a center, a multi-culture that ensures life under the sign of choice rather than loyalty and its inevitable implication of the need for obedience and sacrifice. Something similar is at work in free market thinking. Friedrich Hayek was very taken by the possibilities of spontaneous order that arise in the free play of individual interests in the marketplace. This, too, is an anarchic ideal of social harmony without authority.

All of us feel the tectonic plates shifting under our feet. The best thinkers reach for broad characterizations, groping for ways to characterize our political agonies. The nationalists are challenging the globalists. The ordinary “somerwheres” are rebelling against the elite “anywheres.” These dichotomies are imperfect, but they point toward something real, which is a growing divide in the imagination of the West, one brought about by the striking return of something like Russell Kirk’s sometimes fanciful but always astute intuitions about the essential foundations of a sane society. We’ve endured

a long season dominated by the metaphysical nightmare of Hitler’s return and the counter-dream of limitless openness. Today, a rising populism suggests the nightmare is changing. It now worries about an orphan’s existence with no stable home or reliable inheritance in a world of limitless, ruthless competition.

To my mind, this nightmare is not unfounded. We desire to share something sacred in common, and we want a civic identity in which to find repose, because home and inheritance are among the permanent things, basic elements of any world suitable for political animals. If unmet with intelligence, moral seriousness, and nuanced knowledge of the true achievements of the modern West, this desire will fester, making the West more and more vulnerable to ersatz inheritances and debased visions of our civic home, perversions of which identity politics gives us a foretaste. We should be grateful that Donald Trump has bestirred our ruling class from its smug complacency. The night is far gone. Those of us capable of imagining a genuinely liberal and democratic culture nourished by dispositions of piety, as did Kirk, need to encourage metaphysical dreams worthy of our distinctive cultural inheritance and national home.

The ghosts of Russell Kirk

by James Panero

The subject of ghosts, both their literary and spectral forms, was a lifelong fascination for Russell Kirk. He was a scholar of speculative fiction, also called “genre” fiction. These days, stories of horror and the supernatural are often disparaged when held against the “quality literature” of modern realism. Yet Kirk saw realism as “dreary baggage,” the “art of depicting nature as it is seen by toads.” For a “writer who struggles to express moral truth,” wrote Kirk, “realism’ has become in our time a dead-end street.”

So Kirk appreciated what he called the “fearful joy” of ghostly tales. Such tales formed their own literary tradition, one that he traced from Horace Walpole to L. P. Hartley. Kirk was sure to distinguish these ghost stories from the more recent “flood of ‘scientific’ and ‘futuristic’ fantasies,” which he called “banal and meaningless.” “For symbol and allegory,” Kirk wrote, “the shadow-world is a far better realm than the hard, false ‘realism’ of science-fiction.”

Kirk did not fear ghosts. He feared the death of ghosts and their afterlife in myths and tales. In his own scholarship and writing, he saw to their revival. As he studiously wrote in “A Cautionary Note on the Ghostly Tale,” an essay he first published in *The Critic* in the spring of 1962, the

supernatural has attracted writers of genius or high talent: Defoe, Scott, Coleridge, Stevenson, Hoffmann, Maupassant, Kipling, Hawthorne, Poe, Henry James, F. Marion Crawford, Edith Wharton; and those whose achievement lies principally in this dark field, among them M. R. James, Algernon Blackwood, Meade Falkner, Sheri-

dan Le Fanu, and Arthur Machen. Many of the best are by such poets and critics as Walter de la Mare, A. C. Benson, and Quiller Couch. Theirs are no Grub Street names. The genre has in it something worth attempting.

Regrettably, as Kirk went on: “since most modern men have ceased to recognize their own souls, the spectral tale has been out of fashion, especially in America.” Kirk called himself the “last remaining master of ghostly stories,” something he lamented as a “decayed art.” Still, unfashionable as they may be, it did not mean ghost stories went unread. Beneath our rationalist feet, as Kirk knew, there remains haunted ground. And, in fact, Kirk’s own supernatural fiction brought him widespread popular success. He began by publishing ghostly tales in the early 1950s in small periodicals, such as *World Review*, *Queen’s Quarterly*, *London Mystery Magazine*, *Fantasy and Science Fiction*, and *Southwest Review*. Many of these stories have now been anthologized several times over.

Kirk’s thriller of a novel of 1961, titled *Old House of Fear*, became a surprise bestseller. Kirk said it outsold all of his other books; its royalties provided some financial buoyancy to the Kirk family for years after publication. These literary achievements form their own creative legacy, one not necessarily advantaged by Kirk’s more prominent political associations. Yet they were all of a piece. The writing quality and studied interest of this ghostly fiction were not ancillary to his conservative mind but central to his Gothic sensibility. Quoting Edmund Burke, Kirk wrote, “art is man’s nature.” And ghost stories were Kirk’s nature.

“The Surly Sullen Bell,” Kirk’s short story of 1950, first published in *London Mystery Magazine*, sounds a tone that resonates through much of his fiction. Kirk takes his title from Shakespeare’s Sonnet 71: “No longer mourn for me when I am dead/ Than you shall hear the surly sullen bell/ Give warning to the world that I am fled/ From this vile world with vilest worms to dwell.” The story lends its title to Kirk’s first story collection, published by Fleet in 1962.

It opens in the rubble of St. Louis, where “they have pounded the Old Town into dust.” Against this backdrop of so-called urban renewal, we read, “To the modern politician and planner, men are the flies of a summer, oblivious of their past, reckless of their future.” A character named Frank Loring is visiting, reluctantly, the home of Professor Godfrey Schumacher. The professor’s wife, the former Nancy Birrell, is an old flame. Loring is a self-admitted “reactionary . . . not yet forty”: “Ecclesiastes was Bible enough for him. . . . yesterday’s sun had been warmer than today’s.” Schumacher, in contrast, is a “complacent positivist.” Loring now finds the professor wrapped up in “a startling blend of psychiatry and quasi-Yoga, spiced with something near to necromancy and perhaps a dash of Madame Blavatsky.” Since Schumacher is “late a disciple of the mechanists,” what explains his new philosophy? “Well,” Loring admits, “the line of demarcation between the two cults perhaps was no more difficult to cross than the boundary between Fascism and Communism.”

Schumacher has taken up an interest in mysticism, he claims, to help his ailing wife, who has become a neurotic suffering from “dreadful sights.” This Godfrey is playing God. “He wants to possess me, absorb me, lose me in himself.” Nancy confides to Loring. As Schumacher pours another cup of coffee, he also pours out his strong philosophy: “restraint is for spiritual weaklings. Strength is everything upon the physical plane, and that’s just as true, really, upon the spiritual—the moral—plane. Strength and appetite are the only tests. You’ll admit that soon enough, Loring.”

Walking home “through the district of ruined and ruinous old houses” Loring finds he is followed by a “hulking figure . . . slipping now and again into deep shadow.” After another visit,

the figure follows him again. This time Loring collapses in a ruined alley only to see a spectral face taunting him from an abandoned window. Believing there was something off with the coffee, Loring barely makes it to the police station. When the authorities go back to investigate the Schumachers, they find Nancy dead of heart failure and Godfrey shot by his own hand. Nancy and Loring had been poisoned, yet our final understanding of Godfrey’s drug “was little better than approximation.”

In “A Cautionary Note on the Ghostly Tale,” Kirk writes: “Tenebrae ineluctably form part of the nature of things; nor should we complain, for without darkness there cannot be light.” Kirk’s 1957 story “Ex Tenebris,” first published in *Queen’s Quarterly*, takes on slum clearance front and center. The setting has been relocated to the fading English farm village of Low Wentford and its supposed replacement by the new council-housing scheme of Gorst. Mrs. Oliver is a hold-out in the old town. Even though her windows “were too small” and her ceilings “lower than regulations,” she simply wants to “train rosebushes against the old walls” and to “spade her own little garden.” She also has little interest in Gorst, which boasts “six cinemas” but no churches, and was a “jerry-built desolation of concrete roadways” designed to “make it difficult for people to get about on foot.” S. G. W. Barner, “Planning Officer,” knows better, and has different ideas for Mrs. Oliver: “She would be served a compulsory purchase order before long . . . and would be moved to Gorst where she belonged.”

“A thick-chested, hairy man, . . . rather like a large, earnest ape,” Barner thinks he understands all he needs to know about the future:

He was convinced that the agricultural laborer ought to be liquidated altogether. And why not? Advanced planning, within a few years, surely would liberate progressive societies from dependence upon old-fashioned farming. He disliked the whole notion of agriculture, with its rude earthiness, its reactionary views of life and labor, its subservience to tradition.

He also disliked Low Wentford, which he believed served as an “obsolete fragment of a repudiated social order.” Therefore it must be effaced:

“Ruins are reminiscent of the past; and the Past is a dead hand impeding progressive planning.”

Mrs. Oliver is frightened of Barner, who “seemed more unchristian than any Indian, worshipping his maps.” So she seeks refuge in conversation with Abner Hargreaves, the vicar of Low Wentford’s old church. Problem is, this church has been long abandoned. When Barner goes to investigate, he enters into an argument with the spectral vicar, who tells him, “Cursed is he that smiteth his neighbor secretly.” Barner says: “Individual preferences often must be subordinated to communal efficiency.” The vicar responds: “I speak not simply of whim and inclination, but of the memories of childhood and girlhood, the pieties that cling to our hearth, however desolated.”

Just then, as Barner feels the vicar’s hand on his neck, the “roof of the north porch . . . fell upon him.” A new planning officer abandons the Gorst scheme and recommends a “plan of deconcentration.” Mrs. Oliver can stay in her cottage, where she “weeds her garden, and bakes her scones, and often sweeps the gravestones clean.”

Reviewing Kirk’s first collection of stories, Virginia Kirkus’s *Service* took note of how the ghosts of Kirk’s tales “generally work for the good to defeat the modern evils of city planners, hoodlums or census takers.” At the same time, “there is perhaps too much commonsense reality in these tales for them to be truly terrifying.” Set in the haunted Small Isles of the Scottish Inner Hebrides, *Old House of Fear*, Kirk’s first novel, quickly does away with *terra cognita* for a landscape charged with dark spirits.

Duncan MacAskival is an Andrew Carnegie-like industrialist who wants to return to his ancestral Scottish home. “Look at it all!” he says of his Iron Works. “I made it. And what has it given me? Two coronary fits. . . . Getting and spending, we lay waste our powers.” He taps Hugh Logan to travel to Carnglass, where the old Lady of the MacAskival clan still lives, to purchase the island and its castle, called the Old House of Fear. The name is Gaelic, we learn, and Fir means “man,” just as Carnglass means “gray stone.”

The first half of the book concerns Logan’s efforts to get on island; many conspire to keep him away—just as Kirk, famously resistant to editorial intervention, no doubt conspired to thwart

any efforts at elision. Here we learn about the lingering old superstitions of this remote land: “to preach the Gospels among the Pequots or Narragansetts is a facile undertaking by the side of any endeavor to redeem from heathen error these denizens of the furthestmost Hebrides.”

Kirk’s writing here is possessed of specific beauty. Having earned his doctorate of letters from the University of St. Andrews, the first American to do so, he luxuriates in the maritime Scottish scenery. Just consider the following passage:

At six o’clock the “Lochness” steamed away from the pier toward the Sound of Mull. They crossed the Firth of Lorne; and then, to the south they skirted the great rocky mass of Mull, while the wild shores of Morven frowned upon them from the north. Several islanders were among the passengers, and for the first time in years Logan heard the Gaelic spoken naturally, that beautiful singing Gaelic of the Hebrides. It went with the cliffs, the sea-rocks, the ruined strongholds of Mull and Morven, the damp air, the whitewashed loney cottages by the deep and smoothly sinister sea.

When Logan makes landfall, he meets Mary MacAskival, a red-haired ingenue and soon-to-be love interest. They pretend to be betrothed in order to get past a Dr. Edmund Jackman, a man, we learn, “who knows all about the occult. He has just come back from a trip to Roumania.” This guru figure has taken over the Old House and entranced the old Lady. It turns out he is also a Communist agent seeking to use Carnglass as a forward base of operations to disrupt advanced Atlantic defenses. Working with a henchman named Royall, the “humanitarian with the guillotine,” Dr. Jackman uses “sham bogles to frighten old women.” Says Logan: “But when you play with things from the abyss, you run risks. In this dead island of Carnglass, all round us things are ready to stir, if they’re called.”

“Fed on fantasies of one sort or another,” Jackman says of Mary, “the legends of Carnglass . . . are real.” Mary indeed knows the old Pictish “hidie-holes” of the island. She helps Logan escape and summons her relatives from Daldour, the island next door. While some of the island’s apparitions prove to be false—a happy warrior named Dumb Angus dons the skin of a sheep’s

head to frighten Jackman—the legends of Carn-glass also come true. Jackman is shown to be a demon, “the Firgower, the Goat-Man. And he saw all things, past, present, and future, through his Third Eye.” Far from being saved by the light of day, only Mary’s belief in these same dark legends preserves the island from Jackman’s boot.

In the last year of his life, Kirk spoke about ghosts at length from his “ancestral home” on Piety Hill in Mecosta, Michigan. He was convalescing from bronchitis, “an illness I contracted for the first and, I trust, the last time in my life,” he prophetically declared. Still, he had gathered a small audience in order to tell “some ghostly tales.”

Before he read one of his ghost stories, he elaborated on what he called the “true narration” of the ghosts in his life and the life of his family. Kirk’s ancestors were followers of the mystical Lutheran theologian Emanuel Swedenborg. A New York lumberman from the burned-over country of the Finger Lakes, Kirk’s great-grandfather came for the trees of northern Michigan and brought Swedenborgism with him, building a spiritualist church across from his settlement in Mecosta. After the church burned, the family conducted séances in their home. “My great-aunt Norma told tales of those days,” Kirk said. “A rocking chair levitated toward the ceiling. A great round mahogany table floated up.” Before the Old House burned in 1975, Kirk observed an increase in its spiritual activity. He remembers sleeping on the parlor sofa aged eight or nine, seeing two figures looking back at him through the bay window one winter’s night. They left no footprints in the snow, but years later he learned that his Aunt Faye reported seeing similar figures, with whom she would play. Kirk’s eldest daughter, Monica, also saw these men. “Three generations had some sort of experience,” Kirk concluded. “One of the more pleasant ghost stories of the house.”

“Mine was not an Enlightened mind,” Kirk famously said of himself. “It was a Gothic mind, medieval in its temper and structure. I did not love cold harmony and perfect regularity of organization; what I sought was variety, mystery, tradition, the venerable, the awful.”

Directed not by ideology, but rather a prudential anti-ideology—a disposition—Kirk’s

pathways were sinuous. There is no single key, no one access point or unobstructed promontory to give way to his worldview. Instead he left many clues, often medieval in temper and structure. And for this we are fortunate. He saw the modern age with a time-traveler’s remove. He surveyed the world with idiosyncratic fascination, looking for lost connections between the timely and the timeless; the past, the present, and the future. In his writing, he was his own poltergeist or “rattling spirit,” making critical noise to remind us of lost ties and of the subterranean spirits of culture just below the rubble at our feet and the theories in our heads. With his own Third Eye, Kirk saw through the many false faiths of the modern age: “The primary error of the Enlightenment,” he wrote, “was the notion that dissolving old faiths, creeds, and loyalties would lead to a universal sweet rationalism. But deprive man of St. Salvator, and he will seek, at best, St. Science.” That’s why fruitful inquests might still be made into Kirk’s dim views of post-war urban planning, for example, or the entrancing flicker of information technology—just two areas of many where he was remarkably farsighted. The more we look to the “variety, mystery, tradition, the venerable, the awful” of his life and work, the better we appreciate his Gothic form of conservative mind.

Kirk believed in ghosts. He believed in people who believed in ghosts. He believed in people who believed in the stories of ghosts. Whether ghosts were objective or subjective phenomena, whether they were forces of the universe or of the human imagination, he would not definitively say. “Can we imagine a human soul operating without a body?” he said at the end of his life. “You and I are just a collection of some electrical particles, held in suspension temporarily. We aren’t really solid at all. Can there be a collection of such particles in a different form that can occasionally manifest itself? Nobody knows.”

Subjective belief and objective existence were fluid dynamics in Kirk’s mind. He believed in the life of the dead. He believed in the afterlife of the soul and the soul imbued in the living spirit of the culture. His beliefs still haunt us. On the centenary of his birth, if we have managed to conjure his legacy, then we have also summoned a revenant spirit.

New poems

by William Logan

Winter under siege

The opening gambit of winter, the north under siege,
south under zigzag weather,
goiters of iodized clouds uglifying the horizon . . .

Where were the early painters of landscape,
touching in faint cloudlands out an unglassed window,
the scene the more crowded by the fleshy merchant

and pregnant wife swelling the foreground?
In Giorgione, background took the field,
the glaring romance of halogen and incandescence.

When you stand naked in the shower,
I catch that glint in the black eye of the Renaissance,
your belly rounded like some fifteenth-century Eve.

Fields under offer

Coruscating flashes of the maple,
like the advent of a migraine,
the bristling light both promise
and a reformation,

take their time, as it were.
We would return to those antique
particulars, having returned
would go again.

The opaque light scours us, acid
on metal, wiped clean,
re-etched once more—
twice bitten, once shy.

The frigates shape themselves
over the fields
that offered ridge-and-furrow
to each century in fallow turn,

shadows still visible.
How should we look,
when looking is suspect?
The eyes have been blind, blinded.

Turner's buoy

Distant scud of cloud, burst popcorn
or crumpled like sheep, the day jabbed in

like an afterthought. So much depended
on the sound unheard, shouts buried in fog,

indistinct as deaths telegraphed
along the old Atlantic cables. Sight,

though unreliable, narrated well enough.
That might have been called progress.

The sun bore the weight of revelation,
the masses gathered—whether a new mob

or cumulus nimbus remained to be seen.
Up the street marched the red flag.

Letter from Paris

Numbered among the “ploucs”

by *Anthony Daniels*

While the plate glass tinkled and the atmosphere filled with smoke and tear gas on the Champs-Élysées, I was in a gallery on the rue Bonaparte, contemplating the knotty ethical problem of suffering and evil as the subject of aesthetic representation. The gallery in question was showing photographs of North Korea by William Lighter (of whom I had not previously heard, and in any case a pseudonym).

I prefer the rue Bonaparte to the Champs-Élysées, which appears to me to have become, socially speaking at any rate, a kind of Dubaisur-Seine, in which hordes of people search for and buy exactly the same kind of products that they can, and do, buy in Dubai, and indeed everywhere else in the globalized world. Why they do so is to me a mystery; hell, *pace* Sartre, is not other people, but the taste of other people.

The rue Bonaparte, by contrast with the vulgarized Champs-Élysées, is still genuinely chic, at least in large part. There you can buy the highest-quality African artifacts, antiques, and manuscript letters of Claude Bernard, Balzac, or Baudelaire. Everything on the rue Bonaparte is, for me at any rate, *bors de prix*; I cannot afford any of it, and I do not think I have ever bought anything there. But I still enjoy looking, like a child pressing his nose to a toy shop window just before Christmas.

Having once visited North Korea (in the days of the first Kim), I am drawn to anything North Korean like a fly to ordure, and Mr. Lighter’s photographs of the hermit dynastic dictatorship were superb. They simultaneously

captured the sheer grinding broken-downness of everything there and were beautiful to look upon. Photography is an art, and Mr. Lighter does it very well. There is nothing in it that he has not mastered: the technique, of course, but also composition and the selection of subject that tells you so much beyond itself. My favorite among his photographs—each of which was the occasion for a kind of oneiric reflection, especially for someone who had been to North Korea—was that of a tractor that seemed like a toy from the 1920s, made of tin boxes, as it labored painfully over a plowed field. Tractors, of course, have always been a symbol of the triumph of socialism and over want itself.

It was perhaps ironic that photographs of people who had experienced the joys of ideological egalitarianism for generations should now be selling in a chic Parisian street for between \$1,000 and \$2,500 each (in an edition of twenty copies), while not very far away barricades had been erected and vehicles burned because of a rise in the tax on fuel, particularly diesel.

Seventy percent of the vehicles in France are diesel-engined, thanks to the government’s fiscal encouragement of diesel engines some years back; diesel was then thought to be less polluting than gasoline. It has since been discovered on the contrary to be highly polluting, the prince of pollutants, and now the population is about to be required to buy expensive electric cars instead: that is, until it is discovered that the electricity grid (especially now that nuclear

power generation is being wound down) will not cope and disused batteries will poison the earth. It all begins to look like an experiment in demand management for guinea pigs.

Anyway, all over France, *les ploucs* (the bumpkins) who need their diesel-engined cars to get about and cannot readily afford to buy chic electric or hybrid replacements rose up against the increase in tax and blocked roads, bringing cities such as Bordeaux to a standstill. In Paris, of course, there is always a fund of people—actually men, there weren't many women to be seen—longing to indulge in a little of Bakunin's (rather than Schumpeter's) creative destruction. To the animal joy of smashing things—with a bit of pillage thrown in—are added those of self-righteousness and of doing the world's work. Outrage is its own justification, so any action to express outrage is also justified.

The president, M. Macron, who admittedly has all the human warmth of a reptile and all the sense of humor of a First Secretary of the Communist Party of a minor Soviet Republic, is now widely reviled in France as the president of the rich, the latter being defined by the French as those with more money than oneself. Money is to the French what sex is to *les anglo-saxons*, namely the principal object of their hypocrisy. No people are more avid for money than they, or more envious of those who succeed in obtaining it, hiding their envy (even from themselves) by resort to high-minded egalitarian sentiment.

