The New Criterion

February 2019

A monthly review *edited by Roger Kimball*

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Notes & Comments: February 2019

Opportunity knocks

As we recall, it was Benjamin Disraeli who observed that, "next to knowing when to seize an opportunity, the most important thing in life is to know when to forgo an advantage."

We suppose that a teaching position in academia is a sort of advantage. Less and less, at most institutions, is it an opportunity. This melancholy truth is something that Peter Boghossian will doubtless appreciate. Boghossian is—or perhaps by the time you read this, *was*—an assistant professor at Portland State University. Yes, *that* Portland, the one whose name you cannot hear without sniggering as visions of sugarplums and social justice snowflakes (not to mention masked Antifa thugs) dance in your head. Portland State University is the perfect academic institution for that *echt* politically correct city. It is aggressively undistinguished academically but firing on twelve cylinders in the social justice–identity politics sweepstakes.

In this, it may almost go without saying, PSU is par for the course in the fetid swamps of Academia, Inc. So much of what passes for "research" in universities these days is indistinguishable from tendentious, politically inspired nonsense. Longtime readers of *The New Criterion* know well whereof we speak. We have regularly offered specimens of the genre for the delectation and disapprobation of our readers. We will forbear to offer more on this occasion. Nevertheless, it is worth keeping an axiom enunciated by the philosopher Gottfried Leibniz in mind as one ponders such repellent phenomena. We mean a specific application of the Leibnizian principle of "the identity of indiscernibles." If something is indistinguishable from nonsense, it *is* nonsense. As Leibniz's near-contemporary Baruch Spinoza was fond of concluding: *QED*.

We say "*QED*." But although the thing that was to have been demonstrated has in fact been demonstrated—indeed with "damnable iteration," as Falstaff put it in another context—the academic establishment, bent on pursuing the advantages of reputation, promotion, and tenure, refuses to acknowledge the proof staring it in the face.

This is something that Professor Boghossian, together with two friends not employed by PSU, sought to address. In brief, they composed twenty intentionally nonsensical essays that pulsated with fashionable jargon and politically correct sentiments and submitted them, under various pseudonyms, to a variety of social science journals. Some were rejected. But four were accepted and published; three were accepted but have not yet been published; others are (or were) under review.

The title of one of the winners, published in an organ called *Gender, Place and Culture*, was "Human reactions to rape culture and queer performativity at urban dog parks in Portland, Oregon." The very title sums up the fatuousness that Professor Boghossian and his friends sought to expose. The icing on the cake is the authors' summary of the paper's thesis:

> That dog parks are rape-condoning spaces and a place of rampant canine rape culture and systemic oppression against "the oppressed dog" through which human attitudes to both problems can be measured. This provides insight into training men out of the sexual violence and bigotry to which they are prone.

We'll wager that you tittered at "the oppressed dog." But the peer reviewers were deeply impressed. One began her encomium with the observation that "this is a wonderful paper—incredibly innovative, rich in analysis, and extremely well-written and organized given the incredibly diverse literature sets and theoretical questions brought into conversation." The editor of the journal wrote to the pseudonymous author to praise the essay and offer to publish it as a featured article in a future issue because "it draws attention to so many themes from the past scholarship informing feminist geographies." No doubt. Readers interested in delving further into this midden of insanity can find all of the essays, along with comments from editors of the journals they were intended for, online at *Areo* magazine under the title "Academic Grievance Studies and the Corruption of Scholarship."

This delicious enterprise will remind readers of the Sokal Hoax of 1996, named for the physicist Alan Sokal, who startled the *sancta sanctorum* of trendy academic self-satisfaction when he composed an essay called "Transgressing the Boundaries: Towards a Transformative Hermeneutics of Quantum Gravity"—a crackling pile of gibberish—and sent it to the once-trendy journal *Social Text*, which promptly published it.

Why did *Social Text* publish it? Because here they had a bona fide scientist arguing in owlish terms, with all the impenetrable jargon that they so loved, for two of their favorite theses. One, "that physical 'reality,' no less than social 'reality,' is at bottom a social and linguistic construct"; and, two, that "scientific 'knowledge,' so far from being objective, reflects and encodes the dominant ideologies and power relations of the culture that produced it." Hot dog!

Professor Boghossian and his friends adopted essentially the same strategy, updated the aroma of the nonsense they confected with little squirts of *à la mode* sexual perversity, and Presto! lots of egg on the countenance of the wrinkled, virtue-signaling academic establishment.

Alan Sokal endured the obloquy of that establishment but, protected by tenure and an admirable carapace of common sense, not only survived the onslaught of the embarrassed natives but emerged as a sort of hero for the partisans of sanity. It is unclear whether Professor Boghossian will enjoy a similar fate. Naturally, he has been subjected to an unofficial smear campaign on campus. Nasty messages have been pasted to his office door, he has been threatened, screamed at, and spat upon by angry opponents, and his likeness has been defaced with swastikas and other emblems of dubious endearment. He now requires bodyguards when attending public events.

Even more worrisome is the interest the panjandrums of the administration at PSU have taken in his case. Within days of his hoax being revealed last fall, he received an official notice that he was suspected of "fabricating data."

As one of his collaborators noted, Professor Boghossian was later found guilty of failing to obtain institutional approval for "conducting research on human subjects." "But," you object, "there were no real human subjects. No data was 'fabricated' because no real 'data' was offered. It was a send-up, a satire."

You may say so. But social justice warriors are not distinguished for their sense of humor or their appreciation of satire, especially when it is directed at members of their tribe. Indeed, one of the most pernicious effects of the whole totalitarian project of political correctness is to have made satire almost impossible. Satire depends upon a generally accepted horizon of normality to succeed. But it is not at all clear that, in the exotic purlieus of the academy today, we can count on such a shared horizon of values. Is there any absurdity that one can confidently put forward as satire without worrying that one

will have already been outstripped by the frantic disciples of "intersectionality" and other allotropes of politically correct animus? We've made the experiment and have failed dismally. No matter what gibberish we imagine, a real-life social justice warrior has always beaten us to the punch and has offered in earnest something similar but even more egregious.

As we write, it is unclear what the inquisitors at PSU will do to their errant charge. Professor Boghossian may face various official sanctions, but as yet there is no final word about his future at PSU. He and his collaborators are surely correct that, as they write in their introduction to the online archive at *Areo*,

> something has gone wrong in the university—especially in certain fields within the humanities. Scholarship based less upon finding truth and more upon attending to social grievances has become firmly established, if not fully dominant, within these fields, and their scholars increasingly bully students, administrators, and other departments into adhering to their worldview.

In our view, Professor Boghossian and his friends performed a public service by engaging in these acts of intellectual fumigation. It will be instructive to see whether they have seized an opportunity or wagered on a deceptive advantage. We hope that the great Foundation for Individual Rights in Education, which has been a stalwart ally for those besieged by illiberal liberals on campus, has this case on their radar.

A farewell & two welcomes

We were saddened to get the news in December—too late to include a notice in our January issue—that *The Weekly Standard* was closing. We will not speculate on the reasons for its shuttering. Rather, we note that for more than twenty years *TWS* offered a welcome forum for a wide range of conservative opinion. Bravo for that. Many *New Criterion* writers also contributed, at least occasionally, to its pages.

If we must say *vale* to *The Weekly Standard*, however, it is a pleasure to say *ave* to the U.S. debut of the *Catholic Herald*, the storied English publication that has been a mainstay of Catholic news and opinion—as well as lowercase "c" catholic writing on politics, culture, and the arts—for more than one hundred years. For the first 126 years of its existence—from 1888 until 2014—the *Herald* was a newspaper. It attracted the best of the Catholic literary fraternity, including J. R. R. Tolkien, Evelyn Waugh, G. K. Chesterton, and Graham Greene, all of whom contributed to its pages. Reborn in 2014 as a weekly magazine, it has continued to be an important voice, heeded as much in the United States, where it enjoyed a large readership, as in its native United Kingdom.

With the debut of a U.S. edition, the *Herald* is sure to find many new readers and intervene in an effective and intelligent way in the many controversies that have beleaguered the Catholic establishment in the United States, as well as other matters. In an editorial statement announcing its American initiative, the editors note that the *Herald* "will challenge the dangerous polarization of Catholicism into 'liberal' and 'conservative' factions. Instead, it will explore the riches of orthodox Catholicism—drawing inspiration from the mischievous words of Evelyn Waugh, who, reporting for the *Herald* from a Eucharistic Congress in Budapest, reassured Catholics that 'we are normal—it is the irreligious who are freaks.'" To subscribe, follow this link: catholicherald.co.uk/subscribe.

Fans of that other English weekly, *The Spectator*, also have reason to celebrate. Several months ago, there was another British literary invasion. *The Spectator*—which opened its doors in 1828, even earlier than the *Catholic Herald*—has also started a U.S. edition. For the moment, it is a web-only venture, but within the next few months it will start to publish a monthly print edition as well. We are pleased to welcome its distinctive brand of crisp, independent commentary to the mix of critical opinion on these shores. Most of *The New Criterion*'s editors, and many of its writers, have been contributing to *Spectator USA*, than which a more robust endorsement is difficult to imagine. You will find it online at spectator.us.

In search of the American Virgil

by John Byron Kuhner

Looking out through the doorway of the former Jesuit residence in Antigua Guatemala, you notice one thing: the ominous, perfectly framed cone of one of the world's most intimidating volcanoes, the Volcán de Agua. A row of single-story shops sunk below grade on the other side of the plaza barely registers: all the eye sees is nature's Sword of Damocles poised over the city. The twelve-thousand-foot stratovolcano first intervened in the history of Spanish Guatemala in 1541, when it destroyed the colony's first capital, now called Ciudad Vieja, five miles away. The Spaniards built a new city at a slightly greater remove, but not far enough away to make any difference. The view through the doorway looks like a piece of Baroque moralizing, like the grim reaper that holds an hourglass over the heads of the tourists in St. Peter's in Rome. It is as if the architect wished to say to anyone going through the door: Look here, and notice—here is God's lovely, terrible, life-giving, destructive beauty.

The doorway, with its view, looked little different on the twenty-sixth of June 1767, when Father Rafael Landívar, of the Society of Jesus, passed through it for the last time. A troop of Spanish soldiers had encircled the compound in the middle of the previous night and was now removing the Jesuits and placing them under arrest. Their possessions were forfeit to the *illustrissimo* and *Christianissimo* King Carlos III, though in his royal generosity he did allow them to bring a prayer book and "whatever of clothing they need for their journey." The removal was a surprise. Wishing to avoid any wrangling, Carlos had sent sealed orders to the governors of the Spanish Empire, who set out to capture all Jesuits within their provinces by a series of quickly executed clandestine raids. Landívar and his companions did not know precisely what was happening: after the necessary instructions had been given, the operation was conducted in silence. The soldiers had orders to kill any Jesuits who opened their mouths. Even the encyclopedist Jean d'Alembert, no fan of the Catholic Church, was scandalized by the despotism of a European monarch arresting thousands of his subjects without warning or charge, allowing them no opportunity of defense, and expelling them impoverished from their homes. We know less about what Carlos's subjects thought, because discussion of the expulsion, in public or private, was prohibited by law.

Landívar was led out with the other Jesuits that morning and marched two hundred and fifty miles to Castillo de San Felipe, on Central America's malarial east coast, where they were stacked into Spanish warships for the journey to Italy. Due to incompetence, cruelty, delays, and diplomatic wrangling, the refugees did not arrive in the Papal States for almost a year. Of New Spain's 678 Jesuits, 102 died during the journey; three hundred would be dead within five years.

Landívar was one of the Jesuits who survived. Considered one of the most brilliant members of the company, he was thirty-six, and had been rector of the Jesuit college in his

native Antigua. An academic wunderkind, he entered seminary at the age of seven and took his bachelor's degree at sixteen. Celebrated for his affability and extraordinary command of Latin, he became Professor of Grammar and Instructor in Rhetoric at the Jesuit college of San Francisco Borja at twenty-four. When Francisco José de Figueredo y Vittoria, the Archbishop of Guatemala and an important patron for the order, died in 1765, it was the young Landívar who was chosen to deliver his eulogy. He had a brilliant career ahead of him in the Society of Jesus.

Exile, and the ultimate dissolution of the Jesuit order in 1773, changed all that. Landívar ended up in Bologna, where a large number of former Jesuits from New Spain had congregated. He no longer had any career prospects: the Papal States had been inundated by more than ten thousand expelled Jesuits from all over the world. He became a parish priest and ultimately the rector of the church of Santa Maria delle Muratelle. An eighteenth-century biographer, Félix de Sebastián, praises him as an exemplary priest, though perhaps not exceptionally social. "His real concerns," he reports, "were holy Scripture, theology, and asceticism." While describing at length his piety and religious devotion, Sebastián mentions only in passing what Landívar is known for today: a fifteen-book epic poem, in Latin dactylic hexameters, about life in New Spain, called the *Rusticatio Mexicana*. Known only to a handful of scholars in the English-speaking world, the *Rusticatio* is more famous in Latin America. Four Spanish translations were published in the twentieth century (one, a verse effort by Francisco Chamorro published by the National University of Costa Rica Press, is now in its third edition). After World War II, a brief sunny period in Guatemala's clouded political history—coinciding with the election of president Juan Arévalo, who established the first Humanities Faculty at the Universidad Nacional—precipitated a burst of enthusiasm for Landívar's work. The poet's remains were repatriated from Italy, and a tomb and monument constructed in Antigua. The first English translation of the *Rusticatio*, by Graydon Regenos, appeared in 1948 (now available in a 2006 edition edited by Andrew Laird under the title *The Epic of America*). The year 1950 was declared an *Año Landívariano*, and a journal, *Estudios Landívarianos*, founded. The Jesuits returned, establishing a university named for Landívar. But all this came to a swift end: the United States sponsored a coup in 1954, and a series of military dictatorships led to a thirty-six-year-long civil war that did not conclude until 1996. The Landívar Renaissance was but one of its casualties.

But all the praise heaped on Landívar during that brief spell—that he was "the great poet of colonial America," "the bard of the American natural world," and (most intriguing to me) "the American Virgil"—made me curious. Was any of it true? Could a great—or even a readable—Latin poet have possibly emerged in eighteenth-century Guatemala? Even the Latinists who knew of Landívar couldn't really answer the question for me. They had read only excerpts: getting through fifteen books of Latin poetry is a rather high bar of entry. Meanwhile, I heard from expat friends that Antigua was a fantastic place to park oneself for a while: great climate, beautiful mountains, friendly people, cheap. Where better to read fifteen books of Latin poetry? An opening appeared in my freelancing schedule. Plane tickets were cheap. It was one of those terrible, cold, rainy New York springs. I picked up an edition of the *Rusticatio Mexicana* and got on a plane the next day.

Hic, procul indigenis antiqua sede relictis,
Hispani posuere novi fundamina regni,
Ingentemque urbem vasta in convalle locarunt
Callibus instructam rectis, multoque patentem
Circuitu; quam nulla unquam contagia diri
Vexabant morbi; nimio nec Cynthius aestu,
Nec gelido populum Boreas horrore fatigat.

Here, separate from what had been the natives'
city,
The Spaniards laid the foundations of their new
kingdom.
In a broad valley they built their massive city,
With gridded streets, and of great compass,
Where dire disease could not reach; and neither

Sun's heat nor winter's cold trouble its
inhabitants.
(*Rusticatio Mexicana* 3.34–40. All translations my own.)

Today, Guatemala is the third-poorest country in the Americas, ahead of only Honduras and Haiti. Its primary export is labor: wire transfers from Guatemalans living abroad are the nation's largest source of foreign currency. But a traveler expecting to find only jungles, communist guerrillas, and grinding poverty will be surprised. Antigua was the capital of the Spanish captaincy of Guatemala, the most important center of Spanish culture between Mexico City and Lima. It was laid out to be grand and beautiful, a grid of streets punctuated by spacious plazas. The cathedral, archiepiscopal palace, town hall, and governor's residence dominate the central plaza. Every major urban religious order embellished it: the Dominicans, Franciscans, Carmelites, Mercedarians, Hieronymites, Poor Clares, Capuchins, and Jesuits all built massive churches and convents in the city. Antigua is, in short, a Baroque city—and the best-preserved one in the Western hemisphere.

It's not everyone who travels to Guatemala—the vast majority of the people in the plazas are Guatemalans, who are, as a rule, shockingly young (fifty percent of the population is under twenty)—but as I learned after a few days, Antigua is not really a secret. A substantial expat community lives there, and it is firmly on the backpackers' radar. Brits in halter tops and shorts show off their sunburns in restaurants. Tall Germans book volcano-climbing expeditions in tour agencies. Canadians and Americans carry yoga mats through the streets. A fifth of the buildings seem to be hotels or hostels or Spanish-language schools. The city is a resort for Guatemala's elite, and a hub for local entrepreneurs: an investment in Antigua is seen as a relatively safe bet. I was renting a room from a Guatemalan family. The house was only one story, like almost all the buildings in Antigua, and gathered around a tiny central courtyard. Upstairs was a roof garden, which became my study. There, with views of three volcanoes, good Chilean wine, bowls of tropical fruit, and a soundtrack of chattering birds, I began to read.

Urbs tamen infelix, quam sors suprema manebat,
Ingenti demum terrae concussa tremore
Tota labat, nulloque ruunt discrimine tecta.
Templa, domusque cadunt, saxisque obstructa
rotatis
Nulla per antiquos restabat semita calles.
Interea nubes, coelum quae umbrosa tegebat,
Lugentique diem solemque amoverat urbe,
Effusos subito praeceps se volvit in imbres,
Foedavitque omnes undanti flumine gazas
Infectas limo terraque undaque sepultas.
Tollitur inde virum clamor, maestusque ululatus
Femineus, totumque replent suspiria coelum.