There is the feeling that France, like everywhere else, is dividing into what might be called the Ruebonartists and everyone else: the latter having difficulty making ends meet, given that so many things are now deemed essential to existence (invention being the mother of necessity). It is no coincidence, as the Marxists used to say, and will no doubt say again, that the most famous contemporary theorist of the accumulation of wealth in few hands is a Frenchman, Thomas Piketty.

I am no economist, but it seems to me that one of the overlooked causes of the concentration of wealth is the Ponzi scheme of the bloated modern Western state, France not least

among them. The government is obliged to borrow to keep the whole scheme afloat; it borrows just to maintain consumption, not to invest. It allows the creation of money to ensure that interest rates are low, and because manufacturing has been outsourced to low-cost countries, inflation of the traditional kind seems to have been contained. But money has to go somewhere, the result being asset inflation. Those with already existing assets grow richer, at least until the crash comes, and those without stagnate, and therefore the gap between them grows larger. But the borrowing must continue, or whole populations dependent on government borrowing go cold turkey.

People revolt against phenomena, not the causes of phenomena. They therefore protest against both high taxes and cuts in government expenditure. But not everyone is a natural protester. I watched the events unfolding on the Champs-Élysées on the mobile telephone of the Cabo Verdean carer for my mother-in-law, and she, by no means a Ruebonartist, tut-tutted about the wilful destruction and violence as vigorously as an old colonel in his London club would have done. Perhaps most interesting were the comments on Twitter that came up on the screen like stock market prices: I saw several hundred of them succeed each other at speed. Not one was critical of the demonstrators. "Belgium is behind you!" or "Bravo, the lads!": many indulged in the hope that this was just the beginning of a revolution. Man's thirst—or at least some men's thirst—for destruction is insatiable.

How seriously to take this outburst of revolt and the support for it? Populations are now so large that it is possible to find hundreds or thousands who subscribe to any opinion or doctrine whatever. If they express themselves in union, they appear to be much more significant than they are as a numerical proportion. In politics, however, it is not numerical proportion that is most important.

We—my wife and I—were due to go to dinner that night with some friends, but one of them was so infuriated by the demonstrations that he refused to leave his house and remained glued instead to the television to

watch what was going on (how pleasant it is to be infuriated!). My wife and I went out to dinner alone, then, to an excellent African restaurant nearby run by a splendid Ivorian lady whose laughter wells up as irrepressibly as water from a geyser or lava from a volcano. We ate as if nothing were going on, but she told us that the demonstrations were beginning to have their effect on the supply-chain and making her life as a restaurateur more difficult. Everything around us then seemed so solid and yet so fragile. On the one hand, it was absurd that so relatively small a group of people should imagine that they could bring real change in an established order that was so strong; on the other, that there was nothing as vulnerable as that order. The stores and supermarkets have three days' supply of food. As Marx put it, all that is solid melts into the air.

The following day, my wife and I left Paris in our car for the south. We met no *gilets jaunes*, as the demonstrators were called because of the yellow fluorescent vests that all French motorists are obliged to carry in their vehicles in case of night-time breakdown and that they donned as a visible sign of their protest, until we left the highway about 350 miles south of Paris. It was dusk, and they had lit a campfire. They held up the traffic as it tried to leave the highway, letting drivers through by dribs and drabs.

As we waited in the line, one of the *gilets jaunes* decided he wanted to leave the demonstration and got into his car parked by the side of the road. My wife blocked his way into the line, and he was furious at being given a taste of his own medicine. Again adapting Marx slightly, the blocker was blocked rather than the expropriator expropriated.

He did not take it lying down. He got out of his car, walked with ferocious intensity to his mates in the demonstration and told them not to let us through. When it came to our turn to be let through, therefore, they stopped us.

It was time to apply a lesson that I had learned thirty years ago when I crossed Africa overland and arrived at a border between countries. There officialdom would hold me up in the hope of extracting a big bribe from me. Instead of either paying it or growing angry and querulous, however, I settled down contentedly—or so it must have seemed to them—to read my book. It was obvious that my book would last me for hours, and before long it was they rather than I who grew exasperated, and they let me through with a defeated wave.

The technique worked then, and it worked now. Instead of expostulating angrily, we took out our sandwiches and our books and ate and read as if this had always been our plan. There is, of course, no point in demonstrating unless it inconveniences someone or makes him angry, and so, after only about three or four minutes, the demonstrators waved us through, one of them good-naturedly wishing us *bon appétit et bon lecture*. I waved to them like a passing celebrity.

Perhaps it helped that our car bore the stigmata of several collisions with stationary obstacles such as trees and hedges, encountered in our vain efforts to park. Evidently, we too were numbered among the *ploucs*.

After a further weekend of both road blocks and violence in Paris, the government has climbed down. Is this a triumph for democracy (70 percent of the population agreed with and approved of the *gilets jaunes*) or for street violence? Certainly, it can hardly discourage the latter.

Letter from Brasília

Now we do

by *Ernesto Araújo*

“I am very worried; he talked too much about God.” So said a prominent Brazilian political commentator on TV after hearing President Jair Bolsonaro’s victory speech on the night of October 28, 2018, when the polls showed his victory by a 55–45 margin over the Marxist candidate, Fernando Haddad.

So now talk of God is supposed to worry people. This is sad. But the people of Brazil don’t care. Bolsonaro’s government, in which I serve as foreign minister, doesn’t care what pundits say or what they worry about: they don’t have a clue about who God is or who the Brazilian people are and want to be. Their worry is that of an elite about to be dispossessed. They are afraid because they can no longer control public discourse. They can no longer dictate the limits of the president’s or anyone else’s speech. The last barrier has been broken: we can now talk about God in public. Who could imagine?

Over the years, Brazil had become a cesspool of corruption and despair. The fact that people didn’t talk about God and didn’t bring their faith to the public square was certainly part of the problem. Now that a president talks about God and expresses his faith in a deep, heartfelt way, *that* is supposed to be the problem? To the contrary. I am convinced that President Bolsonaro’s faith is instrumental, not accidental, to his electoral victory and to the wave of change that is washing over Brazil.

Brazil is experiencing a political and spiritual rebirth, and the spiritual aspect of this phenomenon is the determinant one. The political aspect is only a consequence.

For a third of a century, Brazil was subject to a political system composed of three parties acting increasingly in concert. Only now are we realizing the shape and full extent of that domination. First we had the of Brazilian Democratic Movement (PMDB), which took over after the regime established in 1964 (misleadingly called the military regime) gave away power peacefully in 1985. Originally a moderate left-wing opposition to the regime (although with some far-left infiltration), PMDB took the reins of government, wrote a new constitution, and became a broad front for the old oligarchy under a more modern, urban, social-oriented guise. That group mastered the art of political favors and bureaucracy, establishing itself as the foundation of the system. The extent to which the bureaucracy is able to allocate resources in the Brazilian economy—choosing winners and losers—has always been astounding, and during this period it became a full-fledged system of governance that completely stifled the economy.

The 1990s saw the ascendance of the Social-Democratic Party (PSDB), an offshoot of PMDB with roots on the left but better groomed, which started to cater to voters eager for economic stability after a decade and a half of mismanagement and hyperinflation. PSDB refashioned itself as the free market party, more or less hiding its true colors and its cultural-liberal agenda, and surfed on sound macro-economic policies to become the dominant force from 1994 to 2002, always retaining its

links to the traditional political-bureaucratic cabals represented by PMDB.

The third branch of the system emerged in the early 2000s, in the shape of the Workers' Party (PT), an Orwellian name, by the way, since real workers are rarely spotted in this party ruled by Marxist intellectuals, former left-wing guerrillas, and members of the trade-union bureaucracy. After the election of Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva (known universally as Lula) in 2002, PT—which had been preparing for this for years—quickly captured and co-opted the PMDB-PSDB power scheme, retaining the old tit-for-tat machinery run by PMDB and the stability policies represented by PSDB and establishing a much firmer grip on power than its predecessors. PMDB became the junior party in PT's coalition, while PSDB took the role of tamed opposition, participating in presidential elections every four years in which its role was to lose nobly to PT.

PT acquired control of all the levers of bureaucratic power, dominating the economy through public investment banks and state companies, and created a complete mechanism of crime and corruption. Almost every business, along with every local politician, every cultural, sports, and educational institution, and indeed almost everyone in Brazil, depended on the central government for its survival and had to pay its share in bribes, political support, or both. The model was so successful that PT started to export it to other Latin American countries, trying to create and consolidate a network of corrupt leftist regimes across the region.

At the same time, a left-wing agenda quickly took over Brazilian society. The promotion of gender ideology; the artificial stoking of race tensions; the displacement of parents by the government as the provider of “values” to children; the infiltration of the media; the dislocation of the “center” of public debate very far to the left; the humiliation of Christians and the taking over of the Catholic Church by Marxist ideology (with its attendant promotion of birth control); the misdirection of the arts through the allocation of public cultural financing; and so on—these were the results of the new government's policies.

Dominance was thus established over the political institutions, over the economy, and over the culture: a thoroughly totalitarian enterprise. It seemed indestructible. The system only admitted debate about how best to implement itself. There was some debate on privatization, but it never went anywhere near the core of the corruption mechanism. (The supposedly big privatization wave of the 1990s led by PSDB left Brazil with 418 state companies—compared to America's fourteen—and an economy totally dependent on government financing for any serious projects, but PSDB dutifully played the role of “neoliberal” party that PT assigned to it.)

In foreign policy, the system played the globalist tune without a flaw. It helped the transfer of power from the United States and the Western alliance to China; it favored Iran; it worked tirelessly to raise a new socialist iron curtain over Latin America by fostering left-wing governments or parties in Argentina, Venezuela, Ecuador, Bolivia, Chile, Colombia, Peru, Paraguay, Uruguay, the Dominican Republic, Nicaragua, Honduras, and, of course, Cuba. All of that occurred under the benign gaze of Barack Obama, who rarely raised a finger to counter any socialist or Islamist regime anywhere on earth, and who described Lula as “the guy.” Yes, Lula was globalism's guy, a guy who squandered all the resources that flew to Brazil during the commodities boom—hundreds of billions of dollars—to help dictatorships and to enrich his party and himself. Brazil was indeed a wonderful showcase for globalism. Starting with a traditional crony capitalist, oligarchic system in the late 1980s, the country went through fake economic liberalism in the 1990s, until it got to globalism under PT: cultural Marxism directed from within a seemingly liberal and democratic system, achieved through corruption, intimidation, and thought control.

A system so deep-seated would never reform itself. It would only find new masks to extend its rule—that was what several non-PT political figures strove to do every four years in the elections. Real change could only come from without, from the intellectual and spiritual domain.

So what broke the system? Olavo de Carvalho, Operation Car Wash, and Jair Bolsonaro. Since the mid-1990s, in parallel to the ascendance of an atheistic, corrupt regime (back then still in the making), strange new ideas started to circulate in the books and articles of Olavo de Carvalho, a Brazilian philosopher, perhaps the first person in the world to see globalism as the result of economic globalization, to understand its horrific purposes, and to start thinking about how to topple it. For many years he was also the only person in Brazil to use the word “communism” to describe PT’s strategy and everything that was going on in the country, at a time when everyone thought communism was just a sort of collectivism that had died with the Soviet Union, blind to its survival in many other guises in the culture and in “global issues.” Thanks to the internet boom, and especially the social media revolution, Olavo’s ideas suddenly started to percolate through the whole country, reaching thousands of people who had been fed only the official mantras. These ideas broke all dams and converged with the courageous stance of the only truly nationalist Brazilian politician of the last hundred years, Jair Bolsonaro, giving him a totally unprecedented level of grassroots support. Brazil suddenly redefined itself as a conservative, anti-globalist, nationalist country. At the same time, Operation Car Wash, the investigation into the PT corruption scheme—perhaps the largest criminal enterprise ever—evolved and started to throw light on the depths of PT’s attempt to destroy the country and seize absolute power, demoralizing the whole gang and sending its leader to jail.

With a wave of a hand, the nation cast away decades of political indoctrination and political correctness and finally elected a leader who leads and who knows where he wants to go.

But the story is, of course, much more complicated. Everything conspired against this national rebirth. It was not supposed to happen. But at every turn, especially since the

large anti-everything protests of 2013, social, political, and economic events started mysteriously to fit into place. Denunciations, political breakups and alliances, revelations of new corruption from unsuspected quarters, and thousands of other pieces were somehow assembled. These delivered the country its newly acquired freedom—with all the responsibility this involves—in the shape of Bolsonaro’s victory. Was it divine providence that guided Brazil through all those steps, reuniting the ideas of Olavo de Carvalho with the determination and patriotism of Bolsonaro? I think so.

My detractors have called me crazy for believing in God and for believing that God acts in history—but I don’t care. God is back and the nation is back: a nation with God; God through the nation. In Brazil (at least), nationalism became the vehicle of faith, faith became the catalyst for nationalism, and they both have ignited an exhilarating wave of freedom and new possibilities. We Brazilians are experiencing an enormous broadening of political life—inside the Constitution and outside the narrow, materialistic, stultifying system that dominated us for too long and is still so powerful worldwide. We have now the choice to be great, prosperous, powerful, and safe, with freedom of thought, of expression, of enterprise. We have the choice to live democratically—by the will of the people and not according to a collection of empty phrases. We lived for too long in a nominalist world where only those hollow words existed; we lived for too long thwarted by left-wing globalist discourse. Now we can live in a world where criminals can be arrested, where people of all social strata can have the opportunities they deserve, and where we can be proud of our symbols and practice our faith. The psychological control system is finished, and this is nothing short of a miracle.

Tony Blair’s spokesman Alastair Campbell famously said of Britain: “We don’t do God.” Well, in Brazil, now we do.

Unsolvable problems

by Kyle Smith

Audience reaction to the performance I attended of Tom Stoppard's superb new play *The Hard Problem* was disconcerting. In the fourth row, an elderly man wearing a hearing device repeatedly cried out to his wife, "I have no idea what's going on!" Next to me a young man methodically cracked his knuckles, fidgeted, then cracked them again. And again.

Toward the end, a knockout Stoppard line that in context carried a cunning double meaning—"I'm good," says a character in a play about whether people are good—was met with complete silence. I fear that a substantial portion of the Lincoln Center attendees must have taken a wrong turn on their way to the slapstick outing *The Play That Goes Wrong*.

Tickets to *The Hard Problem* (at the Mitzi E. Newhouse Theater through January 6) are nevertheless scarce. Don't miss the opportunity, because this fresh, funny, insightful play is one of the winter's best offerings. Despite the audience's confusion, the piece isn't particularly challenging to follow, and for a Stoppard play it's downright zippy. In recent years, Stoppard has had some difficulty pruning his thoughts down to suitable dimensions for the stage (his three-hour *Rock 'n' Roll* was an hour too long; a successor, the three-part *Coast of Utopia*, ran nine hours) and the balance of heart and brain tilted noticeably to the cranial. *The Hard Problem*, though, is his most entertaining and endearing work since *Arcadia*, an intellectually substantial yet effervescent piece which played upstairs in the same building's much larger Vivian Beaumont Theater in 1995 to an

appreciative audience. Back then, I suppose, people were used to grappling with ideas that took longer than a text or a tweet to explicate.

Stoppard, now eighty-one years old, is a stealthily conservative thinker whose purpose here is nothing less than to make the case for a higher being, for God. This most intellectually omnivorous of playwrights reminds us that even the greatest minds haven't come close to solving the fundamental mysteries of existence. In a contemporary England of brain scientists, think tanks, number-crunching "quants," and hedge funds, Stoppard's refreshingly contrarian heroine is Hilary (sensitively played by Adelaide Clemens), a student turned mind researcher who contests the reductiveness of the materialists around her. Her rebellion is in her prayers. She prays nightly, for forgiveness, for peace, for . . . goodness. Her tutor and occasional lover, Spike (Chris O'Shea), along with everyone else in the play, is a godless rationalist who scoffs at any suggestion that human beings are anything but self-interested devices trying to keep themselves and their genes alive. He gets a bit rattled when she asks him to pray with her. Nothing fazes him except the sight of her speaking to the Almighty. "So . . . so you, as it were, pray to God, then?" he says. But if praying is merely a meaningless ritual that will please her at no cost to him, why should her praying bother him at all? For a fellow resolutely dedicated to doing what's rational, this antipathy to religion seems a bit senseless, and Stoppard has great fun mocking Spike and everyone in the hypersecular order whom Spike represents.

None of these extremely clever people, nor anyone else, can resolve the basic questions posed by Stoppard through Hilary. Why are people altruistic? (But they're not, Spike avers: all altruism is simply disguised selfishness. He's obviously wrong). Why do people love? (They don't, really, Spike says: hence Raphael's *Madonna and Child* would better be entitled *Woman Maximizing Gene Survival*. He's obviously wrong.) And what about the hard problem: how do we get from clumps of cells to consciousness? Man is no closer to an answer to that than he was in Raphael's time. At what point do rationalists admit they at least can't disprove that there is something more to humanity than mere biological material?

Stoppard is more of an ideas man, and a wit, than a storyteller, but he weaves these engaging arguments into a serviceable story about Hilary's efforts, at a think tank funded by an odious American hedge fund plutocrat (Jon Tenney), to devise a psychological experiment that will support her belief that human beings have an innate disposition for goodness. The financier's young daughter, Cathy (Katie Beth Hall), whom we meet when she says, "Dad, what's a coincidence?" turns out to be, in classic self-aware Stoppard style, a coincidence herself: Hilary herself gave birth to her, at fifteen, and then gave her up for adoption. The little girl turns out to play a key role as a test subject in the experiment Hilary devises, nicely fusing the personal drama with her scientific inquiry in the closing minutes of this brisk, charming play. "I'm good" never carried more weight. That Stoppard and Lincoln Center are joining their considerable cultural forces to bring this play to the Manhattan heathen, cracking their knuckles as they may, is one of the more gratifying developments of this theater season.

Kenneth Lonergan's *The Waverly Gallery*, which played off-Broadway briefly in 2000, is a puzzling choice for Broadway today (at the John Golden Theatre through January 27). Last spring the same theater hosted Edward Albee's *Three Tall Women*, which in its tour-de-force second act explored life, loss, memory, and dying through the eyes of a woman who

was at once young, middle-aged, and near death. *Three Tall Women* is, at its best, harrowing, devastating, even tragic. The mood of *The Waverly Gallery* never approaches the tragic; it is merely a study in irritation, and to seek irritation is not why we go to the theater.

Both plays are tributes to departed women in the writer's family. In Lonergan's case, it is his grandmother we are watching in the incarnation of Elaine May's Gladys Green, a daffy refugee from Nazism (the play is set in 1989–91) given to telling long, pointless stories to her grandson Daniel (Lucas Hedges, who received an Oscar nomination as a grieving son in Lonergan's film *Manchester by the Sea*). Gladys's lair is a tidy but forlorn art gallery she runs in Greenwich Village, where it never attracts any visitors. Around the corner she has two apartments, one of which she allows Daniel to live in while he's pursuing that career of his at a newspaper.

That's Gladys's perception, anyway. In fact, Daniel works as a speechwriter for the Environmental Protection Agency, but every time he tells her this she instantly forgets. Gladys forgets a lot of things, and this is funny, for a while, and then it isn't. Invited to the Upper West Side home that her daughter, Daniel's mother, Ellen (Joan Allen), shares with Daniel's stepfather, Howard (David Cromer), she invariably frustrates others with her stem-winding anecdotes. Gladys can't understand anything you say to her unless you say it loudly, then she complains that you're shouting at her. She asks to feed the dog, is told that the dog is being trained not to beg, then asks again a few minutes later. Anyone who loses patience with Gladys (as Ellen occasionally does) causes even more consternation, as Gladys complains that she can't understand why people are so angry with her and vows to kill herself out of spite. May is spectacularly convincing in the role, which is to say she is spectacularly annoying, and she gets more and more so as the evening goes on. The more advanced Gladys's decline, the more her family members yearn for her death—and the more I yearned to be out of the theater. (Alas, like they, I was trapped, in my case by being seated far from the aisle.)

Lonergan doesn't really have a play here; there is no story, merely a situation, and the subsidiary characters have nothing to do except react to Gladys. Daniel is being tortured by a girlfriend, which inspires some mordant one-liners, but we never meet her and never learn much about her. A struggling young painter from New England called Don (Michael Cera) shows up with some wares to offer; Gladys thinks them excellent and places them on the gallery walls, but no one shows up for his exhibition. He gets sucked into the Gladys vortex when she offers him the back room in which to sleep, and though free living quarters in Greenwich Village, even in 1989, are not to be belittled, he pays a substantial price in vexation by being made an unpaid member of Gladys's support staff.

It seems obvious that a family such as this one would simply place Gladys in a nursing home, precluding any miseries such as the lengthy, agonizing sequence in which Gladys, now completely out of her mind, keeps awakening Daniel all night for three nights running. There seems to be no ethical or other impediment to the family's handing over the poor suffering woman to professional caregivers, so the play is an exercise in contrivance as well as frustration.

The Waverly Gallery feels like a dutiful tribute to a sweet but batty lady. Perhaps a substantial play could have been built around this figure, but Lonergan didn't even try. It's merely a character study, but given that Gladys is no longer herself, it's not a particularly illuminating one. It's simply a reminder of decay and decline, with nothing like the hard-won insights of *Three Tall Women* or of *The Father*, the play by France's Florian Zeller that was produced on Broadway two years ago in which Frank Langella painted a devastatingly detailed portrait of dementia while Zeller exploited the possibilities of theater to create an interior, nearly surreal vision of what it's like to find one's mind slipping away, one's hold on space and time becoming loose and uncertain. Zeller took us on a journey to a terrifying place; Lonergan simply creates the theatrical equivalent of a permanent headache.

J., the unseen title figure in *American Son* (at the Booth Theatre through January 27), is a well-off white teen from Coral Gables whose parents have spent \$250,000 on a private education. Having enjoyed every privilege in life, he is heading for West Point to continue his family's long tradition of proud public service.

Jamal, on the other hand, is a 6'2" black man with cornrows, a slouching walk, at least one friend who is wanted by the police, and a habit of wearing his pants halfway down his backside. That J. and Jamal are the same person gives Christopher Demos-Brown's uneven but often gripping play its dramatic valence. Where is it that one can go, these days, for an honest conversation about race? Demos-Brown, a practicing lawyer in Miami, is well aware that even to ask the question is to tap dance through a minefield. Better to stay clear of engagement, the culture has decided, and instead cast aspersions on others while proclaiming one's own virtue. Let us credit the author, then, with structuring his play around what we don't talk about when we talk about race. If the play is, at scattered times, a bit forced, there is no question that its power grows as it goes on, and much of what Demos-Brown has to say is needful.

Shorty after 4 a.m. "on a day this coming June," according to the program, Kendra (Kerry Washington), a black academic, is waiting nervously in a police station in Miami for news about her missing son and for reassurance from her estranged husband (Steven Pasquale), a white FBI agent who is living with another (white) woman. A (white) police officer (Jeremy Jordan) knows more than he is prepared to say about what has happened to the teen, whom Kendra is unable to reach on the phone, but he allows that there has "been an incident" and that the car Jamal was driving (which belongs to his dad) is "in the system." Due to protocol, the parents aren't supposed to be told more until the arrival of the public-information officer, Lieutenant John Stokes (Eugene Lee), whom we won't meet until nearly the end of an eighty-minute, one-act play. "On one side," the playwright has said, "there is a complete lack of reason; on the other, a complete lack of compassion."

In his book *Please Stop Helping Us*, the *Wall Street Journal* columnist Jason L. Riley explains, harrowingly, how when he and other black children were growing up in Buffalo, some peers gradually succumbed to the entropy of “gangsta” culture, first as a kind of costume or affectation and later as a mode of existence. Neglect of standard English and schoolwork led to antisocial behavior, and antisocial behavior led to drug use and other crimes. Poor choices cost Riley’s sister and his friend Trevor their lives.

Scott, the father in the play, sees his role in Jamal’s life as keeping him focused and disciplined and well clear of such dangers, and he scores most of the rhetorical points in his long, frustrated discussion with Kendra, who grew up in the ghetto and is equally bent on saving Jamal from slipping down the class ladder she has so diligently climbed. She understands, as Scott doesn’t, that blackness is an important part of Jamal’s identity. Hence the youth has recently acquired some fondness for hanging out with other black people and posing like someone who just got out of prison. (The droopy-pants look is said to derive from the culture behind bars, where inmates aren’t allowed to wear belts to hold up their trousers.) Jamal was in a car with two other young black men when some trouble with the police began. The man driving (not Jamal) was observed buying marijuana in a housing project. A possibly major incident began, as is so often the case, with a minor infraction.

Yet the underlying reason for the police’s interest might be said to be Jamal’s attitude, his gangsta pose. The car, a Lexus, was made as noticeable as neon by the bumper sticker Jamal placed on it: “SHOOT COPS,” it read, in large letters. (In much smaller letters, it added, “with a video camera.”) Scott, not without cause, considers this decision to have been utterly asinine. “Asking for trouble” is the phrase Lieutenant Stokes uses, and when he shows up, it turns out that he is black. He’d like a frank word with his “sister” Kendra, who derides him as an “Uncle Tom,” about how to stay alive as a black man. There is no big secret on offer: when confronted by police, do what they say, and you’ll generally be fine. Much misery could be avoided by keeping the lieutenant’s advice in mind. Kendra’s paranoid fixations—she hasn’t slept the night through since Jamal was born, and she wouldn’t let him to go to a West Coast concert because she pictured him being attacked in an alt-right burger joint on the drive—create a burden for her son. Scott’s vision for their son is the proper one. But Scott’s absence from the household led directly to Jamal’s waywardness. The younger man has been acting out, pulling such stunts as the “SHOOT COPS” bumper sticker as a way of registering his animosity toward his cop-like dad. Demos-Brown adroitly melds social dysfunction with family breakdown. What this American son is most acutely lacking in his home is an American father.

Forthcoming in *The New Criterion*:

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Frank Gehry in Philadelphia *by Michael J. Lewis*

Charles White at MOMA

by Karen Wilkin

How do we describe Charles White? Over four decades of a relatively brief life—born in 1918, he died in 1979—the distinguished African-American artist was a brilliant draftsman; occasional painter; accomplished printmaker, amateur photographer; award-winning commercial artist; inspiring and influential teacher; friend of musicians, writers, and poets; social activist; and tireless worker for the rights of black people—and I’m probably leaving things out. Adding to the enigma is this puzzling fact: in his last decades, White was internationally renowned, but his reputation has since gradually faded, even while, today, his admiring former students, such as Kerry James Marshall and David Hammons, are increasingly celebrated. This season, “Charles White: A Retrospective” at the Museum of Modern Art, the first major exhibition devoted to the artist in more than thirty years, has helped to focus attention once again on this pioneering figure and clarify our understanding of his multivalent achievement.¹ A collaboration between MOMA and the Art Institute of Chicago (organized by Esther Adler, an Associate Curator in MOMA’s Department of Drawings and Prints, and Sarah Kelly Oehler, the Chair and Curator of American Art in Chicago), the show is accompanied by a substantial catalogue

1 “Charles White: A Retrospective” opened at the Museum of Modern Art, New York, on October 7, 2018, and remains on view through January 13, 2019. It was previously on view at the Art Institute of Chicago and will next travel to the Los Angeles County Museum of Art.

and an unusually broad and ambitious program of special events, workshops, and a discussion of “the possibilities of technology as a means of asserting political agency.”

“Charles White: A Retrospective” assembles about one hundred drawings, paintings, and prints, along with examples of record covers, book illustrations, personal photographs, and a few sculptural ceramic pieces, in an effort to present White whole, tracing the evolution of his work, with all its restless changes, over the years. There’s even a video clip from White’s close friend Harry Belafonte’s 1950s television program *Tonight with Belafonte*, in which White’s tense, lively drawing of the charismatic singer was the signature image displayed behind the title; other drawings by the artist introduced individual segments. The mainly chronological installation begins with White’s early years in Chicago, where he grew up and studied—on full scholarship—at the School of the Art Institute and also made work under the auspices of the WPA; we follow him to New York, where he lived most of the time between 1942 and 1956, and finally to Los Angeles, where he lived and taught in the 1960s and 1970s.

We are first confronted outside the entrance to the exhibition by one of the murals White made during his WPA years: *Five Great American Negroes* (1939, Howard University Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C.). It’s an impressively large, compelling expanse, a hair under thirteen feet wide, with an unstable expanding and contracting space filled with agile figures

whose muscular forms announce not oppression or submission, but rather strength and agency. The five protagonists, chosen by a poll of readers of the influential black newspaper *The Chicago Defender*, are the activist Sojourner Truth, the educator and presidential advisor Booker T. Washington, the abolitionist Frederick Douglass, the scientist George Washington Carver, and the contralto Marian Anderson. White turns out to be a brilliant illustrator who presents each of his subjects as an easily recognizable, powerful individual engaged in an activity that makes clear his or her contribution. Sojourner Truth, for example, moves towards us from the left side of the painting, followed by a column of people being led to freedom by the former slave, while Carver bends over a table of test tubes.

White was just twenty-one and had only recently left the School of the Art Institute of Chicago when he painted *Five Great American Negroes*, but the ambitious mural already embodies everything that characterizes the later works we encounter as we move through the exhibition: a socially conscious theme enacted by heroic figures, presented with strong, subtle modeling and richly orchestrated tonalities. Nearby, three elegantly refined color lithographs, made in the 1970s, about African-American womanhood, prepare us for White's virtuoso drawing ability. *Five Great American Negroes* shows White to be less interested in the emotional potency of color than his older colleague Hale Woodruff, to judge by the evidence of the murals Woodruff executed for Talladega College, in Alabama, in 1939, and less convinced of the dramatic potential of near-abstract and hard-edged forms than his near contemporary and friend Jacob Lawrence, in his sixty-panel *Migration* series, completed when he was twenty-three. But White's expressively inflected canvas and everything that follows make clear that he shared his fellow African-American artists' desire to treat a particular, not always admirable aspect of American experience with dignity and profound aesthetic seriousness.

What soon becomes clear, as we move through sections headed "Chicago," "The War Years," and "Politics and People," is that White

is an artist who thinks in tone, not chromatic color. Many of the most arresting works in the show are drawings or prints—masterly orchestrations of nuanced grays, created with a broad spectrum of marks, touches, and swipes, set off by velvety blacks and stretches of untouched white. White's lithographs, which take full advantage of the medium's potential for saturated blacks and seamless transitions, reward close attention. Witness a ferocious 1949 head of John Brown, seemingly carved from obsidian. But his linoleum cuts are often even more dazzling, paradigms of how exquisitely delicate rows of black lines trapping narrow slots of white ground can model robust form, create personality, and embody feeling. Like the lithographs, they attract our attention with their images: *Exodus I: Black Moses (Harriet Tubman)* (1951, Philadelphia Museum of Art), for example, a large head of a handsome, forceful woman, emblematic of the former slave who led about seventy people to freedom via the Underground Railroad, with the heads of those she succored behind her. We are first engaged by the characterization and the composition, then intrigued by the narrative, and finally captivated and completely absorbed by those insistent parallel lines and the subtle tones they create from oppositions of pure black and white. Printmaking, of course, appealed to White for many reasons, not the least of which was its much-discussed democratic aspect. Prints were produced in multiples and were inexpensive, so they could reach many more people than individual paintings or drawings could.

White's other strength was his gift for eloquent placement. In his early works, he often twists and compresses the figure to intensify the urgency of his message, enlarging eyes and making hands enormous, as if to symbolize the dignity of labor. The ravishing ink drawing *Native Son No. 2* (1942, Howard University Art Gallery, Washington, D.C.), inspired by the protagonist of White's friend Richard Wright's novel, places an elderly man with bulging muscles in an angled, twisting pose, as complex and articulate as a Bernini sculpture. The *contrapposto* figure enters into a lively

relationship with the edges and dimensions of the sheet as he clutches a wood carving in massive, powerful hands.

Most of White's early images in the sections entitled "Chicago" and "The War Years" share this type of exaggerated anatomy and complicated pose, but many are even more stylized and stylish, intensified to the point of mannerism. They are also very much of their moment—fierce social-realist comments on a world torn by political violence, persecution, and horror. White soon backed away from the rather self-conscious exaggerations of these works in favor of a generous, relaxed naturalism, exemplified by the selection of subtly toned charcoal drawings made in the early and mid-1950s. These seemingly effortlessly achieved, half-length figures, notable for their ample scale and isolation (for the most part) against barely indicated settings, are as solemn as High Baroque devotional paintings. White turns a straw-hatted mother, cradling her child, into a vernacular, rural Madonna. Two younger women ignore us as they engage in what seems to be a fraught conversation. A handsome old woman, her body misshapen by time and hard work, gestures toward us as she stands in front of a rough-hewn wooden building. It seems a benign, affectionate tribute, but White's title *I've Been 'Buked and I've Been Scorned* reminds us of his continual protest against inequities. Perhaps the best known of this group is the pen drawing *Preacher* (1952, Whitney Museum of American Art, New York). Purchased the year it was made, *Preacher* was the first of White's works to be acquired by a museum. It's a striking work that hovers on the edge of illustration, completely redeemed by White's marvelous use of tone and the way he plays the repeated tight wrinkles of the sleeves against the vigorously modeled fingers of the extended hands. The low viewpoint—we look up at the minister through his gesticulating arms—turns us into seated members of the congregation, gazing up from a pew.

White's chosen ancestors are evident in many of his works of the 1940s and 1950s. The hard-edged forms, seemingly carved, rather than drawn, and the mask-like features of the tempera painting, *Soldier* (1944, Huntington Library, Art

Collections, and Botanical Gardens), suggest an enthusiasm for both African sculpture and Mexican mural painters such as Diego Rivera and José Clemente Orozco. An early sketchbook drawing of a sculpture from Gabon confirms the former. A trip to Mexico, in 1946, with his first wife, the sculptor Elizabeth Catlett, strengthened White's admiration for the politically engaged Mexican artists of the period.

The installation includes a group of White's personal photographs, never intended for exhibition, but as economically and handsomely composed as any of his drawings. They bear witness to his friendship with Jacob Lawrence, his participation in protest marches, and his alertness to the life of the streets. We also are shown some of White's sophisticated album covers and the video of his work with Belafonte, along with other high-end publicity drawings commissioned by the movie industry after his move to Los Angeles. For anyone of my generation, many of these works are extremely familiar. The edition of Howard Fast's 1951 novel *Spartacus*, about a slave rebellion in ancient Rome, with its economical cover drawing of a thick-set, classicizing figure, was a staple of my parent's library and those of all their right-minded friends. White's close engagement with music and musicians, suggested by the album covers, is reinforced by a section on images of musicians, such as the portrait of Belafonte singing—which we see in the video clip of his television show, as well—and portraits of Mahalia Jackson and Bessie Smith, all done with the same intensity and conviction as the heads of John Brown, Frederick Douglass, Marian Anderson, and Paul Robeson, among others, in White's more overtly political work.

Which is not to say that White's passionate engagement with social issues and his deep feelings about inequality and injustice had abated. Far from it, as we learn from the selections from a series titled *J'Accuse*, as an echo of Emile Zola's famous defense of Alfred Dreyfus's unjust accusation and conviction. These exquisitely modulated charcoal drawings are oblique, resonant protests against the continuing violence and injustice suffered by African-Americans, even as the civil rights movement gathered strength.

They range from single figures, such as *J'Accuse #1* (1965, Private Collection), a frontal, muffled, implacable seated woman, to *J'Accuse #10 (Negro Woman)* (1966, Courtesy Charles M. Young Fine Prints and Drawings), a crowd of extremely diverse heads, pressed into the circle of a tondo. Even more explicit is a second iteration of White's early tribute to Harriet Tubman, *General Moses (Harriet Tubman)* (1965, Private Collection), in which she sits, facing us but inwardly focused, in front of a pile of boulders. The figure is as solid as the rocks themselves.

White's large, assured works from his last decade are among his most enigmatic and mysterious. Some are meticulously naturalistic, but in others recognizable images seem to emerge momentarily from expanses of pulsing, transparent abstract planes of dry brushed ink or sepia-toned oil wash, before subsiding again into the flickering sea of brushmarks. In the tall, narrow *Elmina Castle* (1969, Private Collection), a crisp oval floats above urgent vertical strokes that threaten to coalesce into near-intelligibility. Our gaze is captured by the carefully rendered face trapped between the rough slats of the oval, a haunting presence that becomes even more so when we learn that Elmina Castle, built by the Portuguese in the fifteenth century, was notorious in the seventeenth century as a place where enslaved people were held before being shipped to America or the Caribbean. The conversation is enlarged by examples from the *Wanted Poster* series, 1970–72, angry riffs on the notices posted by slave owners seeking the return of those who managed to escape, incorporating stenciled letters and disturbing, disjunctive texts. And then there's the discomfiting *Mississippi* (1972, Private Collection), a vaguely threatening, heavily swathed, hooded figure that becomes a massive pyramid against an untouched white ground. An enormous, bloody handprint floats above, with stenciled letters indicating the cardinal points, relationships reversed, floating near the edges. Whatever provoked this disturbing image, I'm pretty sure it was nothing good.

The exhibition ends, as it began, with one of White's late, hyper-realistic color lithographs,

Sound of Silence (1978, Art Institute of Chicago), made the year before his death. It's a perplexing image of a chubby, androgynous figure with a neatly groomed Afro, holding open a jacket as if to reveal a floating seashell. There are weird overtones of devotional images of the Sacred Heart, as well as sexual associations provoked by the vertically oriented shell. And more. We may never fully grasp the work's significance, but it seems likely that we won't soon forget it—nor the rest of “Charles White: A Retrospective.”

Exhibition note

“Bruce Nauman: Disappearing Acts”
The Museum of Modern Art
& MOMA PS1, New York.
October 21, 2018–February 25, 2019

The Museum of Modern Art and PS1 might not want to hear it, but—Bruce Nauman? He is *so* over. Consider *Contrapposto Split* (2017), a wall-sized video featured in “Bruce Nauman: Disappearing Acts,” a retrospective encompassing some fifty years of work. In it, we see the artist walk to and fro in his New Mexico studio. The floor is cluttered with detritus, the wall dotted with photos of horses and rodeo performers. The projection is split horizontally—each half of the screen operates just out of syncopation with the other. Did I mention the 3-D glasses, pairs of which are made available to museum visitors? Watching Nauman saunter back and forth in “real space” functions, I guess, as an indicator of an openness to materials and technologies. It's all very clever and, in its dry-as-dust humor, diverting. But mostly it's stale, and—according to the friend with whom I attended the PS1 portion of “Disappearing Acts”—macho. Rolling her eyes, she bemoaned Nauman's intellectual posturing and cowpoke pretensions. Just what we need right now: another man flaunting his genius.

Employing #MeToo logic as a gauge of artistic worth may seem off the mark, but, truth be told, taking account of Nauman's oeuvre in aesthetic terms isn't better. The word “oeuvre” is, in fact, inappropriate here. Looking for stylistic and material consistency? You'd best

go elsewhere: Nauman is the anti-oeuvre. His variousness, the catalogue tells us, is “a gravitational force that over time filters out everything unnecessary, leaving behind something of unusual conceptual purity.” What that “something” results in is stuff, and lots of it. Like many artists of his generation—brainy types who straddle the divide between Minimalism and Conceptual Art—Nauman and his work require significant expanses of real estate. Between MOMA and PSI, viewers traverse room upon room filled with drawings, lithographs, neon lights, no lights, whispering voices, shouting voices, water fountains, Sheetrock, videos, wax casts of body parts, fiberglass molds of animals, machinery, music, and *Double Steel Cage Piece* (1974), in which we are encouraged to squeeze inside the it-is-what-it-says-it-is structure. Only the svelte, petite, and foolhardy need take the challenge.

And then there are words. If words don’t predominate in Nauman’s art, it is, all the same, nothing without them. I’m not referring to the informational wall texts—though they are abundant, and more verbose than the typical museum standard—but to Nauman’s bent for linguistic hijinks. “The true artist,” we read in an unfurling array of red and blue neon lights, “helps the world by revealing mystic truths.” As a *littérateur*, Nauman aims for the abstruse and ironic but coasts on the obvious. *One Hundred Live and Die* (1984) is a list of proscriptions: “Sit and Live,” “Spit and Live,” “Piss and Die,” etc. “Violins,” “violence,” and “silence” flash on-and-off. (Neon is as close to a signature medium as Nauman can muster.) In an empty, darkened gallery, a disembodied voice insists that we “get out of this room, get out of my mind.” Let’s not forget *Pay Attention Motherfucker*, a lithograph from 1973, in which the title is printed in reverse. Nauman’s wordplay is overweening. Pay attention yourself, Bruce. Needy artists we’ve got enough of.

Sex and death are glanced upon, as is scatology, voyeurism, the American West, and, if we are to believe the essayist Nicolás Guagnini, the parlous state of race relations in the United States. Guagnini writes of how Nauman explores the “intersection between self-eroticism

and blackness, codifies that which has no name, names that which has no representation, represents in the hyperconscious unreality of slowed-down time”—well, it goes on. Suffice it to say, Nauman established his PC bona fides in 1969, when he painted his scrotum black and proceeded to manipulate himself, in close-up, while filming in grainy black and white. *Black Balls* is a minor effort in Nauman’s career, but the video bears mentioning in that it underlines the lengths to which art is currently being politicized. Guagnini notes that Nauman was politically disengaged during the 1960s. All the same, *Black Balls* “matters today” in that “a white male with black balls cannot be instrumentalized in any homogenous form of identity politics.” How prescient; how brave. It’s enough to make you think there was more to young Nauman than the callow exploitation of societal pressure points.

There wasn’t. Nor has old Nauman—he turned seventy-seven last year—gained in wisdom, though the work has mellowed. It counts as a small mercy when films of shrieking clowns are supplanted by films of sashaying septuagenarians. As for the two-venue approach: the MOMA portion of “Disappearing Acts” is more tolerable. The museum’s gargantuan galleries allow the curators leeway with the installation, making for adroit juxtapositions of Nauman’s avant-gardist bric-à-brac. Better the whole than the sum of its parts, if only because the parts have been expressly manufactured to test the audience’s endurance: the work matters only to the extent that Nauman can insult its intelligence. Actually, that’s being generous—presupposing, as it does, a temperament interested in anything outside its own discursive purview. The artist—to employ nomenclature appropriate to the exhibition’s gestalt—couldn’t give a shit. He’s Bruce Nauman, and you’re not. That such a figure is being heralded by the art world as an innovator and master points to nothing so much as a subculture incapable of self-reflection and beyond the scope of satire. “Disappearing Acts” is a waste of time, a fraud on taste, and, yes, too macho for its own good.