But the doomed city's final fate awaited.
At last it was hit by a massive earthquake:
The whole city shakes: no building is spared.
Temples and houses collapse; rolling stones
Block the ancient roads: there is no escape.
Meanwhile a dark cloud covers the city,
Blotting out the sun, and suddenly descending
It turns into a pouring rain of mud.
The city's treasures are fouled, buried
In a hail of mud and ash and water.
Men begin to shout; women scream;
They fill heaven with their lamentations. (3.47–58)

The eruption of Vesuvius in 79 A.D. destroyed multiple cities, while also preserving them for future archaeologists. It also inspired literature. Pliny the Younger described in a famous letter the death of his uncle, the Elder Pliny, who died attempting to rescue people from the eruption. But the above passage is not from Pliny, and it's not about Vesuvius. These are Landívar's words, from book three of the *Rusticatio*, describing the earthquake at Antigua in 1773. Landívar heard about the event from exile, which perhaps explains some of his exaggerations ("what was once a city," he writes, "is now but a heap of stones"). The earthquakes of 1773—there were three separate major ones, in fact, over the course of six months—seriously injured but did not raze the city. Many buildings, such as the Jesuit college,

were recognized at the time as completely usable, despite cracks appearing in the masonry. But the Spaniards had had enough of Antigua. Its history had been an interrupted series of disasters. Earthquakes in 1565, 1575, 1576, and 1577 knocked over buildings; in the remarkable year 1585 the city did not go more than eight consecutive days without an earthquake. There were major earthquakes in 1586 and 1651; the largest of all struck in 1717, destroying dozens of buildings. After 1773, a group of citizens petitioned the king to move the capital; and, after receiving permission, authorities voted to establish what is now Guatemala City. A resolution was passed requiring citizens to abandon what became known as Antigua ("old") Guatemala within one year.

The law was never completely followed: some people of course continued to occupy the better buildings. But while Guatemala City developed into the capital of a nation, undergoing all the architectural vagaries of the past two and half centuries, Antigua remained unchanged. And many of its buildings were in surprisingly good condition. In response to two centuries of building in the Ring of Fire (the Philippines, Chile, Peru, California, etc.), the Spaniards had developed a style known today as "seismic baroque," some of the stoutest masonry buildings in the world. In the twentieth century, the city was reoccupied and gently restored. In 1944 it was declared a national monument. By 1979 it was a UNESCO world heritage site.

There are still ruins scattered throughout the city. In 1770 the city's population was sixty thousand; today it is half that. Most of the religious orders never returned, and their convents are now kept as ruinous museums. You may sit among the (truly vast) cloisters, where vines clamber over gigantic chunks of fallen masonry and birds roost in the old chapels. The ruins call to mind the Villa of Hadrian and the Baths of Caracalla, not only because of their overthrown grandeur, but also in specific details: the broken vaults, the long flat bricks, the fallen domes. They make lovely places to read. In the Convento de Santa Clara, an extensive, charmingly landscaped set of ruins rented out for weddings, I read the second book of the *Rusticatio*, where Landívar offers the finest extended description of a volcanic eruption in all Latin literature, both scientifically accurate and emotionally horrifying. He writes of the sudden appearance of a volcano in the Mexican town of Jorullo (a similar event occurred more recently in the town of Parícutin). Landívar describes the warning signs before the eruption; the people's doubts whether to flee; the glow of the crater, and ejecta the size of houses fired like cannonballs; the clouds of ash large enough to produce their own lightning and thunder; even how the eruption changed animal behavior: wild animals were seen wandering in cities, and entering human houses.

> Ceu cum postremus mundi post tempora finis
> Concutiet terrore feras: hominesque trementes
> Motibus insolitis, flammisque vorantibus orbem
> Tuta in speluncis atris habitacula quaerent:
> Inque vicem vacuas errabunt bruta per urbes.
>
> So also the end of the world will strike terror
> Into the hearts of animals; and quivering mankind
> From the earthquakes, and flames devouring
> The globe, will seek safe harbor in dark caves;
> And in their place beasts will stalk the empty cities. (2.229–33)

I was impressed. The Latin verses were extraordinary, and I had moved from one interesting passage to another. In Book I Landívar describes the Spanish conquest of Mexico City, how the city was built on a series of interconnected lakes, and the way inhabitants created floating farms on the surface of the water, using wood frames with earth piled on top. The soil absorbed water from the lake below; when harvest approached, the float was towed into town. (Flooding prompted the Mexicans to drain the lakes after the first World War; Mexico City's sprawl has now filled all the old lakebeds). Landívar then praises the poets who "fill the city's shores with song": Diego José Abad, who wrote a Latin epic poem about God and science, the *De Deo, Deoque Homine Carmina Heroica*; Francisco Xavier

Alegre, a translator of Homer and author of an epic about Alexander the Great; Juan Ruiz de Alarcón, one of the Spanish language's great dramatists; and Juana Inés de la Cruz, a nun-poet described as "the tenth Muse." I had found more than an excellent Latin poet from Guatemala: I had discovered an entire New World of literature—much of it in Latin.

"Two words sum up the life of Landívar," wrote Sebastián: "Prayer, and study." Prayer suited Antigua, with churches on every plaza, a perpetual adoration chapel where a small crowd of believers kept vigil day and night, and the smoking Volcán de Fuego (another of Antigua's volcanoes) off in the distance, each puff of smoke as effective a *memento mori* as could be desired. The feast of one of Antigua's native saints, San Hermano Pedro, fell during my visit, which was a feast indeed: the church was full, but during the service one could hear the hubbub of the feasting crowd outside: laughter, music, ice cream vendors hawking their treats, fireworks. The mass ended with a procession, featuring forty stout believers carrying a one-ton float of Hermano Pedro out into the city. The float's route was completely covered with flowers, pine needles, and brightly colored sawdust: the floatbearers never had to step on bare ground.

The town also seemed—and at first I could not understand why—an exceptionally good place to study Latin. When I tired of the ruins and the roof gardens, I retired to the restaurants and cafes and read *al fresco* in their lush peristyles. I seemed to be breathing classic air. It was atop the Cerro de la Cruz, at the vista overlooking the city, that I finally understood. Antigua was a grid of streets, dominated by a central square, of low-slung masonry houses, built around garden courtyards, at the foot of a massive volcano in a beautiful, sunny land. *It was a living, breathing Pompeii*. The resemblance was even more striking considering that Antigua was laid out before the ruins of Pompeii were rediscovered. The Spaniards were bearers of a Mediterranean urban culture which had in many respects changed little between the first and sixteenth centuries. They used the materials of the New World in ways that had been traditional in the Old: they quarried the hard lava fields to make street cobbles, as the Romans did; they used the soft volcanic tufa to make cheap but intricate bas-relief, and to lay down large thick walls, as the Romans did; they made long, flat bricks for superior stability. They brought air and light into their rooms by placing them around central courts. Their grandest buildings were all temples, which they filled with paintings and statues of their divine protectors.

Landívar's writing an epic poem in Latin was not contrary to the general cultural trend; it was simply another expression of it. And as it turned out, he was uniquely gifted as a poet. Alexis Hellmer, a professor of Latin and Greek at the Universidad Popular Autónoma del Estado de Puebla in Mexico and one of the world's experts on the Latin poets of the New World, enthused: "Landívar is as brilliant as any European poet of the eighteenth century, which is a lot to say. And at times, I believe, he achieves even greater heights. As far as Latin poets go, I believe he is second only [to] the greatest poets of Latin's Golden Age." In Hellmer's estimation, the nearly unknown Landívar—and the "Pleiad" of his fellow New Spain writers such as Abad, Alegre, and José Antonio Villerías y Roelas (who wrote a four-book epic poem about St. Juan Diego known as *Guadalupe*)—produced the most artistically significant poetry in the Latin language since the death of Ovid two thousand years ago. There has been a great deal of Latin after Ovid, including many superb writers like Juvenal, Petrarch, Boccaccio, Milton, and even Baudelaire. Landívar is probably better than all of them.

The *Rusticatio* fits into the tradition of didactic poetry: the author poses as teacher, in this case with the general theme of "life in the New World." As in the greatest of the Latin didactic poems, Virgil's *Georgics*, there is a keen interest in agriculture. As Virgil wrote about growing grain and keeping bees, Landívar writes about New World topics such as growing sugar and herding cattle. But by tackling such topics as earthquakes and volcanoes, Landívar creates something more cosmic and scientific, reminiscent of Lucretius. And in the book's extraordinary encyclopedic breadth—the *Rusticatio* treats

in detail topics as diverse as silver mining, taking calves off of cows to start milk production, producing cochineal (the dye that made redcoats red), and the locals' love of cockfighting—the work suggests Thomas Jefferson's (roughly contemporaneous) *Notes on the State of Virginia*.

In literal translation the material is dry reading on occasions—an entire book is dedicated to the cultivation of indigo—but what is astonishing is that such topics are treated in flawlessly beautiful Latin hexameters. His achievement is best appreciated in the original (I have provided some of the Latin to give readers a sense of his exquisite poetry), but if I were tempted to translate it, I think I would choose film as my medium: it reads like the script for a fifteen-part BBC series, something like *Rafael Landívar's Wonders of Mexico*. The book on mining, for instance, begins in the lofty mountains where the mines are found, then moves underground to describe the torchlight works, then to a scientific account of poisonous gases trapped underground. Then to the miners themselves, their blackened faces, how their bodies are searched as they exit the mine, and the ingenious methods they use to steal gold; then to an account of murderers in the mines (authorities let wanted criminals work without interference). He does not omit a trip in verse to a nearby church, to see where the gold and silver end up. This would still be a winning script for a documentary; that we have such a rich picture of eighteenth-century Mexico is particularly extraordinary. Closely observed, honest accounts of daily life increase in value with age and distance.

That we have the *Rusticatio* at all is likely due to the expulsion of the Jesuits. Landívar had little else to do in Bologna but write; and the pang of exile transformed his vast knowledge of New Spain into poetry, an extended encounter in verse with the wonders he had lost. He was not the only one so affected: many of the Jesuits of New Spain became writers in exile. Their work would have a powerful effect. "Landívar's contribution is not only in the poetry itself," Hellmer wrote to me,

> but in the creation of a Mexican sense of identity, of nationality, of belonging to a place with a rich culture and an amazing natural diversity. That was a main preoccupation for all that generation of both religious and secular Mexican scholars. And it is no exaggeration to say that they were the inventors of a kind of *Mexicanitas* which would evolve into a desire for freedom and independence in the decades that followed them.

King Carlos's decision had unintended consequences.

Before I left Antigua, I visited the ruins of the cathedral of San José, one of the most evocative places in the New World, a vast pile of fractured domes now open to the sky—a kind of tropical Tintern Abbey. There I read the Latin funeral oration for Archbishop Figueredo that Landívar had pronounced a quarter of a millennium before. *O fugaces hominum spes*, Landívar had lamented, *O cito praetereuntia gaudia! Evanuit velut umbra, in momento evolavit*. "Oh fleeting hopes of mankind—oh swiftly passing pleasures! It vanished like a shadow—in a moment it was gone." There had been an entire Latin-speaking culture here, now gone. Carlos's decision to expel the Jesuits was a turning-point in history, of the sort that will prompt endless hypotheticals about what might have been. But it was an act of destruction, like the earthquake of 1773, that also somehow preserved an image of the culture that once had been. And it also left us a picture of the curious, intrepid soul who was its witness, a man who believed a steady contemplation of the wonders of Creation, with all its conflict and suffering, would still yet lead us aright. Landívar closes the *Rusticatio* with an address to his young readers, which a reader of any age might well ponder:

> Let another walk through the fields engoldened
> With the sun's rays without noticing, like a beast,
> And waste his days with idle games.
> You however, to whom acumen has been given,
> Shed the old, and put on new senses now,
> Swearing in wisdom to unlock nature's secrets,
> Using all the powers of your genius:
> And learn with grateful effort what treasures
> are yours.

Feel the Burne
by Dominic Green

By their buyers shall ye know them. Notable collectors of the work of Edward Burne-Jones (1833–98) include Sir Andrew Lloyd Webber, the impresario of the popular musical, and Jimmy Page, the rock guitarist and songwriter for Led Zeppelin. The resemblances between the collectors and the collected are visible or audible in their work: mythic resonances and Romantic pomp, a Wagnerian melodrama with one eye on the gods and the other on the box office. It was Burne-Jones's contemporary Walter Pater who wrote that all art aspires to the condition of music. In the epics of Lloyd Webber and Page, all music aspires to the condition of Burne-Jones.

In 2008, Page, an avid Pre-Raphaelite and Arts and Crafts collector, ran out of wall space in his many mansions. The hammer of the gods fell on the auctioneer's block. Page was obliged to try to sell a massive Burne-Jones tapestry depicting King Arthur's vision of the Holy Grail, *The Attainment: The Vision of the Holy Grail to Sir Galahad, Sir Bors and Sir Perceval* (1891–93). Woven in William Morris's workshop, and described by Morris as "our largest and most important work," *The Attainment* is twenty-three feet long, and one of a series of six. Alas, it didn't sell. Page also possessed a set of Burne-Jones's stained-glass panels, and a round table with matching chairs that might have been props for an as-yet-unwritten Lloyd Webber musical set in the court of King Arthur.

Two other Burne-Jones cycles, *Perseus* (1875–90) and *The Legend of Briar Rose* (1885–90), are reunited and shown together for the first time in "Edward Burne-Jones," now at Tate Britain in London.[1] The exhibition, curated by Alison Smith and Tim Batchelor, gathers more than 150 works in different media, including painting, stained glass, and tapestry, and traces Burne-Jones's ascent from self-taught outsider to eminence in the European *fin de siècle*, and his lasting influence on the strain of mythic fantasy in twentieth-century British literature and music. Six of the paintings have been lent "anonymously" by Lloyd Webber.

"No picture I know, the *Mona Lisa* included, has such a haunting enigmatic female face as the mermaid in this, the first of two versions of this subject," Lloyd Webber said in 2014 of his favorite among his Burne-Jones collection, *The Depths of the Sea* (1886). In the Romantic metamorphosis, narrative becomes myth, beauty becomes divine, and the epic becomes strangely human—physical yet insubstantial, touchable yet ghostly: like a phantom of the opera.

The French critic Charles Blanc felt the same way when he encountered one of Burne-Jones's women in Paris at the Exposition Universelle of 1878:

> To my mind, the most surprising picture from London is the one by Burnes-Jones [*sic*], *Merlin and Vivien*. It expresses the quintessence of the ideal and a sublimated poetry that are deeply

1 "Edward Burne-Jones" opened at Tate Britain, London, on October 24, 2018, and remains on view through February 24, 2019.

> touching. The painter's Vivien seems to have been conjured by an incantation; she is like a figure by Mantegna, retouched and lovingly enveloped by the brush of Prud'hon.

Most of the British paintings at the Exposition were selections from the Grosvenor Gallery's inaugural exhibition of 1877. That exhibition precipitated two events illustrating the growing complicity between mass media and the avant-garde, a lucrative paradox pioneered in the 1840s by the alliance of John Ruskin and the founding Pre-Raphs. When Ruskin visited the Grosvenor in 1877 intending to inspect Burne-Jones's paintings, he found himself distracted by the "Cockney impudence" of Whistler's *Nocturne in Black and Gold: The Falling Rocket* (1875). Ruskin, notoriously, accused Whistler of "flinging a pot of paint in the public's face," and Whistler sued.

The ensuing legal entertainment proved the durability of the Pre-Raphaelite media game, a strategy reaffirmed most recently by the Young British Artists of the 1990s. The general public could be persuaded to follow the avant-garde, so long as the artists were prepared to roll in the muck as they led the parade. The most accomplished Rossetti work may be Christina Rossetti's poem "In the Bleak Midwinter" (1872), but her piety and concision is eclipsed in memory by Dante Gabriel Rossetti who, though he was a shaky draftsman and no poet, prefigured Wilde in mastering the art of life as autobiography. He packaged himself, just as Morris worked out a labor-intensive method of mass-production that satisfied middle-class demand without offending the principles of medieval supply.

The Grosvenor's second marriage of entertainment and the avant-garde was its launching into public awareness the painterly aspect of the Aesthetic Movement, which had been brewing for more than a decade. It was Swinburne who, in the 1860s, took the French poetry of the Movement and made it English—a fact recognized immediately by Mallarmé, who had visited Swinburne in London in 1862–63. The translation of an aesthetic of French literature into a slogan of English painting was made by Pater in *Studies in the History of the Renaissance* (1873). When the Swinburners and Paterites rejected Ruskin and Arnold's doctrine that art must be socially productive, the moral fuss that ensued served their purposes, and not just because it dramatized that most useful of Romantic professional devices: a generational split.

The debate over whether art should be socially productive was a shadow play for the more contentious debate on whether homosexuals, socialists, and purchasers of "greenery-yallery" furnishings should be allowed out of bohemia and into the better class of drawing room. Cometh the hour, cometh Oscar Wilde—heir to Swinburne, pupil of Pater, and promulgator of the theory that true art should have no social purpose, but of course the true artist was a socialist. For Wilde, the social use of art was social climbing, but downwards, and famously.

Again, the debate was highly mediated. The generality of people, who had better things to do than go to art galleries, followed the story through George du Maurier's cartoons in *Punch*, and through Wilde's willingness to act the part of the cartooned in his American tour of 1882, in which he was commissioned to be as Aesthetic as possible so that American audiences would understand the jokes in Gilbert and Sullivan's 1881 opera *Patience*, itself inspired by du Maurier's cartoons. Which is to say, while avant-gardists celebrated the intrusion of the Wildean paradox into a previously rational civilization, and homosexuals celebrated the kiss between Wilde and Walt Whitman in the same sense, everyone else noted these developments not as artistic experiment or sexual liberation, but as light entertainment in the du Maurier vein.

The sublimities of light entertainment are comic—as when Lloyd Webber and Led Zeppelin strain for the serious but hit the timpani of hollow pomp, or when Wilde carves up the stuffed dummy of Victorian manners. And though the serious sublime is tragic, one age's serious sublime becomes another's comic entertainment. The Burne-Jones that Charles Blanc saw in *The Beguiling of Merlin* (1872–77) now seems proleptic of the 1970s,

a decade in which William Morris wallpaper reappeared in English homes as if century-old designs, sleeping like Briar Rose under the layers of intervening taste, had been drawn to the surface like mold. Merlin's socks and sandals, his Simple Life robe, and his black eyeshadow and pin eyes all anticipate an analogous rot, the decay of Arthurian legend into the grubby narcosis of an early Glastonbury Festival.

The connection runs deep and direct. The "alternative lifestyle" that became a lucrative business of light entertainment in the 1960s, and which subsequently became the institutionalized lifestyle of the secular West, began in Burne-Jones's youth and with people like Burne-Jones and his friends. The modern disease of "identity politics" originates in the Victorian cure of *Lebensreform*. As in a religious rebirth, the Victorian experimenters rejected the common and conventional life and realigned the idea of personality around a defining trait or principle: Edward Carpenter and homosexuality, William Salt and vegetarianism, John Ruskin and the guild, William Morris and medieval chairs, Oscar Wilde and himself.