—Mario Naves

The collector's omnivorous taste

by Brian T. Allen

The Wallace Collection's current exhibition of art assembled by its namesake, Richard Wallace (1818–90), is both celebration and revelation.¹ It's Wallace's two-hundredth birthday, a worthy milestone for the museum that holds the single most valuable gift of art the British nation has ever received. This magnitude of philanthropy is itself a shock. The collection of works by Canaletto, Hals, Rembrandt, Poussin, Fragonard, the best British portraitists, and so many others is not entirely a secret pleasure. Though its Manchester Square location in London is not the most conspicuous, connoisseurs of all stripes know the museum well and love it.

Much of the collection was built by four well-known Marquesses of Hertford, yet the titular Wallace is for many a mystery. Likely the illegitimate son of the Fourth Marquess of Hertford, Wallace collected with the passion, limitless budget, and eye for quality of his purported ancestors. His taste, though, was different. He had a most elegant, refined taste for the small and precious, for ornamented Chinese cups, jeweled daggers, and medieval carved ivory. The show celebrates miniaturist sparkle, intricacy, and the joy of close looking.

But who was Richard Wallace? His story is riveting, sad, astonishing, and as rich in paths as one any Victorian storyteller could have spun.

The First Marquess was an ambassador to France and Viceroy of Ireland. The Second,

a longtime MP and official in George III's court, bought with a Grand Tour taste. The Canalettos and portraits by Reynolds and Gainsborough are his. The Third Marquess (1777–1842) acquired what is still one of Britain's best collections of Sèvres porcelain and French furniture. He bought Titian's *Perseus and Andromeda* (1556), among other paintings. The three men were at the pinnacle of English society. Each had a taste for all things French.

The First and Second Marquesses were admired for probity. The Third was the model for the cranky, meddlesome Marquess of Monmouth in Benjamin Disraeli's 1844 novel *Coningsby* and for the awful Lord Steyne in Thackeray's *Vanity Fair* a few years later. The diarist Charles Greville said of him, "There has been, so far as I know, no such example of undisguised debauchery."

Richard Wallace, born Richard Jackson, was probably the son of Agnes Wallace, a descendant of William Wallace, the Scottish patriot of *Braveheart* fame. She married a banker named Jackson, had two children, and then bolted. During her wanderings she met the future Fourth Marquess, then serving in the army. Baby Richard ensued. Agnes soon returned to her husband, but not before depositing her new son with his alleged father in Paris. The boy's grandmother, the Third Marchioness, insisted the boy remain as a ward.

As a young man, Wallace was a gambler and a speculator, incurring immense debts by his mid-thirties, covered in part by his father. He was already collecting art like an addict and had to sell it to settle his debts. Meanwhile, the Fourth Marquess bought paintings by

¹ "Sir Richard Wallace: The Collector" opened at The Wallace Collection, London, on June 20, 2018, and remains on view through January 6, 2019.

Watteau, Greuze, Fragonard, and Boucher, expressing a taste for “only pleasing pictures.” Hals’s *Laughing Cavalier* (1624) must have pleased him greatly: at the auction where he bought it, he paid six times the high estimate.

We don’t know what reformed Wallace, but by the 1860s he had become his father’s secretary and art agent, operating out of Paris, where Chinese loot from the Opium Wars came their way in addition to tips on art for sale elsewhere.

Wallace nursed his mentor through his final, long illness. By all accounts, he was much loved, especially by his grandmother. (Another bit of family lore is that Wallace was really *her* son via an affair, which would make the Fourth Marquess his half-brother, not his father.) Soon after his funeral, the Fourth Marquess’s lawyer read his will to the assembled mourners in a scene that could have come from Trollope. Its contents might have caused a small earthquake. He left his fortune—including one of the best art collections in Europe—to his secretary of dubious heritage, who was as shocked as everyone, though hardly as enraged. Wallace was now a millionaire with a purpose and a plan.

The collapse of the Second French Empire pried much from newly impoverished royals and private collectors alike. Wallace was there to buy (until he fled, disguised as a woman). In 1871, he bought the collection of the Comte de Nieuwerkerke, the superintendent of fine arts under Napoleon III. Pinched French dealers sold to him. British and German aristocrats often turned to him first when agricultural depressions made art expendable. He also bought from artists who needed money but never exploited them.

Wallace was a thoughtful philanthropist. His giving had immediate effects and addressed real needs, not only in the museum but in gifts like drinking fountains built in places where he had homes—not water coolers but pieces of architecture allowing the public to refresh in style. During the German siege of Paris in 1870 and 1871 and the subsequent Commune period, Wallace built temporary hospitals and helped trapped Britons leave the urban war zone. He wanted to stay in France and run for the Chamber of Deputies in 1871. He was barred because of his English birth, despite his French acculturation.

He returned to the London home he barely knew, and became the Conservative MP for an Irish constituency where he was the biggest property owner. He was a conscientious, beloved public servant. The collection was famous even while Wallace still owned it. By the 1870s, he was thinking of its future as a public amenity, exhibiting it for a time at the Bethnal Green Museum in a working-class neighborhood in London’s East End. More than two million visitors saw it. England’s entire population was twenty million.

But Wallace’s inheritance was for a time disputed, though a curious quiet surrounded the litigation. In the early 1870s, Wallace developed a close friendship with the Prince of Wales, later Edward VII. Concurrently, Wallace showed his collection to millions, an unusual outstretched hand of private wealth to public enjoyment. He received his baronetcy at this time and, in 1874, the Tories returned to power under the leadership of another new friend, Benjamin Disraeli. It seems possible a deal was made, so tacit it seemed invisible. It linked a good outcome for Wallace in the courts to the collection’s ultimate home.

Like the Fourth Marquess, who professed to have no children, Wallace saw the collection as his offspring. His own flesh-and-blood family was complicated. Together he and the French Lady Wallace had a son, Edmond; in accordance with family tradition, he had been born long before his parents married. Edmond himself found a French mistress and fathered four children with her, his brood based in Paris. “Mon Dieu,” his father shouted when Edmond told him he was moving there for good, “is there no end to bastards in this family?” They never reconciled, with Edmond dying in 1887.

Wallace lived three years longer. He’d gone from a happy barnacle attached to a great family to a baronet to a dispirited old man. He spent a lot of money and, like many landowners, was hit by drops in commodity prices. He worked fitfully with his lawyers to make a gift of the collection to the nation, never made a final deal, and died believing his wife would honor his wishes, as she did. Whatever remained went to her grandchildren and her late husband’s secretary.

This extensive genealogy helps explain Wallace’s collecting. When I first saw the fine show, I thought, “Why these things?” donning the

marketing hat even retired museum directors like me never leave at home. How was this material going to look on a poster at a tube stop? Nothing was big, splashy, or famous. I kept reminding myself that the show is about Wallace, who had his own acquisitions policy. His taste was part sublime, part flashy. He loved intricate, arcane objects like a set of ceremonial armor made of gold, silver, copper, steel, and velvet and embossed, gilded, blackened, and braided to an inch of its life. It is Milanese, from the 1570s, with decoration so extensive that no plain metal is visible. Provenance was central to Wallace, whether an object bore the ownership of a Medici, a Ghanaian grandee, a king, or a saint.

He loved narrative. A magnificent German box depicts the seduction of the fictional Christian knight Rinaldo by the witch Armida during the First Crusade. A parade shield belonging to the French King Henri II shows the surrender of Calais by England in 1558. The Bell of St. Mura, called “the Book of Kells of Bells,” was said in the eleventh century to have descended from heaven ringing loudly. Some of the art reinforced Wallace’s personal history. In 1872, the year after he got his baronetcy, he bought a grand silver ostrich made in Augsburg in 1600. The bird holds a horseshoe in its mouth, a reference to Pliny’s myth that an ostrich can digest anything, including metal. When he was ennobled, Wallace was granted a coat of arms with an ostrich head and a horseshoe. I take it to signal his taste was as omnivorous as it was perfect.

Though Wallace did buy paintings—and they are the few examples of contemporary art to come into a collection that, in the case of all the marquesses, added artists long after they were dead—this is a decorative arts show designed to feature a part of the collection that should get more attention. Wallace had a pronounced love for trophies and for shiny trinkets, and at points his fascination with these things seems more childlike than scholarly. Once we know his history of illegitimacy and marginality, we can easily discern the collector’s status-seeking and overcompensation.

Wallace was adaptable, to both a convoluted family life and mammoth twists of fortune. Today, it’s his museum that’s doing the adapting. The exhibition inaugurates the museum’s new,

impressive rotating exhibition gallery, artfully carved from back-of-house space. The museum also has a new, charismatic director. Owned by the nation, its financial model is changing along with that of every British public museum. It’s confronting a need to raise money privately. And the museum has a recent strategic plan. It’s making changes while balancing a much-adored brand of Old Worldliness against the realities of today.

The new strategic plan runs from this year to 2021 and addresses the installation of the permanent collection. The Great Gallery—among the loveliest and most awe-inspiring in Europe—and the Canaletto gallery are iconic and needn’t change. The arms and armor and medieval and Renaissance decorative arts galleries are cozy warrens for specialists but difficult, dense spaces for those who aren’t, especially school groups. In the Wallace exhibition, where the “greatest of the smalls” have space, majesty, and authority, their own unique qualities are more sympathetically presented. They sing and shine. More open installation is a good idea.

The idea of “Supporting excellence in curatorial research,” as the plan proposes to, is nebulous. One extreme is aiding curators who sit in the library all day. Another is putting them on a touring exhibition treadmill, courting donors, and serving as glorified docents. This is dismal. With the new exhibition space, the museum will find a balance. A good one, where I think it will land, is a more public-minded curatorial focus, with the museum doing some traveling and loan shows. The shows will contextualize the collection, contribute to scholarship through their catalogues, and add variety. The trick is doing these things in the context of Lady Wallace’s bequest, which forbids the display of objects from the collection with art from elsewhere. It will therefore be the curators who will have a more public face.

The museum will join the digital revolution. The collection is already online, but with spotty photography. A new website is coming. The museum will make its objects available for personal and scholarly use free of charge, and use social media to connect with a younger audience. It’s so easy to fall into a black hole of blogs, blurbs, “design your own exhibition” games, podcasts,

apps, and other gimmicks. The museum is redolent of timeless, classic values; a serious place where silliness is not allowed; comfortable and comforting; a place where the heart and mind intersect. In deploying social media, tensions are bound to arise. This item in the plan can become a huge money pit. Technology changes quickly, and preferences are more and more finely spliced among demographics. The museum should add a trustee from the technology sector. A savvy voice at the highest level will help produce good decisions. To me, technology's overarching mission in this case is to promote a museum visit.

The collection and building belong to the nation, meaning the government, meaning the Department of Digital, Culture, Media, and Sport. It's an odd, counterintuitive, even impossible amalgam with a mission to "protect and promote our cultural and artistic heritage and help businesses and communities to grow by investing in innovation and highlighting Britain as a fantastic place to visit." I tend to read the word "fantastic" with its original meaning: "remote from reality" or, if I'm feeling cheerful, "imaginative or fanciful." Insofar as a rarefied place like the Wallace Collection is concerned, I take the message from the department as "sooner or later, you'll be on your own, guys." The government's subvention is about 41 percent of the museum's £6.6 million budget. Five years ago, the museum's Whitehall grant covered close to 50 percent. This aid will almost certainly decline. The government has long wanted to create a culture sector that generates its own income, relying less on the taxpayers. The museum's endowment is £8.9 million. At a standard draw of 5 percent, this produces about £450,000 in annual revenue. The museum generates about £1 million in earned income, mostly from a lovely restaurant. The rest comes from fundraising.

The museum's building presents a challenge. It's a late-eighteenth-century, Grade II-listed mansion with a Victorian façade, familiar but not loved. Accessibility issues need addressing; the laws are complicated and often a matter of inches will require ugly ramps and weird little elevators. The museum wants an entrance for after-hours events. It might want a special entrance for schoolchildren. My own strongly held

philosophy is that every museum visitor should have the same experience in entering the building. When dealing with old buildings, the first rule is "do no harm." I suppose the British version would be "no monstrous carbuncles allowed." The museum started as a mansion and still looks like a big house. It should stay that way. The only option is building underground, itself fraught with cost and complexity and rarely satisfactory.

The museum's board and its director want to boost the endowment to £20 million. Britain's experience with private philanthropy is newer than most would expect, given the Victorian spirit of giving. This spirit gradually shriveled. All British cultural organizations are now discovering how difficult it is to revive the near-dead.

The museum has made great strides by hiring, in 2016, a director with polish, energy, and scholarly acumen, namely Xavier Bray. He is a specialist in Spanish Golden Age art and also worked as a curator at the National Gallery and the Museo de Bellas Artes in Bilbao. His show on Spanish polychrome sculpture, "The Sacred Made Real," was one of the best I've seen in years.

The Dulwich Picture Gallery, where Bray was the chief curator, has launched more than a few museum leaders. Dulwich is good preparation for a museum director. It's a small, private museum that has assiduously built a fundraising base of individual, corporate, and foundation donors, dramatically increased attendance, and organized consistently strong, scholarly shows. These things go together. My years as a curator at the Clark Art Institute and the Addison Gallery of American Art—two small, tony, and decidedly intellectual places—showed me that scholarship, quality, and chances to learn lead to serious interest among donors and a groundswell of interest among the very considerable numbers of people who value good art intelligently displayed. At Dulwich, and also at the National Gallery, where Bray led the Spanish Art department, curators had to absorb a culture of thinking about the public and cultivating donors. Bray does it by instinct. He will be a smooth fundraiser. Potential donors will look to him for cultural leadership. Bray will be so good at the money game, people will come to him asking how they can help—very good news for this treasured institution.

Music

New York chronicle

by Jay Nordlinger

“I was born singing and grew up singing. I live my life singing.” Those are the words of a Latvian folk song, which the Latvian Radio Choir sang as an encore, in an arrangement by Alfreds Kalnins (one of the most prominent Latvian composers, who lived from 1879 to 1951). Latvians are indeed a singing people, and a musical people. At the Metropolitan Opera recently, at least two Latvians have shone: Kristine Opolais, the soprano, and Elina Garanca, the mezzo-soprano. Balts in general have been known to sing. Recall that Estonia’s independence movement, in the last years of the Soviet Empire, was known as “the Singing Revolution.”

The concert of the Latvian Radio Choir took place in the Church of Saint Mary the Virgin, on West Forty-sixth Street. It was part of Lincoln Center’s White Light Festival. What does that name mean, “White Light”? According to Lincoln Center literature, the festival is an “annual exploration of music and art’s power to reveal the many dimensions of our interior lives.” That leaves a lot of room—and avoids the word “religion.” Each year, the Salzburg Festival begins with programs of sacred music, known collectively as the “Ouverture spirituelle.” (Yes, this proud Austrian festival uses a French term.)

The Latvian Radio Choir was founded in 1940 and has had the same artistic director since 1992: Sigvards Klava. It was he who led the choir in New York. The concert was sold out, incidentally, suggesting a hunger for what the Latvians had to offer.

They offered a program of new or new-ish works, mainly by Latvians, and works by Mahler. They began with a piece by Eriks Esenvalds, born in 1977. This was “Stars,” setting words by Sara Teasdale, the American poet. It was interesting to see this Latvian choir begin in English. The piece is touched by beauty and sincere emotion, and it was sung in just that fashion by the choir. I thought, “If the concert were nothing more than this, it would be enough.”

I also had two other thoughts. (1) “Tonal music, sacred music, spiritually tinged music will never die. The heart and mind want it.” And (2) “How much does the ambience have to do with the enjoyment of ‘Stars’? This church, the dim lights, and all that: what role do these things play? Would ‘Stars’ have the same impact in, say, a brightly lit gym?” I think so, actually—for the musical mind. For others, the ambience may well play a significant role.

The first Mahler piece was “Die zwei blauen Augen,” from *Songs of a Wayfarer*, in an arrangement by Clytus Gottwald, a German musician born in 1925 (and still going). From the choir’s mouths, the song was rounded, smooth, beautiful—almost too much so. It could have used more of a crunch. I thought something similar about an arrangement of the Adagietto from Mahler’s Symphony No. 5. It was marred by a beautiful sameness. In between those two pieces came the GSOAT, i.e., the Greatest Song of All Time. I speak, of course, of “Ich bin der Welt abhanden gekommen,” from Mahler’s *Rückert-Lieder*. I exaggerate, of course, but barely. The song, from

the Latvians, went off the rails for a while—I mean it went off pitch. Worse, it did not have the transcendence it should.

Incidentally, I did not understand a word from the choir, in any language, all night long. This did not especially trouble me, as I place less importance on diction in singing than others do. You could kick up a hearty debate on this subject.

One of the newer pieces was “Chu Dal,” or “Quiet Water.” It was composed by Santa Rāniece, who, like Eriks Esenvalds, is a Latvian born in 1977. In this piece, the singers make a variety of sounds with their mouths, including blowing and whistling. I would classify “Chu Dal” as a New Age and minimalist piece. If you are enchanted by it, you’re in luck; if not, you’re in for a long sit, even though the piece is a mere twelve minutes or so. I myself was not enchanted, but I seem stubbornly unenchanted by such pieces in general.

A piece by Juris Karlsons, a senior Latvian composer, born in 1948, had its premiere. It is “Oremus” (“Let Us Pray”). Initially, it is quick, catchy—almost jazzy. Subsequently, it is slower, with sustained notes. The entire piece is heartfelt and affecting. The last item on the program was another piece by Esenvalds, “A Drop in the Ocean,” which pays tribute to Mother Teresa. It includes her words, “My work is nothing but a drop in the ocean, but if I did not put that drop, the ocean would be one drop the less.” This piece, like one of its predecessors, involves blowing, whistling, etc. I could have done without such effects. But the sincerity of the piece—like that of “Chu Dal,” for that matter—counts for a lot.

So, this was a concert out of the everyday. Virtually any choral concert is something out of the everyday. Is the choral tradition in America in good health? I hope so, but have my doubts.

Into Carnegie Hall came Marc-André Hamelin, the piano virtuoso from Montreal. He is a throwback to the Romantic era, or, if you like, a descendant—of Busoni, Paderewski, et al. He began, in fact, with some Busoni, or at least a Busoni arrangement. What he played was Busoni’s treatment of the Chaconne from

Bach’s D-minor partita for violin. As it happened, the Chaconne had a few good weeks in New York. Igor Levit, the Russian-born pianist, played the lefthand-alone arrangement by Brahms in Zankel Hall. Hilary Hahn, the American violinist, played the real McCoy in Alice Tully Hall. (She played the whole partita, and she played the Chaconne twice—because she presented it as an encore.) And, as you know, Hamelin played Busoni’s arrangement, for two hands, in Carnegie Hall.

Later in his program, he played a curiosity, or set of curiosities—much more curious than Busoni’s treatment of that D-minor chaconne. Hamelin played *Six Arrangements of Songs Sung by Charles Trenet*. Trenet was the Frenchman who wrote and sang, among many other songs, “La mer,” which in America became “Beyond the Sea,” a hit for Bobby Darin in 1959. This is one of the greatest popular songs ever. Alas, it is not among the six arrangements, though “Coin de rue” is. This arrangement was included by Leif Ove Andsnes in his distinguished 2006 album of encores, *Horizons*.

Who wrote these arrangements, anyway? For years, the arranger was anonymous, dubbed “Mr. Nobody.” Then we learned that the arranger was Alexis Weissenberg, the pianist (born in Bulgaria) who lived from 1929 to 2012. Marc-André Hamelin is now the principal champion of these arrangements, and he plays them with virtuosity, refinement, and panache. That virtuosity is almost unseemly. I think of a phrase: “casual facility.” Hamelin plays the most difficult music as though he were rolling out of bed. I should also say that he plays his Trenet-Weissenberg with affection—an affection that shines (or smiles) through his playing. Almost always, Hamelin demonstrates taste. And he never condescends to this kind of music, ever.

Another piece on the program—another curiosity, or at least rarity—was *Cipressi*, or *Cypresses*, by Mario Castelnuovo-Tedesco, the Italian who got out at the beginning of the war and found refuge, and work, in Hollywood. *Cipressi* is Impressionist, I would say, reminding me of “Pagodes,” a piece in Debussy’s *Estampes*. Castelnuovo-Tedesco writes with a fond contemplation. I think he would be terribly pleased

to know that *Cipressi* was played in 2018, in America's foremost concert hall.

Afterward, Hamelin played some Chopin: the *Polonaise-fantaisie* in A flat and the Scherzo No. 4 in E major. This is the last of the scherzos, and is it also the least? I would say not, but it is programmed the least. I was glad to hear it. Earlier on the program, there had been Schumann: the Fantasy in C, Op. 17. I have a question for you (another one): Is this Schumann's best piano piece? Would you put *Kreislariana* or the *Symphonic Etudes* or some other piece in front of it? I think the Fantasy is arguably Schumann's very best. In any case, all the great pianists have played it, since the day it was written.

I have heard them all, or many of them, whether on recording or in recital. I have never heard better than Hamelin. As good, yes, but better, no. His understanding of the piece is utterly sound, and he has the fingers to execute the understanding. After he played the piece, no one was standing, and I felt guilty about remaining seated myself. So stand I did.

A concert of the New York Philharmonic began with a warhorse—but a warhorse that can be made to stand up and gallop, freshly. And it did. I am speaking of the *Carnival* overture by Dvořák. It was thrilling, as when you first heard it, whenever that was. It had its flow, order, and sweep. Also, it was decidedly Czech. The tender parts were not too slow, and they were blessedly unsentimental. And the fast parts were not frenetic, not mindless, as though spat out by a computer. Too many conductors do this. They mistake freneticism for energy, and it is dull.