The experimenters withdrew into forms of ideal community which, being ideal, proved unbearable for most of them, not least because the reformed personality remained helplessly individual. They remained, however, Victorian in energy and conscience, so they worked hard and directed their products back towards society. The effects were the rapid dissemination of their work and the re-integration of the experimenters into society as a kind of Disloyal Opposition. An avant-garde is a luxury for any society. The Victorian avant-garde was sustained by such surpluses of money, positivism, and political stability that its court jester, the Jaeger-suited clown George Bernard Shaw, was mistaken for a great thinker.

Shaw was an intellectual lithographer. His talent, barren of originality, consisted of reproducing other people's ideas in a comprehensible image. He may have performed a kind of public service by clarifying Wagner's mystic fog into principles clear as the lines of a steel-cut engraving. But the price of Shaw's services was that his face overlaid the image. The Pre-Raphaelites had been the first to commodify themselves for the business of art, and thus to put the reproduced image ahead of the original. In this, as in much else, the identification of Burne-Jones as a second-generation Pre-Raphaelite is accurate. But through his international success, Burne-Jones became an influential and admired Symbolist, his spectral Grail Hunters recognized immediately in Paris as the English cousins to the Catholic ghosts of Gustave Moreau and the unchurched dreamers of Odilon Redon.

Reproduction was crucial to the spread of Burne-Jones's art. The ground for the exhibition of *The Beguiling of Merlin* in Paris in 1878 was laid by Joseph Comyns Carr's review of the Grosvenor Gallery's opening exhibition. Carr was the English correspondent for the French journal *L'Art* and also, as it happened, the deputy director of the Grosvenor Gallery. Carr's review for *L'Art* described Burne-Jones's contribution to the Grosvenor as "the major event of the art season in London this year," and it was illustrated by a lithograph of *The Beguiling of Merlin*.

European collectors of Burne-Jones's engravings included Fernand Khnopff, the Belgian Symbolist in whose *The Caresses (The Sphinx)* of 1896 the brother of one of Rossetti's red-haired "stunners" is seduced by a leopard—a scene evoking Oscar Wilde's description of sex with youths as "feasting with panthers." They also included Marcel Proust. In *Jean Santeuil* (1896–1900), prints by Burne-Jones are a means for the Duchesse des Alpes' *mission civilisatrice* among her friends, and Loisel the pianist is so refined and acquisitive as to have "even filled the room of the old Madame Loisel with reproductions by Burne-Jones."

Visiting England in 1950, Picasso told Roland Penrose that, on arriving at Paris in 1900, he had intended to proceed to London so as to examine the Burne-Jones paintings that he had seen in Barcelona only in reproduction. The story recalls Jean des Esseintes in Huysmans' *À Rebours* (1884), who plans to see Burne-Jones but never leaves Paris. Des Esseintes dreams of revisiting paintings he has "seen in the international exhibitions": John Everett Millais' *The Eve of St. Agnes* (1863),

George Frederic Watts's *Denunciation of Cain* (*ca*. 1872), some late and "anemic" works by Moreau, and Burne-Jones's women: "some Eves, displaying the singular and mysterious blend of these three masters and expressing the personality both quintessential and raw of a dreamy, erudite Englishman haunted by fantasies of atrocious colors."

Had Picasso visited London in 1900, he would have seen *King Cophetua and the Beggar Maid* (1884), a hit at the Exposition Universelle of 1889, secured for the new Tate Gallery by public subscription. Local developments prevented Picasso from keeping up with the Burne-Joneses, and the intervening half-century saw the collapse of Burne-Jones's critical standing. His son, Philip, also a painter, contributed to this decline by attacking modern styles like Cubism and Fauvism as decadent, which was what the moralists had said about his father when he had been modern.

In a further irony, Philip Burne-Jones's most memorable painting, *The Vampire* (1897), depicts a scene straight out of the Decadence in which a woman is about to sink her teeth into a prostrate male. She resembles Mrs. Patrick Campbell, who was rumored to be Philip Burne-Jones's lover, and for whom Shaw professed infatuation and wrote the lead role of *Pygmalion*. In 1903, the painting, having inspired a Kipling poem called "The Vampire," was exhibited in Chicago. Burne-Jones *fils* insisted to *The New York Times* that the woman in *The Vampire* was "a Brussels model . . . hired at so much a day," and not the actress who had not been his lover: "I want to lay the ghost of that story forever."

In Anthony Powell's *Dance to the Music of Time* (1951–75), the narrator Nick Jenkins reflects on the (fictional) Edwardian painter Edgar Deacon, whose Uranian apologetics combine the influences of Watts and Simeon Solomon: "I suppose on this debris of classical imagery the foundations of at least certain specific elements of twentieth-century art came to be built."

Burne-Jones's "quintessence of the ideal" was the sublimate of the ideals of the Victorian art movements. Sexuality was and is the great appeal of Burne-Jones. He describes the shift from the symbolic order of Christianity to that of comparative religion and the psychology of sexual repression. The difference being that his contemporaries saw him as a Max Müller, assembling the key to all mythologies, while we see him as a Krafft-Ebing, a non-judgmental cataloguer of the morbid and perverse. Burne-Jones's art, with its post-Christian agonies and proto-Jungian mythologizing, becomes a window into the philosophy of Jordan Peterson, or at least into the inner lives of his less sociable followers.

What Burne-Jones did know how to do, however, was to draw bodies in torment even as faces are serene, and to endow the most diaphanous of drapery with the weight of heavy metal. His males are ephebic and introverted, his women pale and immobile like jeweled tortoises. In *The Rock of Doom* (1885–88), Perseus looks quite incapable of freeing Andromeda, or even touching her. In *King Cophetua and the Beggar Maid*, the king is in armor, the maid enarmored in a dress of pure steel, the pair caught in a ghost story forever. In *The Garden Court*, from the *Legend of Briar Rose* cycle, the field is decentered by the layering of the paint and the curvature of female bodies caught in the garden by sleep. The eye is forced to read the image as a tapestry, the mind forced to follow a narrative in which everything is frozen and incapable of reproduction, yet whose latency means that everything, in Henry James's words, requires "a vast deal of 'looking.'" Where Burne-Jones ends, T. S. Eliot's dry seasons and J. R. R. Tolkien's cold quests begin. As Christina Rossetti had written:

> In the bleak midwinter, frosty wind made moan,
> Earth stood hard as iron, water like a stone;
> Snow had fallen, snow on snow, snow on snow,
> In the bleak midwinter, long ago.

Lionel Trilling: the genre of discourse

by Paul Dean

Lionel Trilling (1905–75) opened his first collection of critical essays, *The Liberal Imagination* (1950), with a piece ambitiously titled "Reality in America." Skeptical of "the chronic American belief that there exists an opposition between reality and mind and that one must enlist oneself in the party of reality," he posed the obvious questions: *Which* "reality"? *Whose* "reality"? The judgment that Theodore Dreiser is a more significant writer than Henry James depends upon certain cultural assumptions, summarized by Trilling as "a kind of political fear of the intellect." The approved model of the mind, and of reality, born of such fear, is materialistic and external. Ideas, and idealism, are rejected as sentimental indulgences acceptable only to those who float irresponsibly above the fray of daily living. Against this view, Trilling spent his whole career arguing that reality, however understood, must allow for a dialectic between the practical and the theoretical, "and in any culture there are likely to be certain artists who contain a large part of the dialectic within themselves, their meaning and power lying in their contradictions."

Trilling belonged to perhaps the last generation of academics who believed that they had something of general social importance to communicate, and who really did have such an influence. By contrast, it might be thought that never did literary criticism have less of interest to say to the world beyond the academy than it does today. Trilling, in his time an influential social and cultural commentator, appears to be as forgotten as F. R. Leavis is in Britain. Both were still, just about, on my reading lists as an undergraduate forty years ago; but now? In a second-hand bookshop recently, I came across several of Leavis's books, on the flyleaf of which the bookseller had penciled "Of historical interest." I suppose that was meant to be charitable. Is Trilling, also, merely of historical interest?

Adam Kirsch thinks not, and following his short, punchy book *Why Trilling Matters* (2011) he has edited a selection of Trilling's letters, spanning the period 1924 to 1975, with remarkable self-effacement (a preface barely five pages long and footnotes so sparing that one actually wishes for more).[1] Trilling's output in his lifetime consisted of two full-length books, on Matthew Arnold (1939), a solid and still profitable work, and a slighter study of E. M. Forster (1943); one novel, *The Middle of the Journey* (1947), which is more impressive than usually supposed (as a political novel it is better than Henry James's *Princess Casamassima*, which he consistently overrated); and four collections of essays and lectures—*The Liberal Imagination*, already mentioned, *The Opposing Self* (1955), *Beyond Culture* (1965), and *Sincerity and Authenticity* (1972). There were several other, posthumously published, collections, supervised by his widow, Diana, who also wrote a memoir, *The Beginning of the Journey* (1993).

1 *Life In Culture: Selected Letters of Lionel Trilling*, by Lionel Trilling, edited by Adam Kirsch; Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 464 pages, $35.

"In a collection of essays," Trilling wrote, "you are presenting a person." The person we discern in his books is appropriately complex. Trilling was delighted when Etienne Gilson said he did not think of him as a literary critic. Writing in 1951 to Norman Podhoretz—with whom his relationship, as shown by these letters, was never easy—he protested, "I am as much disillusioned by criticism as an academic discipline nowadays as I am by scholarship." He rarely practiced close textual analysis, and his significance may be more as a cultural than a literary figure. His own description of his *modus operandi* was "the genre of discourse." He is a synthesizer rather than an analyst, operating in the field of the history of ideas. He is as likely to write about Hegel, Marx, and Freud as he is about Jane Austen, Keats, and Flaubert (whose *Bouvard et Pécuchet* he is almost alone in recognizing as a masterpiece).

It's easy to see why Trilling is neglected. His belief in the value of a traditional liberal humane education is abhorrent to current fashions. He saw Structuralism, which surfaced late in his career, as a literary variant of Stalinism, subordinating individual autonomy and freedom to the demands of a collective. His experience of the 1968 student protests at Columbia (which, according to his wife, he found oddly exhilarating) surfaces in only one letter printed by Kirsch, in which he tells Pamela Hansford Johnson that, angry as he is at the students' behavior, many of those he has talked to "command my respect and even liking. I would find it easier to be simple, but I cannot be."

Many others, of course, find it all too easy to be simple. In his 1972 Jefferson lecture, "Mind in the Modern World," Trilling lamented "our disaffection from history," which had led to calls for universities to renounce their commitment to excellence in the name of egalitarianism. He judged that such "cynicism and intellectual negation" made serious thought about education impossible. As for positive discrimination, faculty recruitment on any basis other than that of "professional excellence," he insisted, would be a disaster. One can only imagine Trilling's reaction to the no-platforming and PC bullying which has robbed so many universities today of their independence and dignity, and which has deprived generations of students of an education worthy of the name. In a world where *Huckleberry Finn*, one of the greatest anti-racist works ever written, is conspicuous by its absence from many university reading lists, while issue-driven trivia are compulsory reading, Trilling's comment has fresh relevance: "no one who reads thoughtfully the dialectic of Huck's great moral crisis will ever again be wholly able to accept without some question and some irony the assumptions of the respectable morality by which he lives." There is a different "respectable morality" in place now, but its adherents are just as unthinking as their predecessors. Without a sense of the past, Trilling wrote, our lives might be easier, but "we might also be less generous, and certainly we would be less aware. . . . The refinement of our historical sense chiefly means that we keep it properly complicated."

Trilling is thought of as a modernist, but his celebrated essay "On the Teaching of Modern Literature" (1961) makes clear that "modernism" for him meant Proust, Joyce, Lawrence, Eliot, Yeats, Mann, Kafka, Rilke, and Gide. As these letters show, his attitude to the literature of his own time was wary. "My relation to modern verse," he admitted to Podhoretz in 1950, "is very largely academic and dutiful—it seldom means as much to me as prose." Writing to C. P. Snow in 1963, he confessed to "a good deal of resistance" to contemporary literature, born of "a stubborn humanistic conservatism." He retained a soft spot for his former student Allen Ginsberg (what more incongruous pairing can be imagined?) but could see in Thom Gunn only "a neat-minded bore of a craftsman making well-made poem after well-made poem." The background reading for his "modernism" course at Columbia included Frazer, Nietzsche, Conrad, Diderot, Tolstoy, and Freud. Such a course would be unthinkable in a modern university, where texts serve to illustrate theory, and creative writing is not read but taught, and rewarded with a degree. Ironically, Trilling's pantheon consists mainly of writers who might be thought of as right-wing, whereas he himself was understood to

be "liberal" (of which more later), and he did not discuss them in detail in his work. In *Why Trilling Matters*, Kirsch sees this as a "deliberate tactical maneuver" stemming from Trilling's wish "not to expound modernism but to put it into question," to weigh his admiration for these writers with his dissent from many of their ideas—or rather, from their ideology, which, as he warns in "The Meaning of a Literary Idea" (*The Liberal Imagination*), "is not the product of thought" but of an unthinking acceptance of "formulas" whose dangers are hidden from us by our emotional commitment to them. In thrall to formulas, we are liable to be blind to those "contradictions" which, according to "Reality in America," it is the job of the critic to examine.

Because so many of Trilling's writings are occasional, his emphasis shifts with the nature of the task. As Mark Krupnick neatly says in *Lionel Trilling and the Fate of Cultural Criticism* (1986), "His stance is consistent but his opinions are not." The nearest approach to a manifesto that we have comes in "On the Teaching of Modern Literature":

> [M]y own interests lead me to see literary situations as cultural situations, and cultural situations as great elaborate fights about moral issues, and moral issues as having something to do with gratuitously chosen images of personal being, and images of personal being as having something to do with literary style.

For Arnold, too, as Trilling noted in his book, morality was a matter of style, and culture "a moral orientation" of "the whole personality in search of the truth." Leavis, with whom Trilling is sometimes misleadingly compared, would have regarded this use of "style" with suspicion. Writing, again, to Podhoretz, who was working with Leavis in Cambridge (and who reviewed *The Liberal Imagination* for the magazine *Scrutiny*, hailing Trilling as a critic in the Arnoldian tradition), Trilling admitted he could understand Leavis's "long pedagogic rage" now that he was supervising graduate dissertations, but was disinclined to emulate it. Suavity mattered to him. Trilling's "The Leavis–Snow Controversy," reprinted in *Beyond Culture*, delivers a solemnly pained rebuke to Leavis for his "impermissible" tone in dealing with Snow. This betrays a failure to understand the tradition of polemical pamphleteering to which Leavis's lecture belongs—although Trilling's own criticisms of Snow (which Snow claimed were misrepresentations of his position) are as hard-hitting as Leavis's.

To define morality as being about right or wrong may be too simple: it is often about conflicting rights. In "Manners, Morals, and the Novel" (*The Liberal Imagination*), Trilling says more about manners than morals, finally suggesting, in a now familiar argument, that novels exercise a moral function upon us when they force us to question our own motives and the assumptions instilled into us by our education and upbringing. The novel uniquely teaches us "the extent of human variety and the value of this variety." Such a pluralistic approach, in Kirsch's view, is reminiscent of Isaiah Berlin. Together with the emphasis on verbal contradictions, it is also akin to William Empson; and, appropriately, Trilling returns repeatedly to the analysis of what Empson called complex words. "Liberal" contains even more contradictions than "moral." It is so routinely a pejorative term nowadays that it takes an effort to remember that it once had a positive meaning. Writing to a French lycée teacher in 1953, Trilling characterized it as "thoughtfulness, a humane interest in the welfare of others, a degree of commitment to philosophical naturalism, a belief in the possibility of progress by political means, an open mind, the resistance to conservative or reactionary ideas." Less positively, such an outlook "was inclined to give to Communism an unreasoned and unintelligent sympathy, sentimental in its first impulse, though often hard and bitter in its tenacity." Hence, as he wrote to Pascal Covici, his editor at Viking Press, the essays in *The Liberal Imagination* sought to promote a self-critical liberalism, preventing liberal assumptions from becoming "mere comfortable pieties." Arnold had called himself "a Liberal of the Future": so might Trilling.

Such "comfortable pieties," as they impinge upon Judaism and Communism, feature largely in the early letters (here I should mention Edward Alexander's review of the collection in *Standpoint* for October 2018, which covers these issues in further detail). Trilling insisted that he was not "a Jewish writer," but he struggled to gain tenure in an academic world which saw anti-Semitism as acceptable. His twenty-five contributions to *The Menorah Journal* between 1925 and 1931 find few echoes in the canonical works. In 1929, when the *Journal*'s survival was uncertain, Trilling wrote to its editor, Elliot Cohen, pleading for a reprieve. He explained that he had grown up largely indifferent to his parents' religion (in 1952 he was still insisting that "very little in Jewish religious life speaks to me") and, indeed, had found Judaism unintelligent, until the *Journal* offered him an image of Judaism as "accepted and legitimate." "I did not get religion," he cautioned, "but I accepted the fact of Jewishness as an important thing." The *Journal*, in fact, made Judaism intellectually and socially respectable to him.

Yet his feelings towards Judaism remained ambivalent. In 1933, writing to Addison T. Cutler, he even felt able to maintain that a lecture invitation by Columbia to the German (Nazi) ambassador to the United States, however ill-advised, should not be withdrawn, because "I believe that it is wiser for the University to adhere to the principle of free speech on all occasions with all its possible anomalies than to reject the principle of free speech on any occasion because of any of its anomalies." Of course, he might have felt differently ten years later; but in 1945, when Elliot Cohen became the founder-editor of *Commentary*, Trilling refused to join the editorial board, pleading pressure of university work, but also admitting that "so many" of his feelings about Jewish life were "negative." He worried that to be formally associated with *Commentary* would limit his freedom to write about—or not to write about—Jewish matters. In 1947 he declined to be a signatory to a report recommending the establishment of a Jewish university, on the grounds that "there are now in America no special Jewish values of a large and important sort." In 1959 he turned down an invitation to address the Seixas Society, an organization for Jewish students at Columbia, explaining that, "after considerable effort, I can find nothing that I can talk about"—even though we learn, from a letter to Samuel Astrachan in 1960, that he had had a "long continuing desire to write a history of the last days of the Warsaw ghetto." In 1965 he wrote flatly of "the unsatisfactoriness—the dimness—of [Judaism's] theological utterances."

It was not just Judaism which he found unsympathetic. "There isn't any conceivable actual religious formulation that I can give credence to" (1965) leaves no wiggle room. When Trilling referred to the spiritual, it was in Matthew Arnold's or Henry James's sense of the word, as a shorthand for a response to those aspects of human nature and society which were not gross, materialistic, or self-seeking. Despite all this, on his mother's death in 1964 (when he was in Oxford and could not get back for the funeral), he decided, at his wife's suggestion, to say the Kaddish, and Isaiah Berlin put him in contact with a group of Jewish students "who regularly hold services at, of all places, Jesus College." It was, he recognized, "an affecting occasion and helpful in a way I would not have expected."

Trilling's initial sympathy with Communism was short-lived. "I must always have a reservation of faith in everything," he commented to his colleague Alan Brown after the Moscow show trials of August 1936; two years later he was still "in solution about a lot of Marxist doctrine," he confessed to Sidney Hook. Marx himself is rarely mentioned in these letters. Trilling was never formally a Party member, and letters of 1946 contain condemnation of Stalinism as "corrupt and dangerous," leading to "the death of the spirit." *The Middle of the Journey*, in which the Communist who breaks with the Party is based on Whittaker Chambers, and the *bien-pensant* fellow-travelers have their benevolence shown up as a disguise for double standards, displays a keen understanding that Communism, like Liberalism, was not a single coherent concept, but a spectrum of

affiliations. Writing of the 1940s in a letter of 1957 to John Wain, who had interviewed him for the London *Observer*, Trilling pointed out that he had combated "the progressive point of view" associated with the New Deal, and the "intransigent liberal-radicalism" of would-be intellectuals; progressivism, "influenced, often unconsciously, by Communism, what here was called Stalinism," was "deteriorating into a new philistinism. It was against this that my essays of the period were directed." He refers Wain to the preface to *The Liberal Imagination*, which "will lead you to see why some people speak of me as 'antiliberal.'" He may be thinking of the passage in which he identifies the paradox of liberalism, that in its "vision of a general enlargement and freedom and rational direction of human life" it "drifts towards a denial of the emotions and the imagination."

There is a surprising streak of romanticism in Trilling. We see it in his unusually warm-hearted essay on Keats's letters, in his attraction to a quality of tragic-heroic glamour in F. Scott Fitzgerald, and, obliquely, in his fascination with Freud—which was not just theoretical. When one learns, from a letter, that Trilling owed his psychoanalyst nearly $1,500 in 1972, one reflects that he couldn't afford (in any sense) not to take Freud seriously. Writing, in 1959, to William Gamble, who had solicited help with an essay, Trilling explained that he had first read *Civilization and its Discontents* when he was twenty-five, and had rejected its thesis as incompatible with the Marxist economic theory he then accepted, but that he later came to admire it. He admits that his knowledge of Freud's writings is far from complete, but that he still entertains the idea (never realized) of "writing a short book about Freud as a moralist." Trilling was aware of the reductive schematism which could result from psychoanalytic "readings"; in letters to the London *Times Literary Supplement* and to Jacques Barzun he objected to the "mechanical Freudianism" of Leon Edel's treatment of the relationship between William and Henry James. In "Freud and Literature" (*The Liberal Imagination*), Trilling places Freud squarely in the nineteenth-century Romantic tradition, while insisting that he also has a "positivist" side—"he holds to a simple materialism, to a simple determinism, to a rather limited sort of epistemology"—and that his conception of the hedonistic function of art is inadequate. Yet, Trilling contends, Freud recognized the poetic capacity of the mind, its recourse, under pressure, to metaphor, symbolism, indirectness, flashes of insight rather than logical sequence. Between the pleasure principle and the reality principle a tragic agon takes place: the death wish is confronted in order that it can be borne. In a later essay, "Freud: Within and Beyond Culture" (*Beyond Culture*), Trilling extended this point: the central issue of modern literature has been the struggle of the self to adjust itself to its culture while at the same time affirming its autonomy.

In his last completed work, *Sincerity and Authenticity*, which was derived from his Charles Eliot Norton lectures at Harvard for 1969–70, Trilling writes what might be called a natural history of selfhood. The key terms in the title are subjected to historical analysis. To be sincere is to be, as Polonius advised, true to oneself—to be what one seems. Such a correspondence is vital to the health of a society, particularly one in which life is lived to a large extent in the public sphere, and which depends on trust if it is to function at all. To be authentic, however—the central ethical aspiration of modernism, whose philosophical forebear Trilling identified as Hegel—is to affirm whatever one is, or feels oneself to be, without regard for convention or the feelings of others. (Trilling notes the importance of Sartrean existentialism in this context.) In "The Sense of the Past," Trilling allows that "whether, and in what way, human nature has always been the same," should be a real question, but that in any case "What we certainly know has changed is the *expression* of human nature." For the authentic individual, however, the belief in an essential, shared "human nature" is an illusion, the product of outworn religious, metaphysical, or moral systems, all of them instruments of oppression. It will be obvious how far this has become, in our time, not only an unquestioned

but, for many, an unquestionable assumption. Just as Trilling was startled to see his early advocacy of modern literature become so accepted as to marginalize the classics, so he might have been appalled by the degree to which authenticity (which had a positive aspect for him) has become the justification for self-indulgence or solipsism.

Sincerity and Authenticity remains a work of real intellectual distinction. It does not feature largely in the letters (or, surprisingly, in *Why Trilling Matters*). Admittedly, the last chapter, in which Trilling attacks the theories of Herbert Marcuse and R. D. Laing, has worn badly; Kirsch prints a severe letter from Trilling to Saul Bellow, in 1974, responding to an essay of Bellow's which Trilling is forced to conclude deliberately misrepresents his arguments in that chapter. Writing from Oxford, where he was a visiting professor in 1964–65 and again in 1972–73, he reported that the book was selling briskly and had been well reviewed in England, but little noticed in America.

Trilling was not a great one for relaxing vacations; his travels usually had a professional purpose. His impressions of Oxford are recorded in several letters. On his first visit, he and his wife found prices rather steep and were daunted by the social round expected of them—drinks receptions, High Table dinners, lecture invitations, requests for media appearances. The dons, he reported, "have a kind of simplicity in their friendliness." In 1972, writing to Jacques Barzun from the grander surroundings of All Souls College, he was more observant, guying "the All Souls manner . . . staccato and a little lofty and severe, no harm in it but to tell you something about the speaker's intellectual pretensions." The Trillings considered retiring to Oxford, but in the end could not steel themselves to leave Columbia. Trilling's loyalty to the College, which he always distinguished from the University, was unwavering. As he wrote to John Vaughan in an interesting autobiographical letter of 1972, he had enrolled at Columbia as a student partly to save money by living at home. The College, he felt, gave him his liberal-democratic side to balance the conservatism of his parents. His most remarkable act of piety was to turn down an honorary Doctorate of Letters offered him by Columbia on his retirement, on the grounds that this would unfairly slight the work of other retired professors who had not received such an honor.

The last letter in Kirsch's selection dates from five days before Trilling's death. Dictated by his wife and signed by his secretary, it informs his cousin Bernard Cohen that inoperable pancreatic cancer has left Trilling terribly weak. His last essay, "Why We Read Jane Austen," which he had not quite finished, appeared posthumously. His earlier writings on *Emma* and *Mansfield Park* had admired Austen's ability to look with critical detachment at her own innate conservatism and to appreciate the increased complexity of moral decision-making by individuals in a society undergoing change. The last piece takes a more anthropological turn, but its message is essentially the same humanistic one: we read Jane Austen "to find in a past culture the paradigm by which our own moral lives are put to test."

Trilling wrote essays on the letters of Keats, Joyce, and Santayana, remarking in the last on the widespread "emptiness and lack of energy" in other modern collections (he exempted those of D. H. Lawrence and Shaw). If he himself cannot be numbered among the great letter writers, it is not for those reasons; it rather is because, despite his admiration for poets, his mind lacks a poetic strand. His "negative capability" was not, as for his admired Keats, imaginative but ratiocinative. "Discourse," his own word, best describes what he is drawn to, and what he does best. These are the letters of a man of singular probity and honesty, whose image as an austere, forbidding, somber character is not the whole truth. "He had a sweet heart," Allen Ginsberg said, in tribute to his former teacher, "a sad solemn sweetness." There is a salutary surprise in those words. For another less familiar side of his character, one can cherish the anecdote of a graduate class in which a student's repeated references to "Lear" were cut short by Trilling with "*King* Lear to you!"

Gehry in Philly
by Michael J. Lewis

This fall gave us our first look at Frank Gehry's ambitious remodeling of the Philadelphia Museum of Art, on which the architect has been toiling for more than a decade. If intended to reassure skeptics that his work will be respectful and understated, his new museum restaurant could hardly have performed better. Called "Stir," it is a warm and handsome space with floors of red oak and walls of Douglas fir. The open lattice of curved wooden beams that hangs from the ceiling like a late-Gothic net vault imparts a cozy sense of enclosure to those who dine beneath it. This distinctive shape, the architect tells us, will be reprised in the new galleries he will add in the course of his renovations.

When it was announced in 2006 that Gehry, the designer of the extravagantly unbuttoned Guggenheim Bilbao, would be turned loose on Philadelphia's serene temple of art, there was excitement but also alarm. Gehry had never worked on a significant historic building. Conscious of this, the museum made a point of stressing that although his mandate was "to create dynamic new spaces for art and visitors," he was to do so "without disturbing the classic exterior of a building that is already a defining landmark in Philadelphia." And, in fact, his first interventions were comfortingly restrained. He gave the museum a 425-car parking garage and tucked it out of sight, invisible except for the most discreet of pavilions projecting above ground. A new loading dock on the museum's south flank was more obtrusive but was seen as an acceptable trade-off, one that made it possible to reopen the long-closed public entrance to the north, which had been turned into a makeshift loading dock.

The current round of alterations, for which ground was broken in 2017, are more consequential. In an effort to create a natural flow between the upper floors and the newer galleries below, Gehry has reconfigured the entire entrance sequence. The eastern and western entrance halls, originally conceived as distinct spaces, are to be joined together and linked to a new grand hall or forum, placed directly below the main stair. This, in turn, will lead to the grand cross axis of the lower level, a 640-foot vaulted passage that runs across the breadth of the building and that has been inaccessible to the public for decades. Here another 23,000 square feet of exhibition space is to be created. This first building campaign, budgeted at $196 million, is focused on the historic building and has been called the "core project" to distinguish it from the next phase, which will extend the building underground.

The breathless cheerleading with which Gehry's plans have been sold to the public is not without incongruity. According to Gail Harrity, the museum's COO, "This is about restoring, preserving, and at the same time reimagining the building for Philadelphia's future." But how exactly do you preserve something that you imagine (i.e., wish) to be something else? For the most part, these claims have been accepted uncritically by the press. It is only when one looks closely at the plans (and the museum has been coy about showing them, preferring to

publish attractive interior renderings) that one realizes that, beneath the ballyhoo and fanfare, one of America's great buildings is quietly preparing itself for disfigurement.

Can you alter a great building without knowing why it is great? The greatness of the Philadelphia Museum of Art is inseparable from its site. It stands alone among the world's museums in being situated upon its city's richest and most consequential parcel of real estate—which is itself ironic, since Philadelphia was not intended to have consequential real estate. Just as a Quaker meetinghouse has no presiding minister or pulpit, Philadelphia was to have no spatial hierarchy. The city that its Quaker founder William Penn laid out in 1682 was an uninflected grid, running from the Delaware River in the east to the Schuylkill River in the west. It had no notable topography apart from a lone hill to the northwest, just beyond the city limits, which he named "Faire Mount." This gave Philadelphia what no other American city has, certainly not in such compact and dramatic form: its own acropolis.

Beyond this hill, the topography changes. The prim Quaker grid abruptly gives way to a meandering landscape of picturesque hills and cliffs, stretching far upriver along the east bank of the Schuylkill. Fashionable Philadelphians, drawn by the attractive scenery and healthy elevation, built their summer seats here. But these estates became less desirable once textile mills upstream began to pour their effluvium into the Schuylkill, the river that provided most of the city's drinking water. Out of self-preservation, the city began acquiring upriver estates and in 1859 laid them out as Fairmount Park. Today it encompasses over 3,900 acres, making it one of the largest municipal parks in the world.

It was sheer luck that Penn's Faire Mount was preserved for the art museum. Other cities have taken far more picturesque sites and squandered them. But for most of the nineteenth century, the hill was set aside as a water reservoir. Only in 1909, long after water from the "poisoned chalice" of the Schuylkill had become undrinkable, was it put out of commission. And so the site became available at the best possible moment, just as the City Beautiful Movement was carrying out its idealistic quest to embellish and refine America's cities by means of broad boulevards, gracious civic buildings, and inspiring monuments. The Faire Mount was made to order for that movement, fortuitously placed just where gridded Philadelphia touched picturesque Philadelphia; all that was needed was to draw a line connecting the two.

That connecting road had long been in the works. After the Civil War, when Philadelphia placed a new city hall on its central intersection, the logic of a grand boulevard connecting it to Fairmount Park became instantly clear. It took decades to secure the political backing for such an audacious move, slicing a bold diagonal right through Penn's Cartesian grid, and the first proposals involved only a new formal entrance to the park. But City Beautiful doctrine loved to terminate every axis with an eye-catching monument, and Philadelphia City Hall—a swaggering Second Empire leviathan—demanded an equally swaggering pendant. So began the twenty-year campaign to design and build the Philadelphia Museum of Art, which advanced hand in hand with the construction of the diagonal boulevard, known today as Philadelphia's Benjamin Franklin Parkway.

Because of the project's complexity and urban component, it was assigned to a team of architects: Paul Cret, Horace Trumbauer, and the firm of Zantzinger, Borie & Medary. Cret, a prodigy of the École des Beaux-Arts, was the most gifted, but he chanced to be in his native France when World War I broke out, and he stayed to serve; he was absent during the critical years. Leadership defaulted to Trumbauer, more an impresario than an artist, who proved a capable administrator. The story is admirably told in David B. Brownlee's *Building the City Beautiful* (1989). Trumbauer wanted to terminate the parkway with one compact and mighty monument—a full stop, as it were. His collaborators preferred something more like the Acropolis in Athens, a loose collection of temples atop a sacred hill. Howell Lewis Shay, a young architect in Trumbauer's office, came up with the inspired solution to achieve the two desires. He made a plan in the form of an

uppercase E, placing entrances at both sides of the cross bar. Each of the arms terminated in a pedimented temple front, eight in all, so that one could read the building as either a single object or a congeries of parts. This ambiguity was precisely the right note to strike in a building occupying a transitional site between city and park.

Shay's brainstorm came in June 1915, but construction had to wait for the end of the war. The project was overseen by the Fairmount Park Commission, the semi-independent agency responsible for the city's cultural and landscape patrimony, and it quickly proved that it knew its way around the corridors of City Hall. Fearing that the city might call a halt to construction once the museum's central block was finished, the commission started with the outer wings, correctly guessing that the city would never tolerate the public embarrassment of a building with a missing middle.

The orthodox solution for civic museums of the period was to build in pristine white marble, but this would have meant inserting civic formality into the park. Instead the architects opted for Mankato stone, a robustly grained dolomitic limestone from Minnesota that is resistant to erosion and is a tawny yellow color. The result is a museum at once ceremonial and picturesque, perched where the formal order of the city gives itself over to the irregularity of natural landscape, making the museum as splendidly contextual a work of art as one is likely to see.

Vibrant color, of course, was everywhere in the 1920s. The building's most startling chromatic passage can be seen in the North Wing's pediment, with its unified sculptural group of larger-than-life-size figures. The theme is "sacred and profane love in Western civilization," and it is depicted by statues of Greek gods and goddesses in electrically vivid color. It had been known for a century that the sculpture of the ancient world was in fact colored, but few modern sculptors dared to revive the practice, and rarely with the intensity of C. Paul Jennewein, who molded the statues, and Léon-Victor Solon, the accomplished colorist who chose the hues (and would go on to design the color scheme for Rockefeller Center). Perhaps only the tolerance for high-keyed color during the Art Deco age made the sculpture possible. A second sculptural group designed by John Gregory for the facing pediment was never installed; it remains unfinished, as do the other six temple porticos, all provisionally backed with blank brick walls. Nonetheless, Jennewein's sculpture is there in all its wanton chromatic glory, perturbing even those who know their archaeological history.

The museum's other essay in archaeological rectitude is not quite so shocking, since it is practically invisible, but it is far more radical. The museum was the first—and to this date the only—large-scale implementation of the so-called optical refinements of ancient Greek architecture. These were the series of subtle and as yet poorly understood departures from the orthogonality that distinguishes Greek temples. Among them are stylobate curvature, i.e., the nearly imperceptible rise and fall of the temple base across its length, and the slight inward tilt of the columns of the portico (those of the Philadelphia Museum of Art tilt so minutely that their axes converge two and a half miles above the earth). Just why the Greeks did this is an enigma. Was it to compensate for perspective distortion, and to make things appear straight that would otherwise seem to sag? Or to impart a sense of living elasticity to the stone? At any rate, the Philadelphia Museum gives us our one chance to experience the effect of these refinements at full scale in bright sunlight, which is the only way they can be appreciated.

And so the Philadelphia Museum of Art is a bafflingly complex object: formal yet picturesque, superbly archaeological yet sparkling with Jazz Age pizzazz. It shows that curious 1920s sensibility that has been called "Greco Deco." To appreciate just how distinctively personal and local it is, one should follow up with a visit to a more properly "correct" museum of the age such as the National Gallery of Art, a museum that is equally impeccable but of purely formal civic character.

Complete unto itself and visible from all sides, the Philadelphia Museum of Art defies enlargement. It has no rear façade, as the Metropolitan

Museum of Art does, that can simply be pushed outward. And so until recently it has grown only by acquiring satellites on the Parkway. The great Paul Cret, back from the war in which he was three times gassed, added the peerless gem of the Rodin Museum in 1927; originally built for a private collector, it has been administered since 1939 by the PMA. In 2007 the museum acquired the nearby Perelman Building, an Art Deco insurance company office that now provides space for the costume and textile department and for exhibiting contemporary art. There should have been a third satellite: in 2001 Tadao Ando designed a characteristically graceful Calder Museum for the Parkway, but it came to grief when the sculptor's descendants and the museum could not agree on loan terms.

For these reasons, the Philadelphia Museum is intact in its original historical fabric to an extraordinary degree, perhaps more so than any other major American museum. Under the circumstances, Gehry made the correct decision to find space below ground, and, happily, there was space waiting. The long passage on the lower level—crowned by a handsome Guastavino vault and stretching more than twice the length of the Hall of Mirrors at Versailles—is the great hidden gem of the building. Whatever galleries Gehry might later burrow beneath the museum's terrace, they will be bound into this generous cross axis and thereby into the classical order of the building.