The conductor was a guest, Manfred Honeck, the Austrian who has long served as music director of the Pittsburgh Symphony Orchestra. The New York orchestra first played the *Carnival* overture in 1892, a year after it was written, with the composer himself on the podium.

Next on the concert—the recent one, I mean—was a rarity of a concerto: the Violin Concerto No. 1 by Bohuslav Martinů. Like Dvořák, he was a Czech, living from 1890 to 1959. This concerto was commissioned by Sam-

uel Dushkin, the violinist so closely associated with the Stravinsky Violin Concerto. Dushkin never played the Martinů concerto, apparently just ignoring it. Indeed, it did not have its premiere until 1973, almost fifteen years after the composer's death. Meanwhile, Dushkin championed the Stravinsky concerto like a fiend.

Personally, I find this puzzling. Not to keep picking on Stravinsky, but I wrote of this concerto of his in my November "Chronicle." "In my opinion," I said, "the Stravinsky Violin Concerto is a lot of work with little musical payoff." The Martinů concerto, on the other hand, has plenty of payoff.

Joining Honeck and the New York Philharmonic for the concerto was Frank Peter Zimmermann, the German violinist. He made a convincing advocate of the work. He showed "freedom within discipline," as I often say. He was both correct and musical, or imaginative. When the concerto called for singing, he did it. And when it called for a major technique—as it does most of the way through—he supplied it. I wish Bohuslav Martinů could have been at this concert, to hear the worth of his concerto, if he had any doubts.

A personal aside: I thought of someone I knew, or knew of, long ago—Ángel Reyes, a Cuban-American violinist who wound up teaching at the university in my hometown of Ann Arbor, Michigan. I went to school with his daughter, Lisa. Mr. Reyes had ties to Martinů, having premiered that composer's Violin Sonata No. 3.

After intermission in New York, we had a pops concert, of a high order: pieces by two of the Strauss brothers, Johann II and Josef. Maestro Honeck is to the manner born. He sat for years in the Vienna Philharmonic as a violist. He communicated to the New York Phil. what he knew: charm, grace, line, rhythm, spirit. His gestures were marvelously clear. As Lorin Maazel would say, he found the "gestural equivalent" of each idea he wished to convey. The New York Philharmonic sounded positively Viennese, except for one thing, and a big thing, I'm afraid: they could not give Honeck, or the music, the warmth of sound that is necessary.

In any event, a woman in the row in front of me could not keep still. She kept dancing

in her chair, and conducting, and tapping her finger on her cheek. That was a rave review of the performance.

Manfred Honeck is one of the best conductors in the world. Another of those conductors, Mariss Jansons, led the Pittsburgh Symphony Orchestra from 1996 to 2004. Then he moved on to greater glory in Amsterdam and Munich. When will Honeck, who took over in 2008, move on to greater glory? That will be a sad day for Pittsburgh, but I look forward to seeing who they will incubate next.

The Italian word *trittico* means “triptych,” and *Il trittico* is Puccini’s trio of one-act operas from 1918. The first is *Il tabarro*, meaning “The Cloak.” The second is *Suor Angelica*, or *Sister Angelica*. Last comes the scherzo, if you will, the comedy *Gianni Schicchi*, whose title role belongs to a baritone but whose hit aria belongs to a soprano. They always luck out, don’t they? (Even when they die.)

Il trittico had its premiere at the Metropolitan Opera, a hundred years ago, and the Met revived it this season in a production by Jack O’Brien (2007). Conducting was Bertrand de Billy, the Frenchman. He applied intelligence and passion, head and heart. He did the necessary, in other words. There has been a lot of good conducting at the Met lately—by de Billy, Carlo Rizzi, Emmanuel Villaume, and others. The Vienna Philharmonic has never had a music director, just an endless series of guests (top conductors). I wonder whether the Metropolitan Opera could do the same. Why not?

Il tabarro was superbly sung (in addition to superbly conducted, and superbly played by the orchestra). Amber Wagner was the soprano, pouring forth tons of sound, beautifully. Some high notes were imperfect, but this mattered little. The soprano sang with wondrous freedom, like Deborah Voigt, back when. Singing his heart out—with good sense, too—was Marcelo Álvarez, the tenor. George Gagnidze was the baritone, demonstrating his usual explosiveness but also a touching lyricism. He was perfect—I will go that far—as the wronged, and ultimately murderous, Michele.

This is a short opera, of course, but it has many characters, and each was portrayed aptly.

After *Il tabarro* was over, I thought, “This is what people expect from opera. It’s what they want from opera, certainly grand opera, certainly verismo. This performance was The People’s Idea of Opera.” It packed a great punch.

So did *Suor Angelica*, though in a less blood-and-guts way. The title role was taken by Kristine Opolais, the Latvian soprano mentioned above (far above). You have heard more beautiful or sweeter Angelicas. You have seldom heard a smarter or more moving one. The aria, “Senza mamma,” was almost overwhelming. Reprising her role as the Princess was Stephanie Blythe, the veteran American mezzo. She was a study in icy villainy, and her voice was huge and sepulchral, as ever. That sound is really one of the wonders of the world. I was with someone who was hearing it for the first time. My cousin was honestly, literally, open-mouthed.

Speaking of veteran American mezzos: taking the little role of the Mistress of the Novices was Jane Shaulis. Google tells me that I first reviewed her in the 2003–04 season, when I called her a “savvy veteran.” She has gotten no less savvy and no less veteran. I also reviewed her in 2012–13, when she was Mother Jeanne in *The Dialogues of the Carmelites*. I now tend to picture her in habits.

Did I say “savvy veteran”? Gianni Schicchi was Plácido Domingo, himself. He had the touch, theatrically and vocally. You could not take your eyes off him, or ears off him. The voice was handsome, loud, and—this is kind of a Mystery of Science—wobble-free. He has been wowing audiences since the late 1950s. He must be unique in opera history. Singing that hit aria—“O mio babbino caro”—was Kristina Mkhitarian, a soprano from Russia. It was not cloying at all. Rather, it was fresh as a daisy. The aria sounds different in context, somehow. You must not gild the lily (to switch flowers) while the opera is in progress.

Whom do I have left to praise? Giacomo Puccini, who in *Il trittico* is masterly. These three little operas will live forever, along with his other and bigger operas. They have craftsmanship, inspiration, and genius. People like to laugh at Puccini—ignoramuses, envious. He will laugh eternally, or, better yet, not even hear his critics.

The media

Twilight of the unwoke guys

by James Bowman

Let's begin with an update to a piece that ran in this space just a year ago (see "Putting down the Big Dog" in *The New Criterion* of January 2018). One year after I wrote of a Stormy Daniels–inspired revival of interest in the long-ago story of President Bill Clinton's (and Governor Bill Clinton's and Attorney General Bill Clinton's) sexual transgressions—the story from which the Left had been insisting ever since that we all must “move on”—the A&E network ran a six-part miniseries on the same subject titled *The Clinton Affair*. It seems not unreasonable to suppose that the motivation behind this latest revisiting of the notorious “affair” between Mr. Clinton and the eternally “twenty-two-year-old intern” Monica Lewinsky is not unconnected to the ongoing campaign by progressives to bring down Mr. Clinton's successor in office, Mr. Trump, whose own past sexual shenanigans, they hope, may be found to include something, anything, that will succeed in producing such a consummation, devoutly to be wished, where Mr. Clinton's failed. But that doesn't make its newfound respect for Mr. Clinton's accusers, no doubt partly inspired by the #MeToo movement, any less valuable.

Amanda Hess of *The New York Times* introduced her review of *The Clinton Affair* by writing that the series “lacks a point of view. It is straightforward in style and even-handed in tone. Strangely, this recommends it.” From that word “strangely” you can learn everything you need to know about *The New York Times*'s own addiction to politically tendentious “narratives” rather than straightforwardness of style. But

it also tells us that the *Times*, which was as contemptuous as the rest of the media and the Democratic Party towards Mr. Clinton's accusers when he was in office, has now itself become more “even-handed in tone” about their various accusations.

It's not surprising that Ms. Hess was unable to detect a point of view, since the series's point of view so closely matches her own, and that of the rest of the newly sensitized media, including Peggy Noonan in *The Wall Street Journal*. As Monica Lewinsky herself put it in *Vanity Fair* in explanation of why she agreed to cooperate so fully and extensively with the filmmakers:

Throughout history, women have been traduced and silenced. Now, it's our time to tell our own stories in our own words. Muriel Rukeyser famously wrote: “What would happen if one woman told the truth about her life? The world would split open.” Blair Foster, the Emmy-winning director of the series, is testing that idea in myriad ways. She pointed out to me during one of the tapings that almost all the books written about the Clinton impeachment were written by men. History literally being written by men. In contrast, the docuseries not only includes more women's voices, but embodies a woman's gaze: two of the three main editors and four of the five executive producers are women.

Not coincidentally, the main adjustment the series makes to the received narrative of the Clinton impeachment is that Ms. Lewinsky herself has been transformed from villain/victim

to heroine/victim. Otherwise, its supposed even-handedness consists of giving equal attention, on the one hand, to supporters of Bill Clinton with reservations, and, on the other, to supporters who are (still) without reservations. The only non-supporters of the former president who are allowed to put their case to the camera are those who have since become supporters, like David Brock and Cliff Jackson, and the members and ancillaries of Ken Starr's team of prosecutors who, apart from one or two who express regret for the way they treated Ms. Lewinsky, come across as utterly unsympathetic, if not loathsome. In the revised narrative, they (and Linda Tripp) are still very much the bad guys.

In supporting roles to its truth-telling heroine are Paula Jones, Kathleen Willey, and, much too briefly, Juanita Broaddrick. But by putting so much of the focus on its lengthy interviews with Ms. Lewinsky—who is now embarrassed by her twenty-two-year-old self and yet still speaks of having been in a “relationship” with the then-president—the filmmakers perhaps unwittingly recapitulate the disingenuousness of the media at the time. The effect is still, as it always was, to keep the media spotlight trained on the sensationally scandalous but consensual “affair” with an intern and the process crime of lying about it, and thus to leave in comparative shadow cases of actual sexual assault and what the never-to-be-forgotten Todd Akin was later to call “legitimate rape.” The biggest favor that Monica Lewinsky ever did for her former lover was to shift everybody's attention from the assault victims to herself. In *The Clinton Affair* she's still doing it, for all the attention (not nearly enough) the series gives to the other women.

To her credit, Ms. Hess of the *Times* acknowledges this:

Lewinsky has always been cast as the central female character of Bill Clinton's scandals, and while that has been hell for her, it has been rather convenient for him. Over two decades, it was easy to forget that the reporting on Clinton's consensual affair with an intern arose out of an even more damning context: [Paula] Jones's

harassment suit. (It was Lewinsky and Clinton denying their affair under oath in the Jones case that gave Starr the material to pounce.) Paula Jones spoke out against the most powerful man in the world, and when his lawyers argued that a sitting president couldn't be subject to a civil suit, she took them all the way to the Supreme Court and won. In another world, she would be hailed as a feminist icon. But not in this world—not yet.

What is conveniently forgotten here, however, is the role of the media in sending everybody off on the wrong scent—and then continuing to defend Mr. Clinton, at least up until a year ago, against the lesser charges against him, as if they were the only ones. About yet another revisiting of the scandals in an eight-part podcast by *Slate*, Ms. Hess writes:

“Slow Burn” concludes with an episode about [Juanita Broaddrick's] NBC appearance. Through new interviews with Broaddrick and Lisa Myers, the NBC reporter who championed her story, it paints a convincing picture of a network news division that seemed incapable of handling assault claims against powerful men, no matter how credible or well-sourced. In the '90s, these women's stories cut directly to the biases of the mainstream media: that sexual harassment and assault were tabloid tales and that publishing anything that seemed to sway a political process was ill advised.

See? It was all just about a bunch of unwoke guys at NBC corporate headquarters in the nineties—all of them no doubt long since cleaned out by #MeToo activists—believing the words of “powerful men” over their victims. It has nothing in the least to do with the media's own attempts to protect one particular powerful man, Bill Clinton. Certainly they had shown no reluctance to believe, or to publicize, much less credible accusations against another powerful man seven years earlier and even further into the chauvinist past, when Clarence Thomas was merely accused of talking dirty to a woman—a woman who subsequently *did* become “a feminist icon” simply for making unsubstantiated accusations against him.

It's hard to avoid the conclusion that what we are seeing here is the media's attempt to use their own #MeToo narrative to correct the Bill 'n' Monica narrative so as to avoid any blame to themselves or the responsibility that any truly "even-handed" treatment would cast on them for the scandal culture that has taken over our political life. I seem to remember that twenty years ago there was rather a lot of what the media themselves believed to be "self-criticism" over the Bill and Monica story—though not, of course, the Clarence and Anita one—which they thought beneath their sense of dignity, not to mention the president's. But of course that should have taught us that members of the media don't really do self-criticism—not unless they have something, and usually something political, to gain from it.

Elsewhere in the *Times* in the run-up to Christmas you might have read Dave Itzkoff's account of the arrival on Broadway of a stage adaptation of the 1976 Sidney Lumet film (written by Paddy Chayefsky) *Network*, now seen (according to the *Times*) as "prescient"—not for anything its story of Howard Beale, a lunatic journalist, played by Peter Finch, and the network suits who exploit him might have to tell us about the media, but because of what it tells "Dave" and those who think like him about—you'll never guess—Donald Trump:

The creators and performers of this stage version, set in the late 1970s of the film, believe they have found a compelling interpretation that they can make every bit as relevant to a contemporary audience.

Its story is not one that required any updating to resonate in the Trump era of alternative facts and fake news, but the play does not go out of its way to draw these parallels, either. Beyond its eerily accurate forecasting about the corporatization of news media and the degradation of truth, this *Network* has a timely and more fundamental message about the power of anger and what happens when society unleashes it *en masse*.

So it would seem that what began as a forty-two-year-old satire of the media has now been transformed into yet another redundant

satirical thrust against the media's fiercest critic of today. And the Howard Beale character, who takes to instructing his pliant audience to shout in the streets, "I'm mad as hell and I'm not going to take it any more," appears to have become the hero, at least according to Bryan Cranston, the actor who will play him on Broadway. "Our society does not welcome the emotion of anger," says Mr. Cranston, who has presumably been living in some other society for the past three years. "It is not appropriate. And working on this made me realize: Why not? It's a great motivator. It's legitimate. Why is that not embraced as who we are?"

The question must be strictly rhetorical, since "it"—i.e., anger—has certainly been embraced as who the media are, and the Howard Beale *de nos jours* is not Donald Trump but Jim Acosta, whose habit of making a parade of his anger at White House press conferences, to the delectation of CNN's diminutive audience of anti-Trump obsessives, got him briefly banned from the White House when he attempted ineffectually to disguise yet another of his angry, Trump-hating tirades as a question. On that occasion, CNN took the administration to court to force it to return Mr. Acosta's White House press pass—not that the network's success in doing so was enough to fill the *Times*'s Michael M. Grynbaum and Emily Baumgaertner with joy. Their report of the judge's decision that the administration had to develop more clear-cut rules about who could and could not have access to the press room included this caution:

"This could backfire," said William L. Youmans, a professor of media law at George Washington University. Mr. Acosta "gets his credential now, but it empowers the Trump administration to come up with conduct-based criteria.

"A 'rudeness' or 'aggressive behavior' policy would have a huge chilling effect, and would be much more damaging to the whole system," Dr. Youmans added. "If it lowers the bar for pulling credentials, it's a recipe for a more tepid press."

Neither he nor the *Times* reporters bothered to ask, let alone answer, the question of who

is afraid of a more “tepid” press, and why? But is there anyone outside the most fanatically anti-Trump media, perhaps including *The New York Times*, who wouldn’t like to see the temperature of the perfervid press lowered a bit?

Well, maybe some on the right. The *Times* also afforded the hospitality of its pages to Katherine Mangu-Ward of *Reason* magazine, who pointed out that both sides in the war of words between the media and the Trump administration have something to gain from continuing and escalating it—in which case, I couldn’t help wondering, shouldn’t Mr. Trump be given some credit for trying to calm things down through the exclusion of the Beale-like Mr. Acosta, even though it is, at least in Ms. Mangu-Ward’s sense, against his own interests to do so? Not that he gets any such credit from her, of course. With the usual libertarian even-handedness, she pronounced a plague o’ both their houses, but ended with a ringing endorsement of the “reality show” she had just spent the previous 1,400 words blaming for the public’s loss of trust in the media and politicians alike:

If powerful politicians and powerful journalists can all, on occasion, be venal, petty and vain, it’s far better that the American people should have every opportunity to see that for themselves. That way, they will know to take every bite they are spoon-fed with a grain of salt.

And, as she might have added, it wouldn’t be bad for the libertarians either. But what else could you expect? Criticism of the media for promoting fake news in support of fake narratives about intrepid journalists—for so Mr. Acosta fancies himself instead of a reality-show star—“holding the powerful to

account”? That’s absolutely bedrock of the journalistic self-image, and it is never to be questioned, even though questioning it (as Ms. Mangu-Ward at first obliquely tried to do) is the first requisite of seeing the “truth” that the media are always disingenuously harping on. It is their own version of the virtue signaling that is all that is left of our politics in a positive way, just as scandal is all that is left in a negative way. “Truth” good, scandal (and the scandalous) bad. What else do you need to know to qualify as a pundit? Or a reporter?

Making a similar, but more positive, point to Ms. Mangu-Ward’s was the legal blogger Ann Althouse writing on “How Trump won the Acosta lawsuit.” She thinks that the judge’s mention of a need for “rules,” or a code of conduct for journalists in the White House press room, means that the administration can now formulate and institute such a code, which can thus be cited when the umbrageous Mr. Acosta breaks the rules the next time. I think she’s wrong. I think something is always lost when the unwritten rules of decorum and manners become codified. The legal mind, which now takes the place of the honorable mind in yet another area of human life, can always find a way around the rules. Anything is possible if something is only illegal; not so if it is dishonorable. Just look at Hillary Clinton’s shakedowns of foreign leaders on behalf of the Clinton Foundation when she was Secretary of State. There was nothing illegal about it, no doubt, but it would have been a much bigger scandal than Monica Lewinsky’s in any political culture from which the sense of honor among its public officials had not fled, as it has from ours. And, as an added bonus, the media would not have had to keep rehashing it twenty years later.

Deil care, it's all true

by *Arthur Herman*

Adam Smith was a distinguished man in his native Scotland, especially in Edinburgh, where he taught not economics, since the subject did not exist yet, but moral philosophy. But as a friend and guest at dinner parties, he could be trying. When he spoke, which was rarely, he spoke at interminable length, which was embarrassing to guests and hosts alike. One remembered him as “the most absent man in company that I ever saw, Moving his Lips and talking to himself, and Smiling, in the midst of large Company’s.” One time at table he suddenly began excoiating a leading Scottish politician; someone pointed out that the man’s closest relative was sitting within earshot. “Deil care, deil care,” Smith grumbled, “it’s all true.”

Today Smith’s reputation as the prophet of free market economics, and of the “invisible hand” of self-interest guiding the wealth creation those markets produce, has swollen almost to the point of caricature. Jesse Norman, a prominent Member of Parliament for the Conservative Party in Britain and the author of *Edmund Burke: The First Conservative*, now offers us a biography of “the father of economics,” as *Adam Smith’s* the subtitle dubs Scotland’s most famous thinker.¹

Norman’s goal is to smooth away some of that caricature of Adam Smith as the apostle of *laissez-faire* (a term which never appears in any of Smith’s works) capitalism to arrive at

a more nuanced portrait of the true historical Smith, and the profound genius, underneath. In the process, Norman has produced a finely written and complex biography with two enormous virtues and one serious, but not fatal, flaw. Fortunately, the flaw does nothing to mar the rest of the discussion, since it mostly comes toward the end. In fact, one could read the book while skipping the conclusion, ominously titled “Why It Matters,” and still come away with a rich grasp of Adam Smith’s real contribution to understanding humanity, not just economics, and of why Smith found it necessary to say what he did, the way he did.

First, Norman correctly puts Smith into the context of his Scottish background and the Scottish Enlightenment of the eighteenth century, the “burst of genius” that produced not only Smith but the philosophers Francis Hutcheson and David Hume, the historian William Robertson, the biographer James Boswell, the chemist Joseph Black, the master of the steam engine James Watt, and the novelist Sir Walter Scott. It was these Scots, Smith included, who inspired my own contribution to this subject in *How the Scots Invented the Modern World*, because as a group (with the exception of Scott, they all knew each other and frequently met) they were engaged in trying to understand how their native land was going to be transformed by its 1713 union with their more affluent and more evolved neighbor to the south, England. In doing so, they defined the main characteristics of what

¹ *Adam Smith: Father of Economics*, by Jesse Norman; Basic Books, 432 pages, \$32.

it means to become a modern society, which includes the bad with the good.

Adam Smith would be at the center of that effort. He was born in Kirkcaldy, near Edinburgh, in 1723. His father was a customs inspector who had to deal with the daily frustration of enforcing onerous new regulations imposed by the Act of Union, which turned otherwise law-abiding citizens and merchants into law-breakers in order to evade the imposed duties that threatened their livelihoods. It was an early lesson for Adam in how human ingenuity will work to overcome rules and regulations that fly in the face of what motivates us all: the desire to defend our own interests.

Smith's later studies at the University of Glasgow and then Oxford, and his encounters with Scotland's budding business entrepreneurs in Glasgow and Edinburgh, only confirmed his belief, as stated in a famous passage in his *An Inquiry into the Origin of the Wealth of Nations* that,

the natural effort of every individual to better his own condition . . . is so powerful a principle that it is alone, and without any assistance, not only capable of carrying on the society to wealth and prosperity, but of surmounting a hundred impertinent obstructions with which the folly of human laws too often incumbers its operations.

The world of business and trade, which became the primary focus of Smith's analysis, was only one expression of this impulse for self-betterment, which he found to be universal among humanity.

Second and equally correctly, Norman treats Smith as more of a moralist and philosopher than an economist in the modern sense. Indeed, throughout the book Norman draws a contrast between Smith and the kinds of economists who head up the American Economic Association or end up running the Federal Reserve or the Council of Economic Advisors—much to the latter's disadvantage. Further, Norman emphasizes a point I have stressed for years: that reading *Wealth of Nations* without first reading Smith's earlier works, *The Theory of Moral Sentiments* and

Lectures on Jurisprudence, is like reading Goethe's *Faust Part II* while skipping *Part I*; or to use a more modern comparison, watching *Godfather Part II* without first watching *Godfather Part I*.

This is because *Wealth of Nations* was the culmination of Smith's life's work to understand what the eighteenth-century Scots termed the science of man—"how humans become human," as Norman puts it—and in particular what makes us effective moral actors. From his great teacher at the University of Glasgow, Francis Hutcheson, Smith learned one angle of approach to that question; from his lifelong friend David Hume, another. Smith's great achievement was to meld the two into a new understanding of human action, including our actions in the world of exchange and markets—a better understanding, perhaps, than any before or since.

Francis Hutcheson taught that, contrary to the orthodoxy of the reigning Scottish Presbyterian Church (of which Hutcheson was, ironically enough, an endowed minister), human beings are far from innately sinful; they are, in fact, naturally inclined to virtue. The proof is rooted in our own experience: all around us the people we interact with are, by and large, more inclined to do the right thing by others than otherwise, as we are to them. Were this not the case, life in society would be unbearable. Why does this happen? Hutcheson's answer was that as human creatures God has given us all an inborn moral sense that expresses itself in our natural relations with others, especially in the emotion of love. "There is no mortal," Hutcheson once wrote, "without some love toward others, and a desire of the happiness of some other persons as well as his own."

Happiness is in fact the goal of all humanity (a thought not lost on a later Hutcheson admirer and the author of the Declaration of Independence, Thomas Jefferson), while the highest form of happiness for Hutcheson comes from making others happy and preventing others from suffering. Hutcheson was the first European philosopher to speak out against slavery, stating that "nothing can change a rational creature into a piece of goods void of all rights." His student Adam Smith

would also be a sharp critic of slavery, but on more practical as well as moral grounds, thanks to the influence of the Scottish philosopher he befriended in the 1750s, David Hume.

Hume's writings, including his path-breaking *Treatise of Human Nature*, offered Smith a more skeptical, even cynical, perspective on the problem of human happiness, and what makes human beings good rather than bad. Hume concluded that what makes us human is not an innate moral sense or even our reason—"reason is, and ought to be, the slave of the passions," Hume wrote—but the most powerful passion of all, the passion for self-gratification, which is universal and unquenchable. Left to itself, the result would be utter chaos. Instead, society's need for order to advance and prosper teaches us to treat others with regard and respect, in the expectation that they then will treat us with the same respect—or else have our own self-interest penalized, by fine or even by prison. This secular version of the Golden Rule, then, allows us all to advance our self-interest without undue interference—especially the desire to possess that which we deem belongs to us and us alone, namely our private property.

Two views of man; two different goals for human happiness—one through serving others and the other through serving ourselves. What Smith did in his *Theory of Moral Sentiments*, published seventeen years before *Wealth of Nations*, was first to revise Hutcheson's innate moral sense in the harsher light of Hume's insight that society can't just rely on an inborn moral goodness to maintain a peaceable kingdom; second, he tempered Hume's relentless passion for self-interest with something higher and more noble: what Smith called "fellow feeling" and a natural identification with other human beings. When we see others suffer, we suffer—in our imaginations. When we see them happy and content, our imaginations make us feel the same contentment and inspire us to look for ways to extend that contentment both for them and ourselves; or, alternately, to relieve the suffering of those who suffer.

Morality, then, for Smith, is more than just an exercise in self-restraint or obeying society's

rules. It involves a leap in imagination that enables us to put ourselves in another's place and then spurs us to do what's right, either to alleviate suffering or enhance well-being, since then we feel the same well-being: just as the best laws of government, Smith concluded, work to prevent us from "hurting or disturbing the happiness of one another"—and ultimately nothing more.

Likewise, when we see a person who is richer and more affluent than ourselves, it spurs us (or some of us at any rate) to want to be rich, too. "The pleasures of wealth and greatness," Smith wrote, "strike the imagination as something grand, and beautiful, and noble, of which the attainment is well worth all the toil and anxiety which we are so apt to bestow upon it."

That crucial passage comes not in *Wealth of Nations*, but in *Theory of Moral Sentiments*. But the insight holds true for both. In the end, Smith concludes, what makes nations rich is not natural resources, geography, or superior technology (Jared Diamond's bestselling *Guns, Germs, and Steel* would inspire gales of laughter from Edinburgh's Professor of Moral Philosophy), but the power of imagination: the society that is best able to harness the energies of people with the imagination to see themselves as rich, and to apply themselves assiduously to getting there, will create riches that other societies can hardly dream of. "It is this deception," Smith writes, meaning the trick our minds play to inspire our pursuit of wealth, "which rouses and keeps in continual motion the industry of mankind," a view otherwise known as capitalism.

This doesn't happen all at once. It takes a long process of social and political evolution, known to Smith and his contemporaries as the advance of "commercial society," of which the Renaissance had been the awakening for Europe. That advance, however, still depends on those few who are willing to focus themselves tirelessly on the tasks that will enable them to gratify their desire for personal advancement by producing the goods and services that others will buy and that they can best supply. This self-selective process comes to be known as the division of labor (David Hume

had identified the process even earlier as “the partition of employments”), which ultimately results in “so great a quantity of everything . . . that there is enough both to gratify the slothful and oppressive profusion of the great, and at the same time abundantly to supply the wants of the artisan and peasant”—or even, Smith was willing to admit, a professor of moral philosophy. Far better to be a poor man in a rich country than a rich one in a poor country, Smith was saying, as every Guatemalan trying to escape into the United States—or every son or daughter of a Bangladeshi government bureaucrat struggling to get a student visa to Harvard or Columbia—knows.

As Norman also points out, Smith didn’t see capitalism with rose-tinted glasses. Our author delineates five myths about Smith and *Wealth of Nations* he wants to dispel (to Norman’s credit, in my *How the Scots Invented the Modern World*, I was only able to identify three). One myth is that Smith believed in an invisible hand guiding the creation of the wealth of capitalism; in fact, when the term appears in both *Theory of Moral Sentiments* and *Wealth of Nations*, it is meant ironically. Nor did Smith admire or worship businessmen. He often speaks of their “mean rapacity” and “monopolizing spirit” and warned that “the government of an exclusive company of merchants is, perhaps, the worst of all governments for any country whatsoever.”

Nor did Smith believe that a market-based order was perfect or even perfectible. In the end it’s simply better, and more rational, than the one put together by the wishes of politicians or bureaucrats. And it’s here, in fact, that Norman starts to run into trouble. Smith certainly recognized a vital role for law and the state in maintaining and sustaining a market-based social and economic order, such as building bridges and providing a constant level of education that can counteract the lowering of cultural standards that the endless pursuit of wealth, and the relentless division of labor, can sometimes entail. One worry Smith had, for example, was that a purely commercial society would “sink the courage of mankind and extinguish the martial spirit,” so establishing a national militia, with the right of

citizens to keep and bear arms, would be one way to make up for that loss.

All the same, none of this permits turning Smith into an advocate for the modern interventionist state, or into some kind of “compassionate conservative,” as Norman tries to do in the later chapters. Here Norman’s interpretation of Smith’s criticism of capitalism, including what we would call today crony capitalism, reads more like Norman’s own. Norman claims that “Far from being intrinsically opposed, states and markets rely and benefit from each other.”

This reads more like Georg Friedrich Hegel than Adam Smith. For Smith, belief in the free market wasn’t an intellectual dogma, but a basic lesson of history and human experience. As Smith himself took pains to point out, monopolies and crony capitalism are products of the interventionist state, and often disguised by the highest motivations (nothing about the case of Solyndra would surprise him). Smith knew all too well that the actions of politicians and bureaucrats are as much motivated by self-interest as those of the most grasping businessman; it’s just that the workings of the market can act as an effective check on private greed and dishonesty. None exists to check those who control the levers of political power, except the rule of law and the occasional election. And in the modern administrative state, as we’ve learned recently, even those can be ignored with impunity.

Indeed, there is a further danger. That is that the liberal conscience built on “fellow feeling” which Smith identified, can be manipulated to betray its own principles by those who have a very different agenda. Call it the Popular Front Syndrome: the last century is littered with the destruction and chaos caused by liberals who fall for the humanitarian lines peddled by the totalitarian Left.

Smith was very clear: soft-hearts should not mean soft-heads. When Smith tempered the moral altruism of Francis Hutcheson with the skeptical chilliness of David Hume, he was doing so against a backdrop of historical truth: relying on others, including government, to respect and protect our rights is a mistake. And relying on government to save ourselves from ourselves, including from the workings

of the free market that we find unfair, usually produces more harm than good.

Adam Smith saw clearly the shortcomings of a society organized around the principles of self-interest and the calculation of profit and loss. But he also believed the benefits were worth the price of admission: a society that can feed itself, not just a privileged elite; a society that can relieve the poverty of even its most unproductive members; a society that recognizes the importance of the individual and agrees to leave him alone to pursue his own ends; and a society that sees more benefit in doing business with its neighbors than in robbing or conquering them deserves our respect and gratitude, not our scorn.

It's those who think they have a better way than capitalism to organize modern society who need to stand in the dock. That may be offensive to some; but deal care, as Smith might say, it's all true.

They came next

H. W. Brands

Heirs of the Founders:
The Epic Rivalry of Henry Clay, John
Calhoun, and Daniel Webster, the
Second Generation of American Giants.
Doubleday, 432 pages, \$30

reviewed by John Steele Gordon

Great generals, inventors, actors, scientists, sports stars, and even criminals often live on in the American folk memory. But, at least since the founding era, unless an American politician reaches the White House, he is almost always doomed to historical oblivion.

Everyone, for instance, has heard of William Tecumseh Sherman (1820–91), who rode through Georgia into immortality in the autumn of 1864. But how many know of his younger brother John (1823–1900)? This Sherman served six years as a Congressman and six terms in the Senate. He was Secretary of the Treasury and of State. He ran for the Republican nomination for president three times (coming close in 1888). He even coined

the political term “mending fences,” and was the principal author of the Sherman Antitrust Act. But I expect not one American in a hundred today could identify him.

There are, to be sure, a few exceptions to this rule. Chief Justice John Marshall made the third branch of government the equal of the other two, with boundless constitutional and historical consequences. William Jennings Bryan was a three-time presidential loser with a golden tongue. Senator Joseph McCarthy's name lives on in both infamy and adjective.

But the most important exceptions to the rule are often referred to as “the great triumvirate”: Henry Clay, John C. Calhoun, and Daniel Webster. While none would realize his presidential ambitions, these three men often dominated American politics from the War of 1812 to the Compromise of 1850. It was, admittedly, an era of relatively obscure presidents (with the conspicuous exception of Andrew Jackson, of course). They all sat in both the House and the Senate (and Clay was Speaker). Each served as Secretary of State. Calhoun was also Secretary of War and vice president. In concert some times, in opposition at others, they helped fundamentally to shape the United States's antebellum history.

These three men are the subject of H. W. Brands's latest book, *Heirs of the Founders*. Brands, who holds an endowed chair in history at the University of Texas, has written or co-written almost thirty books. Twelve of these are biographies, at once scholarly and highly readable, ranging from the life of Benjamin Franklin to that of Ronald Reagan. While each stands alone, read sequentially they constitute a history of this country. *Heirs of the Founders* is a worthy addition to this already distinguished list.

Henry Clay (1777–1852) was the oldest of the three. Born in Virginia, his family moved west to Lexington, Kentucky, in 1797, and he became a planter and successful lawyer. He always maintained the outlook of a Westerner, favoring “internal improvements” and further westward expansion. While himself a slaveholder, Clay recognized what an evil system it was and sought its eventual extinction. After

serving briefly in the Kentucky legislature, he was appointed to fill a brief vacancy in the U.S. Senate. He was only twenty-nine, below the constitutional age requirement, a fact that no one seems to have noticed at the time.

But Clay disliked the rules of the Senate, with its endless debate. His real home was in the House of Representatives, where he won a seat in the election of 1810. A supremely gifted politician, especially when it came to assembling a majority to pass a bill, he was elected Speaker of the House on his very first day in office, a feat no one has accomplished since or is likely to in the future.

If Clay was a Westerner at heart, John C. Calhoun (1782–1850) was a Southerner to his fingertips. Born in Abbeville, South Carolina, he was of Scotch-Irish descent, and he was well endowed with the supposedly belligerent and disputatious nature of that ethnic group. His father was a successful farmer. At first largely self-educated, Calhoun went to Yale at eighteen and flourished there under the presidency of Timothy Dwight, who became his mentor. To be sure, Dwight was sometimes sorely annoyed that Calhoun was perfectly willing to argue with him, but he also recognized Calhoun's formidable skill in argumentation. This would always be Calhoun's greatest strength. Unlike Clay, he had little talent for ingratiating himself with others. Calhoun was his class's valedictorian at Yale in 1804 and then went to Tapping Reeve's Litchfield Law School, then the only one in the country. (Would-be lawyers at that time usually "read law" in a lawyer's office until they were thought qualified.)

Back in South Carolina, Calhoun was elected to the House in 1810, the same year as Clay. At first he was closely allied with Clay, favoring a strong national government, westward expansion, and an aggressive foreign policy. Unlike Clay, however, Calhoun strongly supported slavery and was its most eloquent defender throughout his career. As the divide between North and South deepened, Calhoun more and more favored states' rights over those of the federal government. He also supported low tariffs because the South had little manufacturing to protect.

Daniel Webster (1782–1852) was as much a New Englander as Calhoun was a Southerner. Born in New Hampshire, he was educated at Andover and Dartmouth (from which he graduated Phi Beta Kappa). He read law and was admitted to the bar in 1805.

New England, with its stony soil and short summers, was the most commercial part of the country, dependent on foreign trade and shipbuilding—and soon on manufacturing—for its prosperity; and Thomas Jefferson hated all things commercial. When Jefferson imposed an embargo on trade with Britain and France, hoping to stop their interference with American shipping, political opposition in New England was intense.

A speech Webster made in 1812 against the war that had broken out that year—a war that was very unpopular in New England but had been pushed by both Clay and Calhoun—put Webster on the political map. He was elected to Congress that year from New Hampshire. In 1817 he moved to Massachusetts, and that larger and more important state became his home for the rest of his life.

Just as deal-making was Clay's greatest talent, and argumentation Calhoun's, oratory was Webster's greatest political gift. In an age when oratory was a very popular form of public entertainment, it was a priceless asset. His talent for phrase-making would give him three pages in Bartlett's *Familiar Quotations* (Clay gets less than one, Calhoun none). After a brief flirtation with secession during the War of 1812, Webster became the most ardent of unionists, a conviction encapsulated in his most famous phrase: "Liberty and Union, now and forever, one and inseparable." His talent for oratory made Webster one of the most formidable (and highly paid) lawyers of his time.

The dominating factors in American politics in the first half of the nineteenth century were slavery and the fragility of the Union itself. For while the American state had been created by the Revolution and its aftermath, the American nation was forged only upon the awful anvil of the Civil War. Threats of secession, by no means all of them from southern states, began as early as the 1790s. Increasingly, the

rural, agriculture-based economy of the South diverged from the rapidly industrializing and urbanizing one of the North. And the issue of slavery bit ever deeper, as the South defended the system upon which its way of life depended and the North became ever more opposed to the South's "peculiar institution." The abolition movement—which called for the immediate, unconditional freeing of all slaves—sprang up in New England at this time, although Webster did not endorse it, thinking it both impracticable and extreme. Abolitionism deeply frightened the South, where the possibility of a slave revolt was never far from Southern minds.

Clay, Calhoun, and Webster spent their whole political careers dealing with the precarious state of the Union, sometimes threatening secession, sometimes forging compromises to keep the country together. Brands takes us sure-footedly through each crisis of this era. The first great compromise involved the admission of Missouri as a slave state. There were twenty-two states in the Union at that time, eleven slave and eleven free. The rapidly growing population of the northern states had given that section a growing majority in the House of Representatives, so the South was determined to maintain the balance in the Senate. When Missouri applied for statehood, there were many slaves already in the territory and its citizens were in favor of entering the Union as a slave state. But when the House considered a bill allowing Missouri to call a constitutional convention, a New York Congressman called John Tallmadge inserted an amendment that would have forbidden the importation of slaves into the new state and would have freed the children of slaves there when they reached the age of twenty-five. This, of course, caused the bill to stall in the Senate.

In 1820 Henry Clay wrote to a friend, "The Missouri subject monopolizes all our conversation, all our thoughts and for three weeks at least to come will all our time." But Clay had a plan, which he executed with his usual political deftness. Massachusetts had recently passed a bill allowing its restless northern province of Maine to secede and become a separate state.

It would enter as a free state, while Missouri would come in as a slave state. Clay let the Senate take the lead, and it considered a bill to admit Maine and allow Missouri to write a constitution. As a sop to the North, the bill contained a clause suggested by Senator James Taylor of Illinois, saying that latitude 36°30' would be the northern limit of slavery, with the exception of Missouri. That latitude was the southern boundary of Missouri—except for the "boot heel"—and roughly the latitude where the Ohio River, the traditional boundary between slave and free, flows into the Mississippi. This meant that most of the Louisiana Purchase would be free, but Southern senators knew that the land wasn't suitable for plantation agriculture anyway, so they weren't giving much away.

Many in the House were adamant about keeping the Tallmadge Amendment. Indeed, they strengthened it by requiring the children of slaves in Missouri to be free at birth. Clay knew that that amendment would be a dead letter in the Senate, but he allowed it to pass. As speaker, he had the power to appoint the House members of the reconciliation committee to merge the Senate and House bills, and he packed it with House members willing to compromise. They agreed with the Senate to drop the Tallmadge Amendment and keep Taylor's line. As Brands explains, "The South got Missouri with slaves and the lower portion of the Louisiana Purchase; the North got Maine and upper Louisiana. And Henry Clay got a solution to the slave question he hoped would last for decades."

The election of 1824 was the most contentious in American history, except, perhaps, for that of 1876. Andrew Jackson had won the most electoral votes and Clay had finished fourth, knocking him out of contention when the election went to the House. Clay threw his support behind John Quincy Adams, who then made him Secretary of State. Jackson called that a "corrupt bargain." John C. Calhoun was elected vice president (and would serve also under Jackson, who decisively defeated Adams in 1828, making Calhoun the only vice president to serve under two presidents).

The nullification crisis of 1832–33 revolved around the tariff issue. The very high tariff of 1828—dubbed in the South, with that region’s gift for political theater, the “Tariff of Abominations”—caused John C. Calhoun to propound the doctrine of nullification, whereby a state could decide on its own that a federal law was unconstitutional and leave it unenforced within its borders. Although the tariff of 1832 reduced rates somewhat, it was not enough to satisfy Calhoun, who resigned as vice president in order to enter the Senate and lead the fight against it. (The vice president is the president of the Senate, where he can break tied votes, but does not participate in debates.) South Carolina passed an act of nullification, and Jackson threatened to invade the state to enforce the federal law. Only when Congress passed the tariff of 1833, lowering tariffs substantially, did South Carolina back down. It was the closest any state would come to secession until the Civil War.

The Texas annexation and the subsequent Mexican War were popular in the South, which hoped to extend slave territory westward. These were supported by both Clay and Calhoun. But they were far less popular in the North and were vehemently opposed by Webster.

The compromise of 1850, which undid the Missouri Compromise, was the final battle for these now-aged warhorses. (Indeed, Calhoun was dying of tuberculosis.) The North and South had been fighting over slavery in the territories newly acquired from Mexico. The South, of course, wanted slavery to be allowed. The North, increasingly antagonistic to slavery, did not. With the war hardly begun, Rep. David Wilmot tried to attach an amendment to an appropriations bill that would have outlawed slavery in any territory acquired from Mexico. It failed in the Senate, despite repeated attachments to other bills. Another congressman suggested simply extending the 36°30’ line of the Missouri Compromise all the way to the West Coast. The California gold rush forced the issue, as thousands poured into that territory and demands for statehood rose. Finally the outlines of a compromise emerged, crafted,

as usual, by Henry Clay, again in the Senate at this point, with the help of the freshman Senator Stephen A. Douglas of Illinois. California would be admitted as a free state, unbalancing the Senate. The Utah and New Mexico territories were established and the citizens there, and later in other territories, could decide for themselves whether or not slavery would be allowed, a doctrine called “popular sovereignty.” Texas gave up its claims to New Mexico (and the federal government assumed the state’s debt). The slave trade, but not slavery itself, was banned from the District of Columbia, and a new, far stricter fugitive slave act would be passed.