Unfortunately, the logic of that classical order is emphatically upward. Both the glorious eastern stair hall and the lower western entrance were designed to lift and lead visitors up to the art. Gehry's task was to find a way of directing them downwards, which is always a challenge. His solution was to create a third grand hall, directly beneath the main stair, and to make it appealingly visible from the western entrance. This requires demolishing the stone wall between the original entrance halls and the elegantly detailed stairs that link them. Under the circumstances, it seems that Gehry could have hardly have acted otherwise.

Or perhaps he might have, had his clients viewed the ceremonial spaces of the museum as valuable works of art in their own rights, which one would no more think of defacing than the Rogier van der Weyden *Crucifixion* (1460) upstairs. When Robert Venturi gave the western entrance its postmodern facelift, he made certain to leave the building fabric so that his emendations were easily reversible (as now proven by the ease with which his modifications are removed). Gehry is nowhere near as scrupulous. By demolishing the rear wall of the stair hall, he exchanges a spatial order of discrete rooms for one of flowing continuity. This is no trifling tweak. It turns back the clock on one of the most important architectural developments of the last half century. It was Louis I. Kahn, Cret's brilliant pupil, who restored to modernism an appreciation for the well-formed room as the fundamental unit of architecture. One can hardly imagine a space more important for Kahn's development than the entrance hall of the museum, which was built during his student years. Its mutilation is a loss to Philadelphia's architectural patrimony. (Gehry can leave nothing untouched: the doors of the western portico are to be enlarged until there is virtually no wall left at all but only stubby cylinders between the entrances.)

One has the unhappy sense that the officers of the museum and their architect have no particular reverence or even fondness for the building that has been entrusted to them. It is not as bad as at the Brooklyn Museum, whose stewards have long acted as if they loathed their own building, but one senses glimmers of frustration and resentment. Clearly there is no appreciation for the exquisite display of Greek optical refinements that make this building unique in modern architecture. To see the subtlety of stylobate curvature requires that one put his nose at the base of the building and look directly across its whole length. Gehry's renovations will make this impossible if, in the second phase of the project, he is permitted to affix circulation towers to the north and south ends of the museum. Those blank swaths of wall are one of the delights of the building, and to despoil them with what are in effect glorified fire towers is bad enough in its own right without also compromising

the assiduous investigation of Greek architecture below.

Other violations are in store, such as the plan to poke out the blank pediments above the entrances and fill them with glass. The idea is that the glazed aperture at the center will grant a great axial view along the length of the Franklin Parkway all the way to City Hall. But that view already exists from the museum entrance, and in much more satisfying fashion. Here one can see neatly aligned Alexander Milne Calder's statue of William Penn (1892–94) atop City Hall, the Swann Memorial Fountain by his son Alexander Stirling Calder (1924), and—directly overhead in the stair hall—his grandson Alexander Calder's mobile *Ghost* (1964). (Philadelphia wags call this trinity "the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost.") The view from the punctured pediment is superfluous, and it comes at the cost of destroying the visual meaning of the classical portico, whose beauty comes from the balance between the tapered columns below and the mighty pediment above, weight and support exquisitely gauged to one another. Hollow out the pediment, and the portico becomes grotesquely bottom-heavy.

To expect appreciation for these niceties of form is asking too much from a man who, after all, made his name as a master of anti-form architecture, thrilling critics in the 1970s with his insouciant refusal to give order and resolution to his designs. He may be the right man, but Philadelphia is the wrong place. It would have made far more sense to have commissioned him to give the museum a second building, on the model of the Met Breuer.

A German prince-bishop of the eighteenth century who built himself an exorbitantly wanton palace was said to be *dem Bauwurmb befallen*: in the grip of the building bug (literally "building worm"). Today our building-mad prince-bishops are our museum directors and college presidents. But there is a difference. Those prince-bishops expected to remain in their palaces, unlike the modern administrator for whom a successful building is merely the most tangible of all resume items. The incentive to build will always be stronger than the incentive to preserve and maintain. This is not to say that everyone is a restless careerist for whom there can be no rest until attaining the presidency of Yale or the directorship of the National Gallery, but the cultural pressures and incentives are the background noise of our day. In an age marked by careerism, it takes a powerful will to resist the lure of the *Bauwurmb*.

How was this slow-building shambles concocted by Timothy Rub, the museum's director, and Gail Harrity permitted to happen? Since 1867, Philadelphia's cultural heritage was watched over by the Fairmount Park Commission, the semi-autonomous body that protected the city's cultural interests from political and commercial pressure. It exercised enormous control over the design and construction of the Philadelphia Museum of Art, which does not own its site and which is a tenant of the city. In 2010 the city abolished the Fairmount Park Commission and turned its duties over to Philadelphia Parks & Recreation, an agency led by a commissioner appointed by the mayor. Any insulation between immediate political concerns and long-term cultural considerations has been removed. The result is a crude utilitarian calculus by which any increase in museum visitorship and tourist dollars justifies itself. Once the Philadelphia Museum of Art becomes merely a means to an end, then Gehry's interventions become not only logical but necessary.

New poems
by J. Allyn Rosser & Richard Kenney

I tried all of them in turn

The wooden chairs in the dining room
of the house I grew up in
used to pull my hair. Hard.

Their sleek Scandinavian walnut design
was cleverly constructed to seem flush,
properly joined: but the seams snagged

my every move. I tried never to
mention it: a quiet martyrdom
to sit among them at Thanksgiving,

Christmas, or dinner-guest occasions;
agony to lean forward with feigned interest,
to nod, to stand and beg to be excused.

Had I complained, I knew what to expect:
"So why don't you cut your hair short,
like your sister, how stylish she looks!"

It was my punishment for vanity,
for brushing that thick gold until it shone
for the boys in the back row,

the ones the principal got to know.
Those straight-backed chairs were on to me.
The secret of beauty, they whispered

mid-pinch, *the secret is selfishness*.
We know you. We always have.
Two strands yanked out for leaning in

to ask Aunt Ida a merely polite question.
They knew I didn't give a hoot about her
and her knees, Mr. Bailey and his trip south.

Rip! for sweetly leaning in and *Rip!* for turning
to smile at the handsome cousin. Ow! I'd think,
and blush again, reaching for the cream.

—J. Allyn Rosser

Numbers

Seethe on silicon
like bacterial plaques.
Somehow they liken

to appearances.
They have a seemliness from
which all earth rinses.

The algorithm:
Elegant? Intelligent?
What??—a silicon

coelacanth! Log on:
Forgot your password? Reset
as *Laocoon*.

Unlikeness yaws thought.
Timor mortis is the thought.
That land Time forgot.

This—no mere mirror.
Nor is an error message
like no tomorrow.

—*Richard Kenney*

Reflections

The Dartmouth College Case at 200

by Justin Zaremby

The year 2019 marks the two-hundredth anniversary of the Supreme Court's landmark decision in the case of *Trustees of Dartmouth College v. Woodward*. This legal battle over the validity of Dartmouth's royal charter has long been recognized as a turning point in American constitutional history. Chancellor James Kent, the early American law scholar and judge, wrote that the Court's

> decision in the case did more than any other single act, proceeding from the authority of the United States, to throw an impregnable barrier around all rights and franchises derived from the grant of government; and to give solidity and inviolability to the literary, charitable, religious and commercial institutions of our country.

Following an attempt by the New Hampshire legislature to restructure Dartmouth's board of trustees, the College successfully defended its autonomy. The Court's decision affirmed the role that private actors could (and continue to) play in shaping American charitable and educational activities.

In the 1760s, Eleazar Wheelock, a Congregational minister and aspiring educator, sought to found a college in New Hampshire. After years spent raising funds, in 1769 Wheelock was granted a charter from King George III for the establishment of a college "for the education and instruction of youth of the Indian tribes in this land in reading, writing, and all parts of learning which shall appear necessary and expedient for civilizing and christianizing children of pagans, as well as in all liberal arts and sciences, and also of English youth and any others." The charter further granted that governance of Dartmouth College, which was founded in the western New Hampshire town of Hanover, was to be vested in a board of twelve trustees and their chosen successors.

Under the charter, the College president had the authority to name his successor, subject to the approval of the trustees. Upon Eleazar's death in 1779, he named his son John—a graduate of the inaugural class of the College—as president. (The line of Dartmouth presidents is still known as the "Wheelock Succession.") At the time of his accession, Wheelock *fils* enjoyed the support of a board whose members had been selected by Wheelock *père*. Yet as members of his father's board died, new trustees did not defer to the Wheelock name or legacy. Wheelock was a polarizing and pompous figure. The trustees feared that his desire for control over the College would continue past his own death such that he would "be willing to make the College his heir; but upon the condition that the institution, its authorities and funds, should pass, like a West-India plantation with the slaves and cattle upon it, to his actual heirs and descendants according to his own destination."

Simmering tensions reached a boil when a disagreement over the election of Roswell Shurtleff as the Phillips Professor of Divinity in 1804 led to outright conflict between the board and President Wheelock. Shurtleff, a member of the evangelical movement that was then gaining momentum across the country,

was supported by the trustees but disfavored by Wheelock, who barred Shurtleff from doing so at the College chapel and unsuccessfully attempted to further prevent him from preaching in other locations in town. Hostilities continued to grow, and by 1814 the board had denied Wheelock the right to teach the senior class. Wheelock anonymously criticized the trustees in an 1815 pamphlet and enlisted the New Hampshire state legislature and governor to investigate and implement change on the board. The trustees then issued their own published defense, accusing Wheelock of "gross and unprovoked libel on the institution," and dismissed him from his professorship, the board, and the presidency.

Wheelock's ousting became a political and religious issue in the 1816 New Hampshire elections. At a time when state support of the Congregational church was being debated at the polls, supporters of the Presbyterian Wheelock viewed his dismissal as an act of religious extremism by hardline Congregationalists on the board. Buoyed by his recent victory over the Federalists, the newly elected Jeffersonian Republican governor William Plumer encouraged the legislature to take action to change the governance of the college. He decried certain "principles congenial to monarchy" in the charter that empowered the trustees to choose their own successors, noting that such principles were "hostile to the spirit and genius of free government." In 1816, the legislature passed "An Act to Amend the Charter and Enlarge and Improve the Corporation of Dartmouth College." The act changed the name of the school to Dartmouth University, increased the size of the board from twelve to twenty-one members (with new vacancies to be filled by the governor), and created a board of overseers under gubernatorial control. In other words, the state legislature had upended the self-governance of the original charter.

When the old trustees refused to acknowledge the Act, two Dartmouths effectively existed—the College, led by its old trustees, and the University, led by the new trustees (who elected John Wheelock to the presidency). The government-run Dartmouth University seized control of and occupied school buildings, and in response the displaced Dartmouth College (which still enrolled significantly more students than the University) took up residency in a nearby building. Despite government pressure, the College refused to concede its name and brought suit against William H. Woodward, the new secretary of the University, to recover the seal of the College and the original charter. When the College trustees lost their suit at the state court level, they appealed to the United States Supreme Court. The question before the high court was whether the Act was unconstitutional under Article 1, Section 10 of the U.S. Constitution, which provides that no state can pass any law "impairing the obligation of contracts."

New Hampshire argued that because education is one of the vital goals of government, the state had an obligation and right to modify the charter. The College's charter was fundamentally different from a contract between individuals. It constituted a grant of authority by a state actor (the King) to engage in a public mission (the education of young men); accordingly, the state had the right to modify or even revoke the charter. The trustees were serving a public rather than a private purpose, and therefore the state had the ability to intervene. Doing so allowed the state to ensure that Dartmouth would be responsive to its key stakeholders—the people. "These civil institutions," the United States Attorney General argued for the University, "must be modified and adapted to the mutations of society and manners. They belong to the people, are established for their benefit, and ought to be subject to their authority."

The College argued that it had been established under a private charter to fulfill the charitable purposes envisioned by its founding donors. Even though the College served public purposes, it was established as a fundamentally private institution. The charter constituted a contract between the King and the donors that empowered the trustees to fulfill the donors' vision in perpetuity. Just as the contractual rights of individuals could not be impaired by state action under the Constitution, neither could the contractual rights of a private charitable corporation or, by extension, the trustees acting on behalf of the corporation.

Daniel Webster, a Dartmouth alumnus, was a member of the legal team that represented Dartmouth College before the state court and the Supreme Court. The case, he explained to the Supreme Court,

> is not of ordinary importance, nor of every day occurrence. It affects not this college only, but every college, and all the literary institutions of the country. They have flourished, hitherto, and have become in a high degree respectable and useful to the community. They have all a common principle of existence, the inviolability of their charters. It will be a dangerous, a most dangerous experiment, to hold these institutions subject to the rise and fall of popular parties and the fluctuations of political opinions.

Although not included in the official report of the case before the Supreme Court, Webster's defense of Dartmouth College before the Supreme Court has become an oft-quoted rallying cry for generations of Dartmouth graduates. Addressing Chief Justice Marshall, he exclaimed,

> Sir, you may destroy this little Institution; it is weak, it is in your hands! I know it is one of the lesser lights in the literary horizon of our country. You may put it out! But, if you do so, you must carry through your work! You must extinguish, one after another, all those greater lights of science which, for more than a century, have thrown their radiance over our land! It is, Sir, as I have said, a small College. *And yet there are those who love it*.

Webster's eyes are said to have filled with tears as his voice choked. He continued his defense in classical terms: "Sir, I know not how others may feel, but for myself, when I see my Alma Mater surrounded, like Caesar in the senate house, by those who are reiterating stab upon stab, I would not, for this right hand, have her turn to me, and say, '*Et tu quoque, mi fili*. And thou too, my son!'"

On February 2, 1819, Chief Justice Marshall announced a 5-1 decision in favor of the College. Marshall recognized that education was an "object of national concern and a proper subject of legislation." But while a state government could establish a public university under its control, Dartmouth College was not such an institution. The existence of Dartmouth College's public purposes did not transform it into a public institution. "Does every teacher of youth become a public officer, and do donations for the purpose of education necessarily become public property, so far that the will of the legislature, not the will of the donor, becomes the law of the donation?" The answer, according to Marshall, was no.

Moreover, the Court suggested that allowing the New Hampshire Act to stand would harm the establishment of charities in a young America. "It is probable," Marshall wrote,

> that no man ever was, and that no man ever will be, the founder of a college, believing at the time, that an act of incorporation constitutes no security for the institution; believing, that it is immediately to be deemed a public institution, whose funds are to be governed and applied, not by the will of the donor, but by the will of the legislature.

Why would donors consider establishing private charitable institutions if the public purposes of those institutions would subject them to government control? Through New Hampshire's Act, "[t]he will of the state [had been] substituted for the will of the donor," but as under English common law, the will of the donor could not be so easily usurped. Dartmouth College's original charter stood, along with the authority of its trustees.

The Dartmouth College case established an important safeguard for charitable institutions in the United States. The Court held that while privately run institutions may engage in activities that are within the purview of government, government could not by right assume control. It affirmed the role of charities (and their donors) in shaping America's educational, literary, and cultural life, and over time the number and impact of such organizations grew. Roughly twenty years later, in *Democracy in America* (1835–40), Alexis de Tocqueville admired the "infinite art with

which the inhabitants of the United States managed to fix a common goal to the efforts of many men and to get them to advance to it freely" through the establishment of private associations. These associations executed an "innumerable multitude of small undertakings" that no government could ever achieve. Two hundred years later, they continue to do so in the form of countless charities, including colleges, museums, and hospitals. These nonprofits receive hundreds of billions of dollars of donations annually and make significant contributions to the nation's economy.

Of course, today, charities operate in a far more complex environment than nineteenth-century Hanover. The line drawn by the Court between private organizations and government actors is far less clear. Tension between the private and the public takes various forms as state and federal governments exercise their oversight powers. State attorneys general intervene when trustees find themselves unable to govern effectively. The federal government determines which charities are tax-exempt; that, in turn, determines which charities receive contributions from individuals and foundations. The list of laws and regulations that apply to charities continues to grow. Despite the remarkable private initiative that continues to shape America's nonprofits, federal, state, and local governments have assumed a prominent (and occasionally dominant) role in shaping philanthropy. Charities spar with regulators over a range of issues, including mandated procedures for adjudicating sexual harassment claims under Title IX of the U.S. Code, the composition of boards of trustees, and other laws and regulations that impact how they govern themselves, fundraise, and operate.

Such oversight can be reasonable. Charities do a tremendous amount of good, but there are always bad actors. Lamentably, each year brings new examples of organizations that take advantage of their tax-exempt status to advance the self-interest of their trustees and employees. Governments have an obligation to ensure that charitable organizations actually engage in charitable activities (after all, donors are more likely to support the charitable sector if they believe it accomplishes good). Yet as is the case in the corporate sector, we should consider which of the many tools available to governments are appropriate for upholding the law and advancing the charitable goals of the nonprofit sector, and which are merely used to advance the political agendas of particular politicians, special interest groups, or communities.

The bicentennial of Dartmouth's independence provides an opportunity to reflect upon and honor the place of charitable institutions in American public life. The charitable landscape has become more complicated and heavily regulated since 1819, but the fundamental questions raised in the case remain salient: What is the role of private initiative in advancing charity? How does a personal desire to engage in philanthropy interact with the obligations of government? How is philanthropy most effectively achieved? Answers to these questions will continue to evolve, but the pluralistic vision of charity presented by the Dartmouth College case remains vital. Charities operate on a local, national, and international level, but they reflect an ambition to improve society that originates not only in state capitals or Washington, but also in small communities and households. They reflect a tendency toward philanthropy that permeates American society and, one hopes, will continue to do so.

When the New Hampshire legislature attempted to transform governance at Dartmouth College, the Court ruled that the fickle whim of elected officials should not replace the will of the donors and the trustees. The Court took sides in a battle among stakeholders vying for power over the school—the trustees, the college president, and the politicians. Charities continue to engender conflict among such stakeholders and with government. Such passionate engagement with philanthropy by a multitude of voices can only improve the effectiveness of charities and their good works. This continuing struggle for influence, power, and vision reveals an admirable passion for supporting the public weal. It also indicates (to borrow from Daniel Webster) that when it comes to charities in America, *there are still those who love them*.

Reconsiderations

Sylvia & Michael on Sinister Street

by David Platzer

Compton Mackenzie (1883–1972), the descendant of a theatrical dynasty, played many parts—though as a writer rather than on the stage. Now remembered by many only as the humorist who wrote farces like *Whisky Galore* (1947), set on a mythical Scottish island, he began his life in London's West Kensington. In the first phase of Mackenzie's fame, Henry James praised him as a great hope of the English novel. His second novel, *Carnival* (1912), the tale of the doomed dancer Jenny Pearl and the dilettante Maurice Avery, made Mackenzie a cult novelist among the sophisticated young. Lady Diana Manners (later Cooper, the inspiration for Evelyn Waugh's Mrs. Stitch) took Jenny Pearl's phrase "there's nothing wrong with this little girl" as her own, and she and her friends in the set they called the "Corrupt Coterie" loved repeating the cockney Jenny's "don't be soppy" and "I must have been potty." Mackenzie's next novel, *Sinister Street*, originally published in two volumes (the first in 1913, the second in 1914), consolidated his reputation. *Sinister Street* was lapped up by such young readers as Waugh, Scott Fitzgerald, Cyril Connolly, and his schoolmate the future George Orwell. When the First World War broke out, Charles Lister, a male member of the Coterie, hoped that he wouldn't be killed before he could read Mackenzie's next novel, *Guy and Pauline* (1915), a wish unfulfilled when Lister perished at Gallipoli just before the book reached him.

The lyrical *Guy and Pauline* now seems more poignant in the wake of the conflagration that was overtaking England and Europe. Guy Hazlewood, the book's hero, appeared in *Sinister Street* and returned in uniform in Mackenzie's next novel, *The Adventures of Sylvia Scarlett* (1918–19). Mackenzie's project was to write a series of books based on *Sinister Street*'s characters and call the series "The Theatre of Youth." He started with *Carnival*, whose Maurice Avery returned in *Sinister Street* and in the next few novels. *Sinister Street* was rich in characters, and Mackenzie might have continued in that vein for years but for the war that decimated his generation and for his own discovery at its end that he, now in his mid-thirties, was "impatient of the mood of *Sinister Street*." Rather than continue with "The Theatre of Youth," Mackenzie wrapped up the series after the war's end with 1920's *The Vanity Girl*.

Mackenzie, in the first book of his ten-volume autobiography, wrote that reading *Don Quixote* as a child made him a lifelong "natural minority man" for whom freedom had always been the "guiding principle." A born romantic, he was an inveterate apologist for the Stuarts, and his love of liberty was apparent in everything he wrote. In *Sinister Street* Michael Fane reads Cervantes's masterpiece and tries to emulate the doleful knight. Mackenzie was keen in his memoirs and elsewhere to stress that Michael was meant to be an "every-boy" rather than a self-portrait. Nevertheless, Mackenzie did give his creation elements from his own life. Each spent his early years in West Kensington, suffered with their nurse, went to a local independent day school and to Oxford's Magdalen College, renamed St Mary's in Mackenzie's fiction. But Michael's background diverges from Mackenzie's theatrical inheritance. Indeed, Mackenzie gave Michael

and his sister, Stella, origins even more romantic as the illegitimate offspring of the thirteenth and last Earl of Saxby, prevented from marrying their mother by a wife who refused him a divorce. Michael cannot inherit his father's title, but he does get his money. It seems a bit of a writer's daydream—the sort of fantasy cooked up by a scribbler chained to his desk for twelve hours every day, turning out two books per year to survive, as Mackenzie himself later had to.

Michael and friends prove that nineties' aestheticism was still alive among the young in the twentieth century's first decade to such an extent that *Sinister Street*'s Oxford section can seem the link between Max Beerbohm's Oxford and Harold Acton's in the twenties. As a schoolboy, Michael falls in love with Swinburne's poetry. At Oxford, he buys the complete works of Walter Pater and puts up a print of the Mona Lisa on his wall. *Sinister Street*'s description of Oxford has been so celebrated that few know it only comprises a section of the novel. Indeed Oxford is something of an idyllic intruder upon the book's main theme of the omnipresence of evil. Michael is religious to the extent that his adored governess (who converts to Catholicism, as did Mackenzie while writing the book) hopes he will discover a vocation. Even on retreat in a Berkshire monastery, the schoolboy Michael feels he is "the quarry of an evil chase." In the monastery, he meets the creepy Brother Aloysius, a Graham Greene character *avant la lettre*. This baleful presence keeps bobbing up in Michael's life, each time under a different name, now "Meats," now "Barnes."

Michael first encounters Sylvia Scarlett not in one of London's "sinister streets" but in a pretty cottage in Fulham. He feels an instant affinity for her, she whose eyes are merry, tongue is sharp, and who also reads Balzac and Petronius. Michael gives her *Don Quixote* and *The Golden Ass*. Only later in *The Adventures of Sylvia Scarlett* do we discover that Sylvia and Michael are second cousins, close enough to account for natural compatibility but not so close as to prevent romance.

Sylvia's life has been far less protected than Michael's. She and her English father flee from France on her French mother's death, the tomboyish Sylvia briefly disguised as a boy. Though she soon reverts to acting as a girl, she is obliged to show toughness in the world of show business. Singing and playing her theme song, "The Raggle-Taggle Gipsies," on the guitar, she busks in England's seaside towns until her father dies, leaving her entirely on her own. By the time she exits her teens, she has lived more lives than most people ever will, judging her existence to be "nothing but mistake after mistake." Stage success in London is brief, and all her agent has to offer her is a chorus girl's job in St. Petersburg. Still off with the raggle-taggle gipsies, she says to herself. She is in St. Petersburg in the summer of 1914 when she falls victim to typhus and loses consciousness for weeks. On waking, she finds the world at war. The old world had been replaced by bureaucratic restrictions and red tape. Passports are required, suspicion everywhere. "How can mankind believe in man?" she asks. "How can mankind reject God?" Then she meets Michael, always a beacon to her, in Europe's rubble.

The Adventures of Sylvia Scarlett heralded the shift from Mackenzie's earlier "Edwardian" approach, luscious as a ripe peach, to the sparer, purely comic style that marked his post-war novels. Mackenzie attributed the trimmed-down style to the telegrams he wrote as an intelligence officer, where no unnecessary words were allowed. It was as if Waugh had started his career with *Brideshead* and followed it with *Decline and Fall*. *Sylvia and Michael*, originally published in 1919, was, as Mackenzie later claimed, the first novel to elucidate the "weariness and disgust" of the nightmare just ended. Nerves were still raw, and Sylvia's feeling that the war had made the world safe for bureaucrats rather than heroes was perhaps not entirely welcome by the reading public. Since the new book was something of a sequel to *Sinister Street*, the change in style baffled reviewers the more. Mackenzie continued to surprise and confuse them with his novels, including satires on the Secret Service, two Capri cousins to Norman Douglas's *South Wind*, and the later Scottish farces. Reviewers prefer authors they can pigeonhole; Mackenzie eluded them. Almost fifty years after his death, Mackenzie still deserves plaudits in his many seasons and facets. Meanwhile, his books continue to find readers, many of them delighted to encounter an author whose writing can chase clouds away.

Dance

Hunt & Peck

by James Panero

"New Peck" might as well become a permanent fixture on the Lincoln Center marquee. This month a new ballet by Justin Peck premieres on the stage of the David H. Koch Theater—once again, as a headliner for City Ballet's annual program of "New Combinations." This fourth collaboration with the songwriter Sufjan Stevens, set to full orchestra, is simply billed, currently, *New Peck I (Winter 2019)*.

The wunderkind of the New York City Ballet, Justin Peck has already choreographed more than thirty original works, a number that has outpaced his age (he is thirty-one). This he has done as both a soloist in the company and as only the second "resident choreographer" in City Ballet's history, following Christopher Wheeldon, who held the title from 2001 to 2008.

Considering this balletic fecundity, it is all the more remarkable to note that Peck was a latecomer to ballet. He started in tap, in his native Southern California, and only moved to New York's School of American Ballet in 2003. In 2006 he was made an apprentice at City Ballet and joined the corps in 2007. He created his first ballet in 2009, for the Columbia Ballet Collaborative, and enrolled that year in City Ballet's New York Choreographic Institute. By 2014, at City Ballet's spring gala, he had already premiered his sixth ballet for the company, the forty-two-minute *Everywhere We Go*. Alastair Macaulay, then the chief dance critic for *The New York Times*, hailed it as "diffuse and brilliant," and "young Mr. Peck . . . a virtuoso of the form." In elevating him to resident choreographer later that year, Peter Martins, City Ballet's storied former ballet master-in-chief, called the promotion "sort of inevitable."

There does indeed seem to be an inevitable buoyancy to Peck's tidal rise. His ballets convey a California ease that is not so much sunny as sun-baked. Rather than fight the current, he channels musical flow. *Paz de la Jolla*, his 2013 ballet set to Bohuslav Martinů's *Sinfonietta la Jolla* of 1950, begins in beachy bliss, with splendid Esther Williams–like swimsuit costumes by Reid Bartelme and Harriet Jung, supervised by Marc Happel, stirred into an eddying, swirling reef of abstract, fluid motion.

Peck is most accomplished in such ensemble work, which here transforms into an ocean. Arms and legs trace the patterns of rolling surf. On the day I saw it, Sterling Hyltin and Amar Ramasar became engulfed in the waves, while a third dancer, Georgina Pazcoguin, swam out for the rescue. Peck builds energy out of human shapes. He taps the increasingly chiseled strength of young dancers to create acrobatic displays that coalesce and disperse in swirls of limbs.

Peck's architectonic sense, his use of arms and legs to create lines of structure, has been on display from the start. *Year of the Rabbit*, his breakout work of 2012, begins with a solo dancer spinning out from the tick-tocking gears of a remarkably complex human timepiece. His sprightly *Scherzo Fantastique* of 2016, once again with costumes by Bartelme and Jung, here set against a Fauvist backdrop by the painter Jules de Balincourt, is all spring and

no fall. Arms and fingers shoot up to become the woody branches and verdant canopy of the forest primeval.

No one should wish to cork up the outpouring of such young talent. Yet there is nevertheless a sense that Peck's youthful froth might improve if bottled and laid down to age. Something is missing in all the spume that needs to come forward in maturity—a human feeling calling from the deep.

Peck's ballets are Instagram-optimized—just as the millennial choreographer himself betrays little personal affect in front of the ever-present modern lens. If not designed for social media outright, his works are nevertheless socially mediated creations. His dancers look past rather than into each other. His dances are all surface and no depth. The interpersonal partnering of the pas de deux, the essential romance of man and woman, loses out to internetworked movement. Here is ballet not as consummate courtship but rather as information flow.

As seen in Jody Lee Lipes's 2014 documentary *Ballet 422*, which tracks the creation of *Paz de la Jolla* in laborious detail, Peck is nothing if not humble about his abilities and deferential to the traditions of George Balanchine and Jerome Robbins, the idolized founding choreographers of the company. Peck is a workman, and often a fine craftsman, of balletic form. He is calm and likable. His interactions with the late Albert Evans, the City Ballet dancer and ballet master, are especially moving to see. He also seems self-effacing to a fault. Worried of "overstepping my boundaries," in one scene he approaches the conductor to give the orchestra a pep talk:

> Guys, hi, I'm the choreographer. I don't know if I know all of you, but I'm Justin Peck. I just want to say that my whole process of choreographing is really really really based on the music. And everything I do is about exposing the details and the complexities and the textures of the orchestra. It's really really important to play with a lot of energy and vigor, especially in this piece. I would really appreciate that so much. I'm really looking forward to this premiere and everything. So, *merde*.

Only elevated to the position of company soloist in 2013, Peck was still a member of the corps de ballet when he debuted *Paz de la Jolla*. For the premiere, he takes the subway and carries his suit in a dry-cleaning bag across Broadway. He watches its opening from the orchestra, then at intermission rushes backstage to dance in Alexei Ratmansky's *Concerto DSCH*. For every 1 percent of inspiration, Peck undoubtedly gives 99 percent in perspiration.

Yet Peck's intimate proximity to the craft of dance, and to the craftsmen of his company, has oddly created some estrangements in his works' execution. One explanation may be his reliance on video for translating the developments of the studio onto the stage. Through the lens of *Ballet 422*, we see the *many* lenses that capture and compress his choreography. His creations begin on iPhone. Peck uses the propped-up camera of his smartphone to record his own movements as he translates music to dance. Developing his choreography in ensemble, he reviews the digital video of his dancers' studio work as a criminologist might review a surveillance tape. And laptop video is ever present as he unites his choreography with the lighting, costumes, and orchestration of the dress rehearsal.

Digital video has undoubtedly enabled Peck to work remarkably fast—two months, we learn, to create *Paz de la Jolla*—while remaining an active dancer. But the digital screen can also turn felt movement into a succession of flickering moments. This is why his work translates well to film; he is the choreographer for 2018's *Red Sparrow* and Steven Spielberg's forthcoming reboot of *West Side Story*. In person, his dances resemble stop-motion animation—action without interaction. The lens flattens emotion. It can quickly dehumanize intimate expression and exchange.

Such a consideration might also apply to the other recent headline-makers of City Ballet. These days it seems that Justin Peck is the only good news still coming out of the company. It is all a remarkable *changement* of balletic fate. Over most of the past decade, it appeared as

if City Ballet could do no wrong. Its leader, Peter Martins, was the tough-minded veteran Balanchine dancer who carried his company from its founding era into the modern one. He mentored talent, such as Peck's own, and championed a youthful, all-American image in his company. His series of online publicity videos, for instance, narrated by Sarah Jessica Parker, featured his rising dancers as reality-television contestants. The videos seemed like textbook examples of how to use new media to reposition legacy cultural institutions.

Of course, it helps to have a warhorse such as Balanchine's *Nutcracker* to pay the bills of your online publicity machine, as well as a top talent feeder under your control in the form of the School of American Ballet and a city full of balletomanes and ballet moms to fill the seats. And, of course, it all resulted in a carefully choreographed online performance, which has now seen its own curtain descend.

First to exit the stage was Martins himself. According to accusations that the company has denied, this dancer who debuted with City Ballet in 1967 as Apollo ended his career as Dionysus. He came to rule both the company and its school as an absolute monarch, imposing his hot-tempered will and his cool-tempered choreography with impunity. Whenever I saw him pacing the halls of the Koch Theater, he reminded me of a Roger Moore–era Bond villain about to open his shark-tank chute. In the hashtag era, if nothing else, his leadership style was poised to take a tumble. After a leave of absence, he retired.

Then the other toe shoe dropped. In September, Alexandra Waterbury, a graduate of the School of American Ballet, sued a number of City Ballet's principal male dancers—as well as the School, the Company, and one of its patrons—for a conspiracy of sexual degradation. According to the complaint, last year Waterbury discovered that Chase Finlay, her boyfriend at the time and a principal dancer of the company, had taken intimate photos and videos of her against her knowledge. Finlay had not only recorded this material but, as the complaint continues, also shared and discussed it in explicit and degrading terms through text messages with other men in the company.

The details in the complaint are shocking, and also compromising if it is, in fact, determined that a "fraternity-like atmosphere" at City Ballet "condoned, encouraged, fostered, and permitted an environment" in which this could happen, as the complaint maintains. Regardless of its legal outcome, the scandal has already decimated the ranks of top male dancers at the company. Finlay resigned, while Amar Ramasar and Zachary Catazaro, two other principals who allegedly engaged in Finlay's pornographic exchange, were forced out. The company, meanwhile, has so far denied any institutional wrongdoing.

Ballet, of course, has long had its sybaritic side. Against the sin of scandal, Justin Peck appears all the more saintly, even if the world of ballet is so small that Ramasar was Peck's chosen dancer for his Tony-award-winning choreography in *Carousel* in 2018, and Ramasar and Finlay can each be seen in *Ballet 422*. What unfortunately unites their worlds to Peck's is the smartphone flicker and the Instagram filter.

Contrary to new media, ballet's enduring allure is its connection to the ancien régime. Descended from the dance of the French court, as *The New Criterion*'s Laura Jacobs explains in *Celestial Bodies*, her recent book on ballet, "strict protocols of etiquette—including a refined sense of movement and the ability to dance—governed all. To stay in the king's good graces, the aristocracy itself had to practice grace."

For both dancers and audience alike, the courtly grace of ballet can rekindle this lost world. Just so, nothing breaks this spell like an errant ringtone, a recording light, or a sexting scandal. If the Waterbury lawsuit has proven anything, it is that ballet must be reclaimed by its states of grace. The courtly rigor encoded in the forms of ballet has the power to deliver us from digital psychosis. It can turn girls and boys into ladies and gentlemen—if only we remember to turn off our cell phones and be moved by the truth of ballet's movement. "If someone can find out who you are from the stage," Albert Evans once said, "that's everything."

Theater

Ferried about

by Kyle Smith

Watching Jez Butterworth's magnificent play *The Ferryman* (at the Bernard B. Jacobs Theatre through July 7), I couldn't help thinking of Eugene O'Neill in general and *Long Day's Journey into Night* in particular. There's the Irish element (*The Ferryman* takes place in Northern Ireland in 1981, but all of the characters are Catholic), much late-night disputation over whiskey, a single home for a set, a performance time of more than three hours, and an emotionally vacant mother who occasionally drifts in from upstairs to depress everyone's spirits. But imagine an O'Neill play that's actually masterly instead of merely windy, in which dialogue aims for the way people speak instead of settling for how vainglorious dramatists write, that eschews endless thematic repetition in favor of developing a story, that limns complex family dynamics instead of wallowing in self-pity, that seamlessly interweaves intimate personal relationships with socio-political-historical themes. I'm not saying *The Ferryman* is better than any Eugene O'Neill play I've ever seen. I'm saying it's far better than any Eugene O'Neill play I've ever seen. It is the rare theatrical offering that genuinely probes down deep as it builds to a devastating emotional climax.

Plays about Ireland tend to rely heavily for their dramatic inspiration on either mysticism (ghosts and banshees and a bog of woe) or the chaos unleashed by the IRA. Butterworth delves into both themes, and yet not for a moment does *The Ferryman* seem cliché. It would be reductionist and unfair to characterize it as an IRA play. It is centrally a warm, generous, deeply felt family drama about a huge farmhouse clan comprising eight children, three oldsters, and three parents in the middle. Somehow they and everyone else in this huge cast of twenty-two get a chance to shine, including an infant who, at the performance I attended, repeatedly purloined the audience's attention with spectacular on-cue smiles.