The Constitution’s Article IV mandated the return of fugitive slaves, but the Fugitive Slave Act of 1793 was largely toothless. By the 1840s, several hundred slaves a year were escaping to the North and Canada, principally from the border states. Under the 1850 Fugitive Slave Act, local officials were required, on penalty of a \$1,000 fine and prison, to arrest an alleged runaway, who was not entitled to a jury trial or even to testify. Citizens who aided the escape of a slave could also face fines and prison.

John C. Calhoun, too weak to speak in the Senate, nonetheless retained his powers of argumentation. He wrote a blistering denunciation of the Compromise, read in the Senate by a fellow senator, before dying on March 31, 1850. Clay and Webster were both in favor, and the Compromise came into effect in September of that year. But Webster’s stance in favor of the Fugitive Slave Act, deeply unpopular in the North, ruined his chances of getting the Whig nomination in 1852. The act was effective, as measured by the fact that the price of slaves in the border states rose 30 to 40 percent in the next few years. But more and more northern juries refused to convict under the act regardless of the evidence. The road to the Civil War now lay open, and Henry Clay, John C. Calhoun, and Daniel Webster would not be around any longer to forge an alternate path.

American history of the first half of the nineteenth century often gets less attention than the thrilling years of the Civil War and the Gilded Age. H. W. Brands shows us, in *Heirs of the Founders*, why that should not be.

Dying all his life

Alan Walker

Fryderyk Chopin: A Life and Times.
Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 736 pages, \$40

reviewed by James F. Penrose

The great difficulty for any biographer of Fryderyk Chopin is conveying his mercurial personality. An idea of its elusiveness can perhaps be glimpsed from one pupil's struggle to understand how Chopin wanted a piece played:

[H]e rose from the couch to play the piece and . . . finished the lesson . . . I did not want to forget this experience to which I had so religiously listened.

At the following lesson, almost satisfied with the imitative fashion in which I had worked on the piece, I played it again. Unfortunately . . . Chopin once again . . . rose and with a brusque reprimand, seated himself at the piano saying, "Listen, this is how it should go," and proceeded to play it again in an entirely different way.

Chopin's evanescence was not restricted to performance questions—it informed virtually every aspect of his character. His first biographer, the composer-pianist and a longtime acquaintance Franz Liszt, ruefully acknowledged this difficulty when he said that Chopin was "prepared to give anything, but never himself." The problem is compounded by the loss or dispersal of a large amount of Chopin's personal papers and correspondence. For this reason, Chopin studies have been afflicted by an unusually high level of biographical whimsy. "Scholarship abhors a vacuum," writes Alan Walker in *Fryderyk Chopin: A Life and Times*, his new study of the composer, which examines the "speculation, hypothesis, and sheer fantasy" that have affected previous studies.

A good part of the interest of Walker's book is in seeing how he enlarges the Chopin "scholarship vacuum" by showing us where previous scholars have either got it completely wrong (for example by treating as genuine the freakishly erotic correspondence alleged

to have been written by the composer), probably wrong (such as the claim that in his last months of his life he saw ghostly creatures fluttering out of his piano), or merely unverified (his not quitting Paris for London on account of a life-changing invitation to the Rothschilds' salon).

Another strength is Walker's technical perspective on the music, often accompanied by short bar-by-bar examples, that makes the book feel like a skillful lecture-recital. But the most important of all is the marvelous perspective he brings to describing Chopin's milieu. Walker is a master of the long aside and the diverting footnote, such as how an early Parisian neighbor requested, and was granted, the dubious privilege of commanding his own firing squad. We see, among other topics, how tuberculosis, Chopin's music teachers, Russian imperialism and Polish nationalism, his musical and literary contemporaries, and Paris's place at the center of European culture all contributed to the making and unmaking of the man and the composer. *A Life and Times* is an informative and exceptionally engaging read.

The essential facts of Chopin's life are these: He was born in 1810 in Żelazowa Wola, a tiny village a few miles west of Warsaw where his father tutored the children of the Countess Skarbek, a Polish noblewoman. After Chopin's birth, the family moved to Warsaw, where his father taught at the Lyceum. When his talent became too obvious to ignore, Chopin began piano lessons from a local violinist, the only instrumental teacher he ever had, and started even as a boy to invent the supple technique that would revolutionize piano performance. At twelve, he began studying composition with another local. By all accounts he was a happy and gregarious young man with a playful sense of humor. Though Chopin's parents did not want their son to be a musician (then socially akin to being a servant, or worse), word spread about the boy's talent for improvisation and musical mimicry, gaining him invitations to the houses of Warsaw's aristocracy, where he developed his self-deprecating charm and social polish. At eighteen, he visited Berlin by which time he had published several works. By nineteen

he had finished his formal musical studies and visited Vienna, where his playing was overwhelmingly well received. At twenty, he departed from Poland forever, first to Vienna, then Munich, then Paris where finally, after a rocky start, he settled. After a successful career teaching aristocratic and wealthy middle-class pupils at twenty gold francs per lesson and a comparatively successful composing career, he died in 1849, leaving some 194 individual works in 74 opus numbers and some 40 other works on which his reputation rests.

For all the pleasure he has given us, however, Chopin was an unlucky man. Plagued by terrible health from his early teens and a ravaging sense of guilt about leaving Poland, serially unsuccessful with women, alienated from his great musical contemporaries, leaving no pupils of note, and seeing his musical creativity wither in his last years, he died destitute and unhappy. This is in contrast to the popular image of Chopin as a nattily dressed, dreamy Romantic.

Walker's biography shows us how disease altered Chopin's life. As Beethoven contended with deafness, so Chopin contended with tuberculosis. Walker tells us that, during Chopin's lifetime, around a fifth of Central Europe's population suffered from consumption (one of the old names for tuberculosis). Tuberculosis killed about 70 percent of its victims, and it claimed a large number of Chopin's friends and acquaintances. Chopin's family, though prosperous by the standards of the time, was no exception. His father eventually died of it, and his talented sister, Emilia, contracted it around the same time as Chopin, but survived for only two years. Although he outlasted her by more than a generation, his symptoms worsened until his death in 1849. Consumption is not an easy disease to endure: at least one piano student recalled that when Chopin was ill, the normally punctilious and elegant composer would shout, throw things, and otherwise be downright nasty during lessons.

Chopin's struggle with tuberculosis appears to have affected his concert-giving. As a young man he enjoyed public performance, but by his

mid-twenties this changed, possibly because he found its physical demands too difficult. Even in the salon settings where he was most comfortable, his playing was characterized by its vanishing softness. Walker relates how an audience member once wrote that Chopin's playing "whispered to [the audience] of zephyrs and moonlight rather than of cataracts and thunder," and the Irish composer-pianist John Field, who created the genre that Chopin would immortalize—the nocturne—called him "a sickroom talent." Apart from his suffering from watching the deaths of friends and family, the direct effects of that wasting disease on Chopin's emotional state cannot be ignored. His health may have also played a part in his deteriorating friendships with Liszt and Hector Berlioz, whose robust and large-scale works so contrasted with Chopin's intimate style.

His perennially grim health also contributed to his difficulties with women. Though Chopin's unrequited love for the soprano Konstancja Gładkowska can perhaps be explained as youthful *gaucherie* (decades later she described him as "temperamental, full of fantasies and unreliable"), his engagement several years later to Maria Wodzińska was, to his great chagrin, broken by her mother on account of his ill health. On the rebound, Chopin fell in with the gregarious authoress George Sand, becoming one in her long, long line of lovers (or, to adapt one of Walker's best lines, a fortunate successor to his fortunate predecessors). Yet, as Walker shows, during their nine years together Sand kept Chopin alive and stimulated, midwifing many of his great works—the *préludes*, the two last sonatas, and many of the *impromptus*, *nocturnes*, *mazurkas*, *waltzes*, and *ballades*. But even at the beginning of their time together, when they took their famous honeymoon-in-all-but-name to Majorca, Chopin became so ill that, in Sand's words, he was "coughing up bowls of blood," and their relationship quickly became chaste at Sand's insistence. The immediate cause of their breakup in 1847 was the constant fighting among Sand, her children, and her son-in-law, the unscrupulous sculptor Auguste Clésinger, into which

Chopin was drawn. But the long-term cause was probably the collateral emotional damage caused by the inexorable pace of his illness. Perhaps the saddest evidence of this was Sand's roman-à-clef, *Lucrezia Floriani*, about a relationship gone bad: "what happens to the rapture and love when he, who is the object of it, behaves like a raving madman," she wrote. After their break, Chopin went into physical and musical decline, writing hardly anything, and dying just two years later, forever remembered as the consumptive "poet of the piano."

Chopin's music, says Walker, was shaped by his love of *bel canto* singing, particularly the pure and sensuous arias of Bellini. "You must sing if you wish to play," he told his students, and the emphasis in his music on *cantabile* voicing and a sumptuous *legato* create an intense emotional response in the listener. It was this effect that Robert Schumann perhaps had at the back of his mind when he described Chopin's mazurkas as "guns buried in flowers." Chopin was essentially a miniaturist, at his best in intimate salon settings where his delicate, subdued progressions and revolutionary harmonies were at their most powerful. Not that these traits were universally admired—he was described by one critic as "someone who had written some rondos and dance tunes." At heart, Chopin's art is improvisatory. Walker explains that he composed relatively little in the classical sonata or concerto forms favored by other musicians, but raised the *prélude*, the mazurka, the polonaise, and the ballade—musical genres that he effectively invented—and the *étude* and nocturne—genres that he radically transformed—to the highest art. Schumann claimed that Chopin's style was so distinctive that he could publish works anonymously and people would still know they were his.

Perhaps this inwardness explains his rather unconventional views about other composers. Chopin thought the violin playing of Nicolò Paganini, another genre-inventing virtuoso, was perfection itself. He preferred Hummel to Beethoven, not because Hummel was the greater composer, but because he was less

musically rambunctious. And he was largely indifferent to the works of his great contemporaries, finding these men more of social than musical interest. One possibly apocryphal story (but typical of his sly humor) has Chopin claiming that Berlioz composed by flicking ink onto ruled music paper. Walker tells us that after Schumann dedicated his *Kreiseriana* to Chopin, all Chopin could find to admire was the design on its front cover. Mendelssohn did not fare much better. And after Louis-Philippe sent the pianist Ignaz Moscheles an elegant traveling case in thanks for a command performance, Chopin commented that the gift was a thinly veiled hint that Moscheles had better get out of town.

Then there is Chopin's extraordinary treatment of Liszt. After Chopin arrived in Paris, Liszt befriended him and introduced him to a number of musicians and literati, including George Sand. Liszt revered Chopin, reviewing him favorably, publicly performing his music, and occasionally sending him pupils. His kindnesses were not reciprocated. Though he agreed with many of Liszt's musical judgments ("Liszt is always right," he once told a pupil) and could be deeply moved by his playing, Chopin was profoundly envious of him. Examples abound, but one is particularly telling: Wilhelm von Lenz, a former Liszt student, introduced himself to Chopin and asked for lessons. When Chopin asked to hear something, von Lenz played him Chopin's own B-flat mazurka. After he finished, Chopin whispered, "*He* [Liszt] showed it to you—he has to put his stamp on everything . . . he plays for *thousands* of people and I rarely play for *one*!" But although relations between Chopin and Liszt cooled over the years (accelerated, perhaps, when Liszt let himself into Chopin's apartment for an interlude or two with Berlioz's ex-fiancée, Camille Moke, leaving, as one confidante later recalled with a grimace, "evidence"), Liszt, who understood Chopin better than most, championed the man and his music until his own death in 1886.

Early on, Walker quotes Somerset Maugham's observation that "There are three rules for writing biography and nobody

knows what they are.” In his own field, the author seems to have found a few sound guidelines. First, pick an interesting composer, preferably one whose music has “timeless power to move its hearers to a better place,” and who lived in a fascinating time. Second, weave hundreds of little accounts and personal histories of that time into a colorful description of the composer’s setting. Third, tell the story in stylish but elegant prose with clear and forthright judgments. But perhaps that can be expected with all the practice Walker has had. Years ago, he published a collection of essays by various authors on Chopin’s life and work, still read with pleasure, which has matured into this book. In 1966, he brought out a similar collection about Liszt which evolved into his marvelous three-volume biography. Finally, in 1972, Walker published a last collection on Schumann. With Liszt, and now Fryderyk Chopin, so well cared for, one can but hope that Walker will try for the hat-trick.

Shines in the darkness

Christian Wiman

He Held Radical Light: The Art of Faith, the Faith of Art.
Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 128 pages, \$23

reviewed by Christopher Benson

Since poets live, move, and have their beings in words, it is not surprising that the titles and subtitles of Christian Wiman’s memoirs are carefully chosen. Wiman, who edited *Poetry* for a decade and now teaches at Yale Divinity School, recounted in his 2013 memoir, *My Bright Abyss*, how—in the words of Dostoyevsky’s devil in *The Brothers Karamazov*—he passed through “the great crucible of doubt” after a terminal cancer diagnosis. Blessed to live forward, he tries to understand life backward in this sequel, *He Held Radical Light*, which traces his development as a poet, student of poetry, and man of faith from college to the start of his professorship. Many others illuminate his search for this “radical light,”

including contemporary poets like Seamus Heaney, Mary Oliver, Philip Larkin, and A. R. Ammons and the twentieth-century theologian Dietrich Bonhoeffer.

If *My Bright Abyss* was an essay on the roles of art and faith in dying well, then *He Held Radical Light* may be an essay on the roles of art and faith in living well. Both titles allude to “the true light” from the Gospel of John, although Wiman emphasizes that this light at the root of all things (the etymological origin of “radical” is, after all, the Latin word for “root”) is usually perceived in darkness (as the word “abyss” implies)—the darkness of ignorance and unbelief. Curiously, there is no mention about the darkness of sin, which may be explained by his first memoir’s subtitle: “Meditation of a Modern Believer.” For “unbelieving believers,” as Wiman calls himself and his readers, the eyes strain to perceive the light because of weakness rather than wickedness. The only sins that remain, it seems, are piety (“Nothing kills credibility like excessive enthusiasm”) and conviction (“Nothing poisons truth so quickly as an assurance that one has found it”).

The poet Fanny Howe nourished Wiman’s “sense of what a genuine faith might look like to a genuinely modern mind” when she told him that “she could wake up an atheist and go to bed a believer, and vice versa . . . *pretty much every goddamn day!*” The organizing question of *He Held Radical Light*—“What is it that we want when we can’t stop wanting?”—receives fluid answers: “I say God, but Jack Gilbert’s greed may be equally accurate, at least as long as God is an object of desire rather than its engine, end rather than means.” Elsewhere, Wiman approvingly quotes Ilya Kaminsky’s answer to that same question: “Lord, give us what you have already given.” At the end of the memoir, the answers are “form” and “order,” which can be satisfied in part by poetry, but only in full by God, who is discovered through human insufficiency: “Our only savior is failure.”

The true Savior stands just off stage as the memoir ends. Wiman refrains from identifying the “saving absolute” in a visit with Seamus Heaney:

What might I have said? *All you have to do, Seamus, is open your big Irish heart to Jesus.* One more truth dies with the utterance. No, the casual way that American Christians have of talking about God is not simply dispiriting, but is, for some sensibilities, actively destructive. There are times when silence is not only the highest, but the only possible, piety.

Perhaps Wiman's aversion to "casual" God-talk owes less to his youth in the Bible Belt of Texas than to the soirées of professional wordsmiths.

Certainly, poets and theologians should responsibly steward their words about God. Yet I cannot help but wonder if Wiman's proclivity for silence betrays modern timorousness more than monastic piety, Ludwig Wittgenstein more than Saint Anthony. Yes, Wiman writes from a Christian perspective, but he joins the company of poets whose motto could be the final sentence of *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*: "Whereof one cannot speak, thereof one must be silent." Like the painter Basil Hallward in *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, Wiman seems to feel the embarrassing exposure of expression: "Perhaps one should never put one's worship into words." And yet, if carried to its logical conclusion, silence would be planned obsolescence for poets since poets worship with words.

Of course, God-talk varies from age to age while God remains the same. In his earlier memoir, Wiman pictures God by the oxymoron of a "bright abyss"—an image common to negative theology, which emphasizes what God is *not*, looking into a bottomless depth that finite minds cannot reach. In his new memoir, Wiman pictures God by an even less comforting image, which has its source in the A. R. Ammons poem that inspired Wiman's title: "wrestling to say, to cut loose/ from the high unimaginable hook." Are we worms impaled on this sharp hook? Or does the hook bear the weight of our pain and sorrow? "If I say that the hook is God, will only believers understand me? If I say that the hook is the Void, will only atheists understand me?" Wiman asks. He then makes a signature move of equivocation: "The hook is both God and Void, grace and pain. I am reasonably sure that most poets will know what I mean."

Whether empty like an abyss or violent like a hook, this description of God is a far cry from those used by Christian poets in the past. The seventeenth-century Anglican priest and poet George Herbert, for example, used biblical images of God that offer a positive theology, such as the protection of a "Father," the sovereignty and justice of a "King," or the tenderness of "Love." Wiman's poems are often based on his private revelations (notice the possessive "*my* bright abyss"), whereas Herbert's religious poems tend to focus on the revelations of God. Wiman insists, "You can't let the flashes of insight harden into 'knowledge.' You have to remain true to those moments of truth." Intellectual humility and imaginative docility are admirable virtues in a religious writer, but not at the price of evacuating dogmatic content, as if belief were the enemy of inspiration. While mystery cannot be mastered, it is not mystery all the way down—not fumbling around in the dark, because "the light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it," as Saint John puts it.

The chiasmic subtitle to Wiman's new memoir is "The Art of Faith, The Faith of Art." Some traditionalists may be troubled by Wiman's treatment of "the art of faith." But they should laud his treatment of "the faith of art." It balances charity and reproach: charity for the sacred resonances of secular poetry, reproach for turning poetry into secular scripture. Wiman's incisive reading of Philip Larkin's "Aubade," Craig Arnold's "Meditation on a Grapefruit," and Seamus Heaney's "Sunlight" show "art contains and expresses a faith that the artist, in the rest of his waking life, rejects." Setting aside the shortcomings of Wiman's writings on faith itself, the memoir delivers "the needful bits and curbs to headstrong weeds" (to quote Duke Vincentio in *Measure for Measure*) that infiltrate the garden of modern poetry. Wiman pulls up the stubborn credo of art as a "redemptive activity":

I think it's dangerous to think of art—or anything, actually—as a *personally* redemptive activity, at least in any ultimate sense. For one thing,

it leads to overproduction: if it's art that's saving you, you damn sure better keep producing it, even if the well seems to have run dry. . . . The real issue, for anyone who suffers the silences of God and seeks real redemption, is that art is not enough. Those spots of time are not enough to hang a life on. At some point you need a *universally* redemptive activity.

He Held Radical Light deserves attention for its central paradox, which chastens Percy Shelley and all who believe that poets are “the unacknowledged legislators of the world.” Wiman is an alert watchman where others are drowsy to the element of overweening that can sneak in and take hold, resulting in the belief that art can save. He fights this pretentious enemy, insisting that “art is not enough,” and yet everything must be given to crafting words, even though they will not survive. This understanding of the artist, which does not forfeit dedication or passion for humility, recognizes that the deepest hungers of the human being are satisfied outside of art, while art gives those hungers their force and vividness.

The man behind “Messiah”

Jane Glover

Handel in London:

The Making of a Genius.

Pegasus Books, 488 pages, \$28.95

reviewed by John Check

The letters he left behind are relatively few, and these are sparing in personal detail. Vigilantly he steered clear of controversy, the better to concentrate on work, his true priority. He seems to have gone from one success to another; when met with setbacks, say an unenthusiastic response to an opera, he trained his resources on new projects, justifiably confident of his ability to succeed again. Succeed he did, driven, as the conductor and musicologist Jane Glover writes, by “his own charismatic energy and fierce insistence on the highest possible standards.” At the time of his death in 1759

at the age of seventy-four, George Frideric Handel was famous throughout Europe.

Born in 1685 in the German university town of Halle, the young Handel soon received instruction there in counterpoint and composition, earned recognition for his organ and harpsichord playing, and at the age of nineteen wrote his first opera, *Almira*. Next he spent four years in Italy, where he came under the auspices of the great patrons of the day, including the Medicis, and readily absorbed new musical influences. Handel's early attainments, efficiently treated by Glover, provide context for what followed: his nearly fifty years in London, the period that gives *Handel in London* its scope. Its theme is how and why the composer gave up opera for the oratorio.

Although he wrote orchestral and keyboard works and composed music to commemorate special occasions (*Water Music*, for example, and *Music for the Royal Fireworks*), Handel is known primarily for his operas and oratorios. Opera had its beginnings in the late sixteenth century in Italy. So important was its provenance that, when Handel came to England in 1710, opera still meant Italian opera. Librettos were in Italian and were often the work of Italian librettists. The star singers were Italian, too, and about them the popular press made a tremendous stir, tracking their comings and goings. The kind of opera Handel composed, *opera seria*, was serious and elevated in its tone, drawing typically on classical personages, tropes, and allusions. These operas were expensive to mount, owing to the use (or overuse) of sets and costumery. English audiences, in particular, had a taste for special effects, a taste Handel made sure to indulge. One such effect, in *Rinaldo*, Handel's first opera composed in England, is described in the libretto as “a Chariot drawn by two huge Dragons, out of whose Mouths issue Fire and Smoke.”

The oratorio, on the other hand, was an altogether more modest production. Unlike the classical themes explored in *opera seria*, oratorios had texts based mostly on religious topics, and these texts, in Handel's works, were almost always in English. Also unlike opera,

Handel's oratorios were not acted, nor were singers costumed, and special effects were nonexistent. These compositions appealed strongly to a rising middle class.

A key moment in Handel's turn from opera came in 1717, when the Duke of Chandos hired the composer to write a series of anthems for performances in his private chapel. As a music enthusiast of the highest order, the Duke kept on staff a band of two dozen singers and instrumentalists, and it was for this ensemble that Handel fashioned religious compositions with texts in English. One of these was *Esther*, a biblical work whose impact on Handel's career would take years to become evident.

By the time he entered the Duke's employ, Handel had composed five operas for English audiences. His best works in that genre—including *Giulio Cesare*, his very best—lay ahead of him. For twenty-five years, he continued to compose one opera after another, even as the vogue for Italian opera in London began to dissipate. Some critics, Richard Steele and Joseph Addison among them, couldn't fathom why English-speaking audiences should be expected to understand works set in Italian.

Handel was in the thick of opera composition in 1732 when he attended a celebration to mark his forty-seventh birthday at the Crown & Anchor Tavern, a popular gathering spot for music professionals. Assembled that night was a group of singers from the choirs of St. Paul's Cathedral, Westminster Abbey, and the Chapel Royal; the work they performed for Handel was *Esther*. Its three performances were immensely popular, and just a few months later, it was presented again. The response to *Esther*, writes Glover, "laid the foundations for a vast development in English music": Handel's move from the opera to the oratorio. He wrote the oratorios *Saul* in 1738 and *Israel in Egypt* in 1739.

When he set sail for Dublin in the fall of 1741, Handel took with him the beginnings of what would become his greatest work, the oratorio *Messiah*. The reaction it received was overwhelming; but how, Glover asks, could the composer grasp its lasting significance? She writes:

That *Messiah* would become a veritable cornerstone of European and therefore world culture, resonating spectacularly through the centuries and across the globe, changing the whole nature of music-making and to an extent also that of concert-going, as well as uplifting countless millions of performers and listeners, would—even for the confident, resilient and optimistic Handel—have been utterly unimaginable.

Handel devoted most of the rest of his life to writing oratorios, many of which were brilliant. But, of course, there is only one *Messiah*.

In *Handel in London*, Glover demonstrates the same feel for people that made her earlier book, *Mozart's Women*, both enjoyable and illuminating. In the present book, she is particularly good at portraying the royals and their often fraught connections—for instance the acrimonious relationship between George I and his son, George II, or that between the latter and his own son Frederick, the Prince of Wales. She captures well the peevish and proprietary Charles Jennens, the librettist of *Messiah*: Jennens thought that Handel, working fast as usual and finishing the music for the oratorio in about three weeks, paid insufficient attention to the texts over which he had labored. Likewise, Glover's portrayal of Senesino, the miraculous castrato and troublemaker, is first-rate. Handel took pains in his operas never to allow another singer to outshine Senesino, but that didn't stop the castrato from forming an opera company to rival Handel's.

Glover's musical judgments are as acute as they are persuasive. She holds, for instance, that Handel is at his most "searing" in music conveying grief or despair. Granting that certain of his compositions were "sometimes routine," she writes that "he was never mediocre." And about *Messiah*, a work she has conducted more than one hundred times, she is splendidly authoritative.

"Across the generations, Handel the professional musician and craftsman continues to educate and inspire," Glover writes. Her inspired book invites us to marvel at his permanent achievements.

Making book in Russia

by Jeffrey Meyers

In nineteenth-century Russia, gambling at cards was a favorite leisure activity of military officers, and casinos in Germany and France became magnetic destinations for the landed gentry. Gambling was a way to test one's nerve and courage, to risk honor, property, and status. Fueled by alcohol, the pleasurable distraction and means to stave off boredom often turned into an uncontrollable addiction. Obsessive gambling became reckless self-destruction, a form of suicide, which often followed total ruin. Like warfare and dueling, gambling was a high-risk and sometimes deadly activity, where greed and crime could flourish. When connected to love, it made a perfect literary subject.

Dostoyevsky believed that Russians, torn between extremes of behavior, were fatally attracted to risk. Chekhov's biographer writes that "Pushkin gambled away his poetry, Tolstoy gambled away his house, and Dostoyevsky gambled away everything he had." Dostoyevsky quarreled bitterly with Turgenev after the former had borrowed money for gambling debts and failed to repay it. Even the cautious Chekhov tried his luck in Monte Carlo and placed a few modest bets on *le rouge et le noir*. Pushkin and Lermontov took the ultimate risks and were killed in duels.

These writers portrayed their experiences in fiction, and the psychological motivation of gamblers became the central subject of five representative works published within three decades: Pushkin's story "The Queen of Spades" (1834), Gogol's play *The Gamblers* (1836), Lermontov's story "The Fatalist" in *A Hero of Our Time* (1840), Tolstoy's story "Two Hussars" (1856), and Dos-

toevsky's novella *The Gambler* (1867). Pushkin's characters and scenes inspired all his followers, and his narrative elements persisted: the arrival of officers in a provincial town, handsome uniforms, hopeless servants, male comradeship, flowing champagne, rampant drunkenness, reckless gambling, sly cardsharps, disastrous losses, fatal encounters, savage fistfights, grand balls, skillful dancing, bold seductions, dark-eyed gypsies, sudden departures, brief returns, sad farewells, threats of suicide, romantic rendezvous, pure maidens, and fatal duels. All were fascinated by the idea of attempting to conquer one's fate.

In "The Queen of Spades," the cautious German Hermann is fascinated by the officers' card games but unwilling "to risk the necessary in the hope of acquiring the superfluous." The story begins with a tall tale. One of the officers describes a countess who's found a secret, infallible method to win back her disastrous gambling losses. Her orphaned companion Lizaveta Ivanovna (whose name Thomas Mann gave to the sympathetic Russian confidante in *Tonio Kröger*) is oppressed by the selfish old countess. Pushkin's plot combines gambling with romance. Hermann sets out to discover the countess's precious secret and, he claims, win enough money to marry Lizaveta. He arranges to come secretly to her room at night and to confront the countess in her adjoining suite.

Pushkin depicts gambling as the literal work of the devil. To extract the countess's secret, which she has learned (Hermann thinks) through some satanic pact, he threatens her with an unloaded

pistol. Terrified, she suddenly expires without revealing it, and he feels guilty about causing her death. In the first of three supernatural events, the countess winks at Hermann from her open coffin and he crashes headlong onto the floor. Later, her ghost appears to him, reveals the secret he has desperately sought, and forgives him for his role in her death. Following her system, he wins spectacularly at cards by betting on a three and on a seven, then mistakenly bets on a queen instead of an ace and loses everything. The card in his hand, the queen of spades, mockingly winks at him again, taking revenge for the countess's death and his own insatiable greed. Pushkin twice compares Hermann to Napoleon, but the effect is satiric. Hermann is a notable failure who falls down, breaks down, and is finally confined to an insane asylum.

In a letter of 1880, Dostoyevsky, puzzled, exclaimed, "At the end of the tale . . . one does not know what to think: did this vision [of the countess] emanate from Hermann's nature, or was he really one of those who have contact with another world, a world of evil spirits hostile to man?" But these alternatives—the first more convincing—are both supernatural. The story is also stuffed with Gothic and melodramatic clichés, which made it an excellent subject for Tchaikovsky's opera in 1890. There is an obsessive quest, mysterious secret, devil's pact, sudden death, fainting fit, lost love, irrational mistake, and mental breakdown. In this moral tale, Hermann's obsession with gambling, which runs counter to his naturally cautious character, compels him to lose his entire patrimony, the woman he plans to marry, and, finally, his sanity. Despite its lack of subtlety, the story's magical quality and black humor exerted a profound influence on later writers and became part of the canonical Russian portrayal of gambling.

Gogol's one-act play *The Gamblers*, propelled by snappy dialogue and a fast-moving plot, uses the destructive power of gambling in a satiric comedy and moral fable about the deceiver deceived. The play makes three references to "The Queen of Spades." This card is considered unlucky, a weak character is compared to Napoleon, and the victim believes that the scam he's caught in is the devil's work. Gogol's main characters,

unlike Pushkin's gambling addicts, are professional cardsharps who prey on guests at a provincial inn: first Ikharev, then Glov and his son Glov, Jr. All the gamblers bribe the servants to provide inside information and use their own marked decks. There is no Liza Ivanovna in the play, but Ikharev attributes female qualities to his favorite deck of cards. He names it Adelaide Ivanovna; praises it as a beauty, treasure, and pearl; and throws it across the room when it fails to bring him riches.

Ikharev and the three cardsharps agree to join forces to swindle the older Glov. Gambling, Ikharev insists, takes "experience, keen insight, careful study of markings," elevating the con to an art. What honest men and victims call stealing, he calls "the product of subtle intelligence and maturity." As the gamblers try to persuade the reluctant Glov to play cards, he devises his own counterplot. He tells them that he's impatiently waiting for two hundred thousand rubles from the state bank and has to leave town immediately, but authorizes his innocent son to receive the money on his behalf. The gamblers treat the son as if he were already a cavalry officer and get him drunk. He keeps doubling his bets, recklessly stakes and loses the two hundred thousand rubles, and signs an IOU for that amount. Then—following the romantic cliché—he waves around a pistol and threatens to shoot himself. The bank manager, also part of the cunning swindle, confirms that he's waiting for the money to arrive.

The three gamblers then extract eighty thousand rubles from Ikharev in return for the two-hundred-thousand-ruble IOU. He fantasizes about how he'll spend his vast wealth by dressing in the latest fashion and visiting the theaters and restaurants of Petersburg and Moscow. He boasts of his immoral ethos, "to live subtly, artfully, to deceive everybody and not be deceived yourself." Glov, Jr. then reveals the plot of the three gamblers, who've suddenly disappeared, and thus exposes Ikharev's stupidity. Glov, Jr. has pretended to be the son of a rich landowner for a fee of three thousand rubles (which he won't get) and to help the three gamblers give Ikharev a worthless IOU in exchange for his fortune. Finally, the disillusioned and embittered Ikharev, the trickster tricked, states the theme of the play:

“You spend your life scheming, using your wits, refining all the tricks of the trade! Forget it! It’s not worth the effort. Some crook will turn up who’s twice the crook you are. At one stroke the bastard will bring down what you’ve spent years building.” Gogol offers acute insights into the motivation and psychology of gambling. He shows how men gamble to kill time and relieve the boredom of provincial life. They take risks to defeat their opponent and to maintain the illusion that it’s possible to get somewhere in the world, even if gambling gets them nowhere.

In “The Fatalist” Lermontov, more philosophical than Pushkin and Gogol, uses gambling to dramatize the conflict between fate and free will. The story seems to confirm the Muslim belief that “one can’t avoid one’s fate.” Tired for the moment of cards, a group of Russian officers seconded to the Caucasus begins an intellectual discussion. But the Serbian Vulich, a foreigner like Pushkin’s Hermann, believes in free will rather than in predestination and is willing to risk suicide to settle this dangerous argument. His adversary, the fatalist Pechorin, opposes Vulich’s belief that “a man may dispose of his life at will” and predicts that the Serbian will die that very night. Taking his life into his own hands, Vulich lifts a pistol from the wall, puts it against his forehead, and pulls the trigger. It misfires, though a second shot aimed at the wall is successful. Free will prevails, and he wins the bet of twenty pieces of gold.

On the way home, Pechorin sees a pig that’s been cut in two by a drunken Cossack. That night he’s told that Vulich—the victim of Pechorin’s prophecy and his own strange fate—has been killed by the sword of the same drunken Cossack who’d killed the pig. Vulich had survived his battle against the Chechens and his suicide attempt. But fate, in the form of the Cossack, decided that Vulich would die and Pechorin would live. The story confirms Pechorin’s belief that the time has not yet come for him to die and that no one can “escape becoming a fatalist.”

Tolstoy’s “Two Hussars” has all the familiar elements of a Pushkin tale. The characters of the two Turbins, father and son, are quite similar. Both are handsome, swaggering, domineering, wild,

and violent officers. The father had abducted a woman, killed a man, and dropped another victim out of a window: “He was a regular daredevil . . . a gambler, a duellist, a seducer, but a jewel of an hussar.” In an operatic gesture, he offers, if a woman commands him, to risk his life by jumping out of a window or plunging through the ice. The name of the father’s dog, Blücher (after the field-marshal who defeated Napoleon at Leipzig and Waterloo), points to the greatest gambler in French history, who had won and lost a whole empire.

As in Pushkin, Tolstoy connects the passions for gambling and romance. At the beginning of the story a cardsharp swindles Ilyin, a young officer who loses his all his own money as well as the government funds he’s been entrusted with. Terrified and disgusted with himself, he feels “his youth, rich with hope, his honour, the respect of society, his dreams of love and friendship—all were utterly lost.” He plans to kill himself as the only escape from disgrace, but Turbin comes to his rescue and recovers the money the cardsharp has stolen from him.

At the same time, Turbin plans to seduce the attractive widow Anna Fedorovna, whom he meets at a ball. In a bold military stratagem, he secretly enters her carriage and waits for her to arrive while “his face was aflame and his heart beat fast.” When she bursts into tears and rests her head on his chest, he has his way with her. After a mad interlude with the gypsies, he suddenly thinks of Anna. In a tender epilogue that completes his seduction, he “found the widow still asleep, took her in his arms, lifted her out of bed, kissed her sleepy eyes, and ran quickly back. Anna, only half awake, licked her lips and asked, ‘What has happened?’”

Twenty years later, Turbin’s son, rather improbably, arrives in the same town and is given a room in the house of his father’s old lover. To compensate for the loss of the older Turbin and recreate that magical liaison, Anna “longed to relive in the soul of her daughter what she had experienced with him who was dead.” Anna’s innocent young daughter is attracted to Turbin’s son. She fantasizes about him while “a sweet, languid sensation of sadness oppressed her heart, and tears of pure wide-spreading love, thirsting to be satisfied—good comforting tears—filled

her eyes.” As the son plans his wicked seduction, he receives a delightful letter from his witty and emotionally responsive mistress, who’s “much better than our young ladies”—as well as a nasty letter demanding payment of gambling debts, which he ignores.

The romantic Lisa tells young Turbin that she will be sitting that night at her garden window, and he thinks she’s inviting him to a rendezvous. But he misjudges her feelings, and when he touches her hand, she screams and runs away. Tolstoy distinguishes between the father’s spontaneous and impetuous seduction of the sexually experienced widow and the son’s calculating and cynical attempt to ruin the life of her innocent daughter. Their attitude to gambling is another touchstone of character. The older man took pity on a comrade who’d been caught in trap; the younger swindles the widow in a game she doesn’t understand. The father has a violent and vicious character. But Tolstoy, the lapsed moralist, is willing to exonerate the dashing fellow who upholds military values and suggests that the older Turbin is morally superior to his son.

Dostoyevsky preferred roulette to cards. Xan Fielding’s *The Money Spinner: Monte Carlo and Its Fabled Casino* (1977) describes gambling from the casino’s point of view. He explains how the lavish gambling den was developed in the nineteenth century by French millionaires who lured the aristocratic and fashionable world to the tables, and was later controlled by the German arms dealer Basil Zaharoff and by the Greek shipping magnate Aristotle Onassis. At the height of the season in the early 1900s, twenty-three gaming tables were manned by five hundred employees. Fielding discusses Dostoyevsky’s disastrous gambling at Wiesbaden on the Rhine, which the Russian novelist described in *The Gambler*, and provides a number of intriguing facts about the ambience: to prevent swindles, croupiers wore suits without pockets; one famous gambler always carried a million francs in cash; no one ever broke the bank; and there were many suicides after gamblers had lost everything. Fielding also explains how roulette, *trente-et-quarante*, and baccarat actually work, and how

the casino maintains absolute control of its astronomical profits.

In a letter of May 1867, Dostoyevsky, who thought he could win but knew he would lose, confessed that he lacked self-restraint and was always ruined in roulette: “My efforts are successful every time, so long as I retain my sangfroid and calculatingly follow my system. But the moment I start winning, I immediately begin to take chances. I can’t control myself.” In *The Gambler* he condemns the Poles, French, Germans, and English. By contrast, he exalts the bold Russian passion for risk-taking and calls roulette a Russian game. At one turn of the wheel, when everything can suddenly change, he could quickly gain a great fortune and earn the praise and admiration of the crowd. But Russians, who squander rather than retain their wealth, often destroy themselves. As Joseph Frank observes, Dostoyevsky “may well have rationalized his gambling addiction. . . . [*The Gambler*] may be considered a self-condemnation and an apologia.”

Written carelessly in only four weeks, *The Gambler* is long-winded and repetitive. The narrator-gambler Alexis—a twenty-two-year-old nobleman and university graduate—tutors the General’s children and is in love with his stepdaughter, Polina. She’s been the mistress of the wicked Frenchman de Grioux (named after the lover of the ill-fated Manon Lescaut), to whom the General is disastrously in debt. The General is the heir of the wealthy Grandmamma. She is supposed to be dying in Moscow, and he believes that her death will solve all his problems. Alexis, a typically Dostoyevskian insulted-and-injured character, is mentally disturbed, often irrational, out of control, frequently humiliated, and filled with self-hatred.

The best and most comic scene in the novella takes place when Grandmamma unexpectedly turns up in Roulettenberg (Wiesbaden) and shocks the General. Despite her exhausting journey from Russia, she ignores the beneficial effects of the thermal springs and, though she’s never played roulette before, heads straight for the casino. Everyone is desperate for money, and gambling makes their dreams seem possible. They want to clear debts, pay current expenses, form wealthy alliances, rise in social status, or maintain their parasitic position.

Alexis's passion for Polina runs parallel to his even stronger passion for gambling. He first gambles on behalf of Polina while using her money, then on behalf of Grandmamma while using her money, and later bonds with both women by participating in their losses. Like Hermann in "The Queen of Spades," the hero gambles so he can win enough money to marry. Like the older Turbin in "Two Hussars" with his reckless vows, Alexis is ready to gnaw his hands off at the merest rustle of Polina's dress or (if she commands him) to throw himself off the peak of the nearest mountain.

But he's drawn to "the extraordinary magnificence and luxury of the gaming rooms in the casinos of the towns on the Rhine, and the heaps of gold that are supposed to lie on the tables." He believes that "some radical and decisive change in my destiny will inevitably take place" and claims that gambling is no worse—and may even be nobler—than other ways of acquiring money. Though many players rely on a secret mathematical system, he does not think calculation is important. He admits that there's a lot of greed and trickery involved in the casino, and that thieves often reach across the table to steal another's winnings. But he insists that a real gentleman must never show emotion, even when he is unable to keep his winnings and continues to play until he loses everything.

Dostoyevsky's account of the pathology of gambling emphasizes the effect on the gambler, not on the mechanics of roulette itself. He believes that gamblers, like duellists and debtors, can be admirable or unworthy, and that there's an important difference between aristocratic gamblers who don't care about losing money and the greedy plebeians who desperately need the cash. Alexis knows that he'll never escape from the chains of roulette and hates to stop betting when the casino closes at midnight. Like the earlier fictional heroes, he lives in a fantasy world and dreams of fabulous wealth, challenges fate, and believes that his destiny is written in the stars.

Alexis wants to astonish the spectators at the casino by his theatrical Russian craving for risk and eagerness to take senseless chances. He compares his feelings to sliding down a precipitous mountain on a toboggan and to the fate of Marie Blanchard, who accidentally ignited the gas in

her balloon and thus became the first woman to be killed in an aviation crash. Dismissed by the General for his offensive behavior, Alexis is reduced to poverty and even imprisoned. He laments, "I was far from home, in a foreign country, without work or any means of livelihood, without hope, without plans." But he's not worried about these problems and plans to restore his fortune by gambling.

Late in the novella, Alexis explains how to play roulette. You can bet on red or black, on odd or even numbers, on *manque* (numbers one to eighteen) or *passé* (numbers nineteen to thirty-six). If the spinning ball lands on zero, the bet on that number gets thirty-five times its stake and the bank takes all the other bets on the table. Fascinated by zero, Grandmamma—in a grotesque parody of Alexis's obsession—defies all the odds by repeatedly betting on that number. On her first encounter and with amazing beginner's luck, she wins twelve thousand florins. She remains cool while Alexis, her nervous guide, suffers trembling legs and a throbbing head. The next day, when Alexis is unable to restrain her, she loses everything she's just won as well as the rest of her money. The General wants to have her forcibly confined before he forfeits his entire inheritance, but she escapes back to Russia. In a final irony, Alexis, persisting in self-destruction and comparing himself to a triumphant Christ, claims "I shall rise from the dead!" and be restored to a meaningful life. He expresses the sensation of freedom that can come from utter abasement, a certainty in degradation and an animal level beneath which he could not fall.

Despite his satiric portrait of Alexis and his illusions, Dostoyevsky knew that he was himself in thrall to gambling. In this context, roulette was an escape from artistic creation, an addiction that prevented the artist from working, but would also, if he won, give him a new freedom to write.

All these five works by Russia's greatest writers owe a profound debt to Pushkin's original story. Despite the dash of bravado and twirling mustachios, they contain a moral message. They portray desperate characters and reveal that the irresistible risks of gambling—and the struggle between free will and fate—inevitably cause a series of disasters: swindles, bankruptcy, ruined lives, insanity, and death.