A highly appealing Paddy Considine plays the farmer, Quinn Carney, who has fifty acres in Northern Ireland where he raises wheat to be fed to livestock. He and Caitlin Carney (an equally engaging Laura Donnelly), we find in a scene near the beginning, have a lovely, unforced rapport suggesting an enduring bond. It isn't till much later that we learn that Cait is not Quinn's wife. The missus of the family, Mary (Genevieve O'Reilly when I saw it, now Catherine McCormack), is upstairs in a nightgown, as usual, only intermittently floating into the unkempt but welcoming kitchen/family room in which virtually the entire play takes place. Mary, vacant and ethereal, is in the grip of some dismal force like drugs or depression. Her spiritual absence leaves Cait as the effective matriarch of the household who cares for the many children, only one of whom is hers. She's a widow who is about to learn that her husband, Quinn's brother Seamus, has finally been located: ten years after he disappeared, his body has been found face down in a bog with a bullet through the back of his head courtesy of the Irish Republican Army, in whose ranks he once served. The IRA seems

to have decided that he was an informant, or guilty of some other infraction.

Apart from Mary's condition, the Carney household is so boisterous and loving that a few minutes in its company are almost enough to make us forget the opening scene of the play, in which a Gerry Adams–like figure ruthlessly presses a priest for sensitive information about Quinn learned in the confessional. It's unclear what unfinished business the IRA honcho Muldoon (played with stern intensity by Stuart Graham) has with Quinn, but it's 1981, and Bobby Sands and nine other soldiers of terror have died of hunger strikes in the Maze prison. Much later we'll learn that Quinn was once a member of the IRA, but he managed to extricate himself before his brother's death and since then has had no truck with them.

None of this is to give too much away, because the above is mere setup. Butterworth constructs several other intersecting plot lines in a play that bursts with so much story and so many beautifully realized characters that the run time of three hours and fifteen minutes (with one intermission) gallops by. I scarcely have space to give due credit to all of the artistry shaped by the stage and screen director Sam Mendes, whose credits include the films *American Beauty* and *Skyfall* and many inventive productions on Broadway and in London, where *The Ferryman* originated. The set, by Rob Howell, is dense and richly imagined, and the acting ranges from solid to sensational. Two exceedingly eye-catching performances are Fionnula Flanagan's as the intermittently catatonic, intermittently eloquent, and intermittently prophetic old relative, Aunt Maggie Far Away; and Justin Edwards's as the hulking, mentally challenged English farmhand Tom Kettle. These and many other actors enjoy periods in which to rule the stage, but Butterworth's generosity with the performers does not come at the expense of the audience. At least ten of these characters play important roles in the plot instead of merely enjoying showcase time, and that's not counting the chilling, intermittent Cassandra-like commentary from Aunt Maggie Far Away that knits it all together. She gives the play a sumptuously theatrical quality that could easily come off as hokey folk spiritualism in the hands of lesser talents.

Having a giggle at American television media is a sure bet in London. But have our British cousins really earned the right to sneer? Their country's TV news shows, led by the gigantic forced-subscription service they call public television, are mostly staid and sanctimonious because much insulated from public taste. Yet Britain's privately owned newspapers are now, and long have been, much more sensationalistic and tawdry than their U.S. counterparts. Given that the BBC costs more than HBO and for that price produces mainly narcolepsy and liberal propaganda, I'll take the American way, thanks, but it's no surprise that the Royal National Theatre Production of *Network* (at the Belasco Theatre through April 28) was a smashing success on the Thames. On West Forty-fourth Street, however, the flaws of the underlying material are woefully evident, and the director Ivo van Hove has piled atop it additional errors of taste and judgment. The play is a shiny, high-tech blunder.

Bryan Cranston, who in five seasons of *Breaking Bad* turned in one of the great television performances of all time in the finest tragedy that medium has ever produced (and should probably therefore have more gratitude for TV than to abet van Hove's rubbishing of it), literally and figuratively flails as Howard Beale, the "mad prophet of the airwaves" from Paddy Chayefsky's perennially overrated 1976 cinematic satire, which on screen was directed by Sidney Lumet. Lee Hall, adapting Chayefsky's screenplay at a concise length of two hours without intermission, has retained the most famous bits and the mid-seventies setting while adding a mawkish be-nice coda and trimming some dated aspects, notably a subplot about a domestic terrorist group modeled on the Symbionese Liberation Army. For more than forty-two years Chayefsky's lampoon of TV news has been labeled prophetic. It is the opposite of prophetic. In fact, it has proven pretty much wrong about everything. Any attempt to, for instance, credit the author with foretelling the rise of Fox News Channel will fail. Naturally there's a Trump reference in the production, but that doesn't work either.

Beale is one of those portentous would-be Cronkites at a dull network newscast who, with

his ratings tumbling, responds to being fired by telling his audience he'll be committing suicide live on the air. This promises something of a ratings fillip, if only once. Instead, capitalizing on the buzz, the tabloid-minded programming whiz, Diana (Tatiana Maslany), rehires Beale, steers the broadcast away from the conventional style of her clubby colleague and partner in adultery, Max (Tony Goldwyn), and makes Beale ringmaster of a populist news-commentary show mixing prophecy and angry rants. This version of the evening news, for a while, earns strong ratings. But Howard takes populism too far, denouncing his employer's proposed sale to Saudi interests (one of Chayefsky's dimwit divinations was that American culture would soon answer to Arab petrostates). This sally into his employer's business affairs inspires the movie's second most famous speech, the "You have meddled with the primal forces of nature" warning delivered by the corporate overlord Arthur Jensen (underwhelmingly played by Nick Wyman here, unforgettably by Ned Beatty in the movie). Jensen's remarks, unlike the most famous speech in the piece, are actually worth considering today, mainly because only in the past couple of years have events proven them completely wrong. I'll come back to that.

As for that "mad as hell" speech: though it made for an arresting bit of 1970s screen craziness, it is today exposed as meaningless. Beale is speaking in 1975, after the Vietnam War. What is he Mad as Hell about? Inflation. Unemployment. Unrest in the Middle East. Crime. The stuff that's in the papers every day. There is actually less of that stuff right now, in *Anno Domini* 2019, than there usually is, but people are, of course, still Mad as Hell. If anything, they're even madder. (The play ends with a montage of all presidents since Richard Nixon being sworn in, which means it ends with Donald Trump being sworn in, at which the audience predictably boos. Mad as Hell, on command.) The mid-1970s are frequently cited, by Paul Krugman et al., as the last moment in American history before the economic roof caved in, nefarious capitalists sucked up all the wealth, and the New Satan of Inequality began to rampage across the landscape. In other words, if you were Mad as Hell in 1975, you'd be Mad as Hell anytime. Which means you're just an angry person. Which means the problem is you, not the political landscape.

There is an audience for performative rage, and for demented conspiracy theories, but *Network* doesn't actually understand the (American) television model, which depends on advertising. The closest real-life analogue I could think of to Howard Beale is Glenn Beck. Remember him? He earned large ratings for a couple of years, but ultimately his worldview was too strange for the advertisers, who deserted his show, which in turn ended it on Fox News. There's an excellent reason why TV news isn't as nutty as the programming contemplated by *Network*: advertisers don't want it that way. Moreover, unlike the network news division portrayed in the play, which is losing $32 million a year, TV news is immensely profitable and doesn't need soothsayers or terrorist guests or live on-air assassinations to mint money. Anderson Cooper standing in a hurricane is all you need. Hell, all you need is a panel of journalists in expensive eyewear whining about Trump's latest tweet and you'll be up to your ears in profits.

Van Hove, the Belgian avant-gardist, has taken a commercial turn here, providing himself with plausible deniability by telling himself he is merely satirizing commercialism. Based on how he presents *Network*, I wouldn't be surprised to learn he has signed up to direct *Aquaman 2*. He has brought in a dazzling set (by his partner Jan Versweyveld) with a giant video screen to the rear, a bar area off to the right where a few dozen audience members get to serve as extras, and a glass box to the left to serve as a control room for executives and producers. Much of the action is invisible to some or all audience members and is seen only on the video screens, which in turn are fed by cameras wielded by actors on stage. Other scenes are seen both live and projected on the screens. All of this eyeball sucrose further diminishes the value of a weak play. When there are live performers and video screens in front of you, the eye is naturally drawn to the latter, which means you wind up watching a lot of the play on the screens. Stage acting is poorly suited for the screens, though, since it is a product of the whole body, whereas

screen acting focuses on the eyes and voice. A screen capture of a stage performance invariably comes off badly, and Cranston's madman act, not excluding an interlude in which he rushes down an aisle in his pajamas waving his arms and screaming "Stop!," is unworthy of him. As for his two main supporting actors, Maslany has no spark whatsoever as Diana and Goldwyn barely registers as Max, the roles expertly played by Faye Dunaway and William Holden in the film. At one point they wander outside the theater and we watch them talk on the video screen. I wish they had stayed there.

The one, completely unintended, value of staging *Network* in 2019 is that "primal forces of nature" speech. Jensen chides Beale for his America First populism and bellows, "There are no nations. There are no peoples." There is "only one holistic system of systems . . . the international system of currency which determines the totality of life on this planet. That is the natural order of things today." Jensen is a globalist *avant la lettre*. He sees no borders. He sees no peoples. He thinks "There is no America. There is no democracy. There is only IBM and AT&T . . . . We no longer live in a world of nations and ideologies." As recently as 2015, that might have sounded wise. Today, borders are being hardened everywhere you look and peoples grow ever more fractious when you tell them they don't exist. Nations reassert themselves. When Beale switches to preaching Jensen's no-borders gospel, he pays dearly for the mistake. So Beale is certainly not Donald Trump. Maybe he's Angela Merkel?

Tarell Alvin McCraney is an Oscar-winning writer (his play *In Moonlight Black Boys Look Blue* was adapted into the 2016 film *Moonlight*, which won the Best Picture Oscar) and the chair of Yale School of Drama's playwriting department. He would like you to take note of his pain. The playbill of his 2013 play *Choir Boy*, now being revived on Broadway (at the Samuel J. Friedman Theatre through February 24), quotes him: "Things become problematic when an audience member sees your personal work and feels removed from it because they only see it as your pain and don't recognize it as their own." In other words: listen up, ticket-buyers, I have troubles. When someone seeks a space in which to share his tales of woe, ordinarily the payment goes from the complainant to the listener, so respect to McCraney for monetizing his moaning. It doesn't, you will be unsurprised to hear, add up to much of a play.

Choir Boy is a slight, sloppy, first-draft style grab-bag of anecdotes about the tribulations of Pharus (Jeremy Pope), the leader of the a capella group at an all-black boys' boarding school. Pharus, whose group specializes in negro spirituals, is what a Briton would call "quite camp." The other boys have varying reactions to his flamboyant homosexuality; one of them teases him a bit, causing a momentary disruption in a school performance that provides the play with an opening conflict that peters out. Two of his allegedly heterosexual friends seem as though they might also be gay, and, as with *Moonlight*, the play is centrally a *cri de coeur* against repressed young black homosexuals who participate in violent acts against unrepressed young black homosexuals. If you consider this a slender reed upon which to hang a career, you haven't been keeping up with the mania for "intersectionality," which grants prophet status to those who claim membership in more than one minority group.

The play, which runs a hundred minutes padded by perhaps twenty-five minutes of breaks for a capella singing, wanders around in several directions without ever choosing a clear destination. There's some talk about whether negro spirituals contained coded guidance about how to use the Underground Railroad, some pain around the subject of parents who won't be attending commencement, and some musing about why the N-word should not be used (because it offends the sole white character in the play; sounds about right). Mostly it's a character study about the sassy, irrepressible Pharus, who suffers a bit but will be just fine. For me the only remotely surprising plot turn hangs on the notion of being thrown out of a private school for fighting. I shudder to think of how many boys' boarding schools would have lost their student bodies if that prohibition were extended more than a few years into the past.

Art

The Prado looks back

by Brian T. Allen

Over the years, I've told people that if they want to develop a deeper understanding of Spain, and a meaningful empathy for it, they need to start with the Escorial. Completed in 1584, it's the architectural embodiment of Philip II, Spain's empire-building king, and the necropolis for Spanish kings and queens. Its austere aesthetic is distinctly Spanish. Both palace and monastery, it unites church and crown. A basilica, a university, and a library, it's an all-purpose emblem of a culture. Franco's tomb was deliberately placed next to it, so that era now has a place in the Spanish sun. The Escorial is not in Madrid or Granada or Seville but in the forbidding Guadarrama Mountains, lean and mean like so much of Spain outside its cities.

After seeing "A Place of Memory," I'd say the Prado tells the story of Spain as convincingly and hauntingly as the Escorial. The museum's history and Spain's run on parallel tracks.[1]

This was plain as I visited Madrid last December with Miguel Falomir, the Prado's director since 2017. We met at the Casón del Buen Retiro, one of two buildings remaining from Philip IV's Palace of Buen Retiro. We looked at the lovely ceiling in the king's former ballroom, painted by Luca Giordano, one of many foreign artists commissioned to work for Spanish patrons. The space now houses the Prado's great art library, open to scholars. Libraries once gave bureaucrats in the Franco era the jitters. God forbid people know too much.

Falomir and I talked about the Prado's expansion plans, centered largely on the Hall of Realms, the other part of the old palace still standing. It once housed the great imperial history paintings, among them Velázquez's *Surrender of Breda* (1634–35), as well as Zurbarán's cycle of the labors of Hercules (*ca.* 1634). Many of these pictures will return to the Hall of Realms once the renovation is finished. Norman Foster, a Briton, is the project's architect. Spain today, like the Prado, has an international atmosphere.

The Prado emerged from a long slumber starting in the 1980s, as did Spain. Today it is a thriving, modern museum, surely among the world's liveliest spots to see Old Masters. And Spain is now a country of the bustling, messy world around it. Falomir, a Renaissance paintings scholar, was a curator at the Prado for years before assuming the directorship. He put on its majestic Titian and Tintoretto retrospectives. As part of the leadership assembled by his predecessor as director, Miguel Zugaza, he helped make the Prado modern. Zugaza was the key figure in separating the Prado from Spanish politics, which unfold down the road in the country's Cortes Generales. Until Zugaza's appointment, Prado directors came and went with the political winds. Unless jolted by turmoil, the Prado slept, to paraphrase Goya, the sleep of stasis. It dreamt the dreams of bureaucrats.

1 "Museo del Prado, 1819–2019: A Place of Memory," opened at the Museo Nacional del Prado, Madrid, on November 19, 2018, and remains on view through March 10, 2019.

In "A Place of Memory," the Prado looks back. Last year, the museum welcomed about three million people. Starting around 2011, the majority of its visitors have been foreign, which speaks both to Spain's tourism boom and to the Prado's new and superb exhibition program. Until the early 1990s, its shows were variations on treasures by Velázquez, Goya, and El Greco, when it even got around to doing shows. It now explores in depth the other stars in that big Spanish solar system. Its current retrospective on the early-Renaissance master Bartolomé Bermejo is a revelation, as was its Mariano Fortuny show last year. Lovely, too, was a Rubens oil sketch show that was also topical, since Rubens was a spur to young Spanish painters during his diplomatic visits to Madrid. The Prado's shows travel the world now. Reliable subventions from the government, obtained regardless of the specific politicians doling out the goodies, keep the enterprise well afloat.

The Prado emerged from the Spanish Enlightenment in a circuitous way, as almost everything modern in Spain does. For the Prado, "enlightenment" meant shedding light on the past. Its founding was part of a heritage protection movement. This started in 1779 with restrictions on the export of paintings by Spanish artists. Not many people were thinking about "Old Masters" as a distinct group worth cherishing, and Spain was never part of the Grand Tour, but a new awareness of the treasures in the royal collection led to action. Joseph I Bonaparte tried to establish a national museum of royal holdings. But it was 1809, during the middle of the Peninsular War, and the turmoil of the time was too great. After the war, Ferdinand VII, the Bourbon king, decided to use a new building, built in 1785 as a natural history museum, to display art belonging to the Crown. On November 18, 1819, the museum we know as the Prado opened.

Many factors played a role in the founding. It's safe to say that good artists, universally, feel underappreciated, regardless of the culture, but in Spain the feeling was both piercing and a correct appraisal. Anyone with enough *reales* to commission art thought artists were artisan craftsmen at best, or hired hands like house painters at worst. A wish to elevate the status of artists through homage to the past figured in the Prado's founding, as did the desired beautification of the capital and the enhancement of good taste through the founding of a great museum. The Louvre, the British Museum, the National Gallery, the Brera, and Munich's Alte Pinakothek were opened roughly at the same time through similar impulses. Napoleon's art plunders were teaching moments, too.

The Prado opened with 311 paintings on display, all by Spanish artists. In 1840, 101 works, some by Raphael and Titian, came to Madrid from the Escorial. In 1829, the museum got its first donation, Velázquez's tough, mournful *Christ Crucified* (1632), a gift from the Duke of San Fernando.

Spain in the nineteenth century was a fascinating place, a fever dream for the rest of Europe and America and, internally, a place part medieval, part imperial, mostly broke, with a modern feel that can only be called neurotic and fitful. The country still possessed enormous colonial real estate that it was in the process of gradually disgorging through revolutions in Latin America or the Spanish–American War in 1898. Washington Irving's *Tales of the Alhambra* (1838), probably the best-selling travelogue of all time, defined the place for outsiders. Spain was in large part a place of memory, once a big power player, then a spent giant. Politically, socially, and economically sclerotic as it might have been, though, the Prado did have a pulse.

In 1838, the Museo de la Trinidad opened in Madrid to accommodate art collected by Castile's convents and monasteries, many of which were forcibly closed. This art, exclusively Spanish and mostly from the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, eventually came to the Prado after the 1868 revolution, when the Prado ceased to be a "royal" collection and became a "national" museum owned not by the Crown but by the state.

When Pablo Picasso's dealer Daniel Kahnweiler went to Madrid in 1906, he wrote that "it seemed to me like a town which had been asleep for fifty years." He was right, but at the Prado much was bubbling. Most people don't think about art in Spain between Goya

and Picasso, but it was very much alive in two ways, both driven by the Prado. Starting in 1856, the Prado held a much anticipated and widely discussed "National Exhibition" of the work of living Spanish artists. Art's contemporary character sharpened as a cadre of young artists—both Spaniards and outsiders—made it an institutional mecca. Eduardo Rosales, Mariano Fortuny, Joaquín Sorolla, and, of course, Picasso were among the Spaniards studying the Old Masters collection.

Fortuny and his circle and, later, Sorolla were among Europe's establishment favorites. While academic in spirit, they were distinctly modern and on a parallel track with the Impressionists. A major portion of the Prado features their work, which has migrated over the last thirty years from the Casón to the main building. Theirs is a fascinating period. Big, wild, wacky history paintings like Francisco Pradilla's *Juana la Loca* (1877), depicting the grief-mad queen who dragged her husband's corpse from city to city, are shown with exquisite Fortunys, Federico de Madrazo y Kuntz's elegant portraits of Spanish aristocrats, and Sorolla's nudes. A few years ago, the Prado smartly reconfigured its permanent collection, displaying these works with Goya's pictures from the nineteenth century, starting with his *Third of May, 1808*, the lesser known *Second of May, 1808* (both 1814), and the *Black Paintings* (1819–23).

It wasn't until the mid-nineteenth century that Spanish Old Master painting became an anchor for modern art internationally. Starting in the 1850s, the Prado became a mandatory stop for young French artists. Its copyist signature book is the dance card of the French avant-garde. Everyone from Courbet to Manet to Carolus-Duran to Renoir visited. They drew from the Prado's Old Masters endless inspiration. I think Whistler was surely a visitor, though he claimed never to have made it. Starting in the 1860s, Americans visited the Prado in droves. From Thomas Eakins to Robert Henri, hundreds of American artists came, making the Prado a catalyst for American art into the 1920s.

"A Place of Memory" looks at two sensitive periods in Spanish history: the Civil War and the Franco years. The Spanish Second Republic was born on April 14, 1931. During the Republican years, which ended in 1939 after a gruesome civil war, the Prado figured in Spanish culture in two ways. The government launched what were called the "Pedagogical Missions." Organized by the art historian Manuel Bartolomé Cossío, these brought features of high Madrid culture—books, theater, music, film, and art—to nearly seven thousand towns and villages throughout Spain. It was a massive culture-sharing enterprise at a time when much of Spain had hardly budged from feudalism. The Prado organized and marketed more than two hundred shows outside of Madrid, mostly of copies of the museum's art, "to show them to the people who have never seen them, because they belong to them, too," as the Missions' promoters said. This was heady, populist education.

Once Madrid—and the Prado—were bombed during the Civil War in 1936, and the Republican government fled the city, the Prado closed. Between 1936 and 1939, Picasso was nominally the director of the Prado, though the collection was mostly in deep storage and he was in Paris. Its core collection traveled to Geneva, where an exhibition in 1939 drew four hundred thousand visitors. With the start of the Second World War in 1939, the Prado, unusually for a European museum, reopened. Spain was not a combatant. It was officially neutral but a soft Axis booster. This leads to a second touchy period, the years between 1939 and the death of Franco in 1975.

During the Franco years, the Prado was hardly suppressed. Its collection, if anything, expressed the nationalist and Catholic character of Falangism, the political ideology of Franco's party. Spain under Franco was culturally stunted but not totalitarian. The collection didn't particularly warrant cleansing. Its directors were harmless artists or academics. Spanish avant-garde art mostly, but not exclusively, was made and shown outside of Spain among the exile community of artists. Picasso was the most famous. Though it was a quiet phase for the museum, it was during the Franco years that great works by El Greco, Rubens, Goya, Tintoretto, and Bosch came

to the collection. Its physical changes, including small additions, mirrored the weirdly incremental changes in the rest of the country. Artists from America and Europe continued to visit. In 1957, Picasso began a series of fifty works referencing Velázquez's *Las Meninas* (1656), by then one of the world's most famous paintings.

I first visited the museum in the 1980s, when both the Prado and Madrid were just stirring. A jolt came in 1981 when Picasso's *Guernica* (1937) arrived at the Prado as part of the artist's bequest. The Reina Sofía Museum's opening in 1992 established the Prado's as the beacon of Spain's cultural past. While the other nineteenth-century European museums had come into their own decades earlier, the Prado was a very late bloomer.

The Prado's reorganization of its nineteenth-century art a few years ago was instructive. During most of the Franco years, all the Goyas were shown with the Old Masters. Art roughly from Vicente López Portaña (1772–1850) to Sorolla (1863–1923), including the big, patriotic history paintings like the Pradilla, was displayed separately. Goya's violent pictures of the 1808 rebellion and suppression were tucked in the distant past, not far from his tapestry cartoons, his own Court work, and the imperial pictures by Velázquez.

The two iconic Goya pictures now introduce the Prado's modern work. They begin a story, rather than ending it. That story now seems less about exalting the realm—the two May scenes depict resistance to the Napoleonic invasion—and more about Spain's recent past. That past is marked by disestablishment of the church, numerous rebellions against Spanish tradition, and the advent of democracy.

After more than twenty years as a curator and two years as the director, Falomir has a sharply focused vision for the museum. The Prado is not an encyclopedic museum like the Metropolitan Museum of Art and is actually much smaller than many might think. The collection comprises a bit more than twenty thousand works, of which well more than half are prints and drawings. And thankfully the Prado won't be going on the wretched, addictive exhibition treadmill of many big museums. Instead, the presentation of focused, scholarly shows of human scale and the celebration of its own collection seem to be the order of the day. Everything on the walls is great, and a trait of great art is its capacity to tell a different story every time a visitor looks at it. Falomir is also an effective fundraiser, and there's no better selling-point than the Prado's art. Spain is a big, complicated place. In its third century, the Prado will continue to inspire and to direct the county's sense of self.

Forthcoming in *The New Criterion*:

"War & Peace" at 150 *by Gary Saul Morson*
The harmless pleasure of Garrick *by Pat Rogers*
Second City's third style *by Francis Morrone*
Simmonds: craftsman of art *by Clive Aslet*
Degas' dancers *by John Simon*

Irving Sandler's goodbye

by Karen Wilkin

If Irving Sandler (1925–2018) had been Japanese, he would have been declared by his people a "Living National Treasure." From the 1950s to his death, he was a crucial figure in the evolving story of American vanguard painting and sculpture: a friend of artists and frequent studio visitor, director and founder of alternative galleries, art critic, professor of art history, museum director, and, above all, witness and chronicler of the changing desiderata of the moment. When Sandler died in June, a few weeks short of his ninety-third birthday, the art world lost a legend. Until the very end of his long, busy life, he was a seemingly ubiquitous presence who knew or had known everyone, tirelessly attending exhibitions, panels, and lectures, taking exhaustive notes in his tiny handwriting and asking probing, informed questions. The four volumes that bear witness to his experience—*The Triumph of American Painting: A History of Abstract Expressionism* (1970); *The New York School: The Painters and Sculptors of the Fifties* (1978); *American Art of the 1960s* (1988); and *Art of the Postmodern Era: From the Late 1960s to the Early 1990s* (1996)—together provide a history of (mostly) American art after World War II. Required reading for several generations of scholars and collectors, and equally fascinating for those with even a casual interest in the subject, these books are notable for their deep, firsthand knowledge and their jargon-free, lucid prose.

Sandler dated his discovery of his lifelong passion to 1952. He was a twenty-six-year-old impoverished veteran of World War II, then a candidate for a Ph.D. in history who was losing interest in his subject. (He hadn't seen combat, but he'd been an officer in the marines, which he called his "moment of glory.") His epiphany came when Franz Kline's 1950 black and white abstraction *Chief* suddenly compelled his attention on a casual walk through the Museum of Modern Art. As Sandler described it, "It was the first work of art that I really saw, and it changed my life. . . . *Chief* began my life-in-art, the life that has really counted for me." Soon after, the young enthusiast was befriended by Angelo Ippolito, a second-generation Abstract Expressionist, and became a regular at the Cedar Tavern, where both card-carrying and aspiring Abstract Expressionists pondered the vexed aesthetic issues of the day in intense, often acrimonious debates fueled by ample amounts of alcohol, tobacco, and ambition. Although Sandler was about twenty years younger than most of the Abstract Expressionists, he became part of their inner circle, visiting studios and attending their events. Eventually he became the woefully underpaid "manager" of the cooperative Tenth Street Tanager Gallery, which placed him in the thick of the younger downtown avant-garde and led to lifelong friendships with artists of his own generation such as Alex Katz, Al Held, and Philip Pearlstein. Over the ensuing decades, Sandler seems not only to have gotten to know everyone, but also to have made it his mission to record everything he could about what the artists he followed were making, exhibiting, and talking about. Held termed him "our Boswell."

Remarkably, Sandler's curiosity, appetite, and enthusiasm were neither focused on a

single approach nor restricted to artists of his own generation or to the older abstract artists whose work had first stimulated his passionate "life-in-art." As attested to by his memoirs and by the art that he and his wife, the eminent historian of medieval art Lucy Freeman, lived with, his interest was captured by the work of artists as diverse in age and in ways of working as Joan Mitchell, Louise Nevelson, Judy Pfaff, and Robert Berlind, to name just a few of the many whom Sandler followed closely and who became part of his astonishingly wide-ranging circle of friends.

Despite his significant friendships, Sandler always maintained that he strove for objectivity in his four volumes, choosing the artists he included, he said, not as much because of his own predilections as because of consensus—what the larger art world deemed important, at a given moment. Yet his love of the entire art-making milieu and his affection for particular artists comes through in all his writings, however dispassionate their tone. So does the eyewitness quality of his perceptions. These characteristics are even more visible in the informal, informative memoirs, *A Sweeper-Up After Artists* (2003) and *Swept Up By Art* (2015), that Sandler published in his last decades, intimate commentaries drawn from his copious notes that offer a more personal, less dispassionate view of the New York art world. Now, the gloves have come off completely in *Goodbye to Tenth Street*, Sandler's last book, a rowdy quasi–*roman à clef* that mixes composite, invented characters with walk-on parts for real New York art world figures.[1] *Goodbye to Tenth Street* can be read as the outtakes from Sandler's art history books—that is, the novel includes all the gossip, conniving, back-biting, sex, and bitchiness that, for obvious reasons, are conspicuously absent from his other accounts of the New York art world of the 1950s and 1960s.

Sandler plainly had fun writing *Goodbye to Tenth Street*, and it's generally fun to read. The time frame is 1956 to 1963, the tumultuous years after World War II and during the Cold War, when the first-generation Abstract Expressionists were increasingly accepted and acclaimed by the small establishment art world of the period and, at the same time, increasingly challenged by younger artists associated with Pop Art and Color Field painting. It's a world Sandler inhabited and whose participants, on all levels and in all capacities, he knew well. He reminds us, in a brief preface, that "My subjects are fictitious, but they and the situations in which I have put them hopefully possess a sense of reality," adding that while his protagonists never existed, he "met the likes of them in my more than six decades in the art world." Part of the fun is trying to identify the models for the novel's leading characters—artists, collectors, dealers, critics, and the like—and trying to find prototypes for the novel's events and actions.

The main character in *Goodbye to Tenth Street*, the painter Peter Burgh, for example, seems like an amalgam of Mark Rothko and Philip Guston (absent Guston's last, fierce, politically charged figurative phase), to judge by Sandler's descriptions of the evolution of Burgh's work, from early Social Realism to lyrical abstraction for which he was recognized and admired, followed by a transformed, less popular last series. An influential female art dealer, Celia Loeb, shares the sexual appetite attributed to Peggy Guggenheim, while the artists she exhibits remind us of those supported by the less flamboyant Betty Parsons. Herbert Stein, a perceptive curator at the Metropolitan Museum of Art, shares some of the aesthetic leanings of the legendary Henry Geldzahler, the museum's first curator of twentieth-century art, in the 1960s, but Sandler gives Stein none of Geldzahler's well-known personal predilections. An unpleasant critic, whom Sandler calls Marshall Hill, seems intended as a caricature of Clement Greenberg. Hill is described as doing everything that Greenberg's enemies accused him of, including telling artists what to paint. Sandler certainly knew this wasn't true, but he never liked Greenberg much. Is the character in the novel a kind of revenge? Witness Sandler's ferociously ambitious younger painter, Neil Johnson, who solicits Hill's advice and follows it—a sign of his questionable character. And so

1 *Goodbye to Tenth Street*, by Irving Sandler; Pleasure Boat Studio, 373 pages, $20.

on. The real art world figures from the 1950s and '60s, both well-known and obscure, who appear briefly, the way Alfred Hitchcock did in his films, add an amusing subtext.

Like Rothko and like Frenhofer, the troubled artist in Honoré Balzac's *The Unknown Masterpiece* (who is referred to throughout *Goodbye to Tenth Street*), Burgh commits suicide. We learn this at the start, in a prologue dated September 30, 1963, when a close painter friend of Burgh's discovers his colleague's body in his Tenth Street studio. One of Burgh's obituaries notes that the works in his last exhibition "were failures, the issue of an artist in decline," while another maintains that "Abstract Expressionism is the triumph of American painting, and in large measure, its stature depends on Burgh's paintings." Flash back to July 22, 1956, when we meet a hard-drinking, chain-smoking Burgh at work, wracked by anxiety about what is evolving on his canvas. Leaving the studio, he heads for the Cedar Tavern, where Jackson Pollock is sitting with the invented Greenberg surrogate, Marshall Hill. And we're off. *Goodbye to Tenth Street* traces the accumulation of events and emotions, including adulation, betrayal, changing reputations, a shifting art world, and personal doubts that gradually leave Burgh deeply dissatisfied with his work, drinking heavily, and finally unable to paint—a combination of insurmountable horrors that leads him to take his own life.

The story is told through encounters between artists, dealers, collectors, curators, and critics, with occasional ventures into the characters' unspoken thoughts. We meet the generous, the terminally selfish, the ambitious, the canny, and the self-destructive, sometimes in combination as a single, contradictory person. We watch Burgh's reputation fluctuate and observe Johnson's efforts to bolster his own position, while dealers and collectors remain constantly alert to their own interests. We note with distaste how dismissively women artists are treated by just about everyone, including successful female gallerists, and admire Burgh's efforts to help a gifted but self-defeating painter friend. The intertwined stories of the various characters, invented and real, keep us engaged. We follow plausible struggles, occasional triumphs, disappointments, and sometimes disquieting machinations. Sandler is a scrupulous observer, good at noting the revelations of behavior and dress. He's good, too, at describing ambience, evoking the chaos of some studios and the obsessive neatness of others, and conjuring up the interiors of certain kinds of apartments and galleries by cataloguing furniture and color schemes. The contrast between uptown and downtown locations is made very clear. The rough-hewn, downright scuzzy character of East Tenth Street and its environs in the late 1950s and early 1960s is brought to life, along with its sometimes unsavory inhabitants. Sandler's artists live in a neighborhood very different from today's gentrified "East Village." The nondescriptness of the Cedar Tavern is commented upon several times as a quality appealing to the artists who congregate there.

Sandler's years of frequenting studios, of spending time with artists, and even of sitting for his portrait—he was painted more than once by his friends Alex Katz and Philip Pearlstein—make the novel's descriptions of artists at work completely convincing, especially for those of us with a lot of studio experience. Sandler makes us privy to how artists attacking large canvases handle their materials and tools. The voluptuousness of oil paint and its responsiveness to change come through in the descriptions of Burgh at work, alternately agonized and ecstatic, as he punishes the canvas with the wet-into-wet, scrape-out, and paint-over methods that result in the contingent, unstable imagery of gestural Abstract Expressionism. Even the choice of postcard images and reproductions on the wall of Burgh's studio seems accurate. *Of course*, he'd have something from Piero della Francesca's great cycle of frescoes in Arezzo! But what Sandler does best is conjure up the passionately held ideas and deepest concerns of the artists of the novel's period. The political climate of the time is suggested by the presence of still intense old Leftists, by references to Cold War attitudes and anxieties, and by allusions to unflattering "official" perceptions of vanguard artists. (There's less about the hideous effects of the House Un-American Activities Committee than I would have expected,

but that may have been less pressing to painters and sculptors than for my parents' blacklisted writer friends.) Most of all, we're made aware of the urgency with which artists argued about the necessity of abstraction, the importance of authenticity, the requirement that art not depict what can be seen but instead reveal the unseen, and many more thorny issues. And we're made to sense how deeply the people who debated these ideas cared about them and how obsessed they were with what happened in their studios. There's also a fair amount about the role of success and what some artists will do to achieve it, which allows Sandler to write about some truly offensive behavior.

Goodbye to Tenth Street would have been even better if Sandler had been as good at writing dialogue as he was at observing. Many of his characters' most telling attitudes and firmest convictions are presented as long rants intended to convey the important ideas of the time; unfortunately, they fail to sound like anything anyone ever said, especially over drinks at the end of a day in the studio. In my admittedly limited experience, several of the younger artist habitués of the Cedar Tavern were notable blowhards—at least, when they were much older and giving self-involved lectures on their work—but even they were less didactic than Sandler's crew.

Nonetheless, *Goodbye to Tenth Street* is a must for anyone interested in an art world very different from today's. Sandler immerses us in a time when artists sought aesthetic excellence, intensity, and—above all—individuality, striving to charge their work with their entire being rather than "strategizing." (Except for the novel's venal Neil Johnson.) Recognition and sales were, obviously, desirable and welcome, but in contrast to the present day, aesthetic values, rather than monetary worth, were life-and-death matters, to be wrestled with in the studio and, elsewhere, to be argued about, challenged, fought over, and even died for. Sandler vividly recreates the atmosphere in which such beliefs flourished. For facts, *The Triumph of American Painting* and *The New York School* are still essential, along with his two volumes of memoirs, with their privileged information. But for sheer entertainment, go to *Goodbye to Tenth Street*.

Exhibition note

"Hilma af Klint: Paintings for the Future"
The Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York.
October 12, 2018–April 23, 2019

Among the many remarkable things about "Hilma af Klint: Paintings for the Future" is the goodwill it has generated. Has there recently been an exhibition of art quite as popular with both the culturati and the public at large? Notwithstanding a few curmudgeons grumbling at the sidelines, "Paintings for the Future" is an out-and-out winner. Forget the huzzahs in the press; consider the visitors trawling up the Guggenheim's ramp. They're markedly enraptured, taking in the byways of one artist's vision. You can't help but eavesdrop as museumgoers chat about the intricacies of af Klint's hieratic compositions and occluded symbolism. That "Paintings for the Future" features an unheralded figure who devoted the majority of her life to abstraction makes the show's appeal somewhat unexpected. No art stars here, thank you, and though abstraction has a long and storied history, it's a mode of working still widely held in suspicion. What is it about af Klint (1862–1944)—a Swedish modernist who has only recently gained international attention—that is goosing our collective pleasure center?

Kudos to Tracey Bashkoff, the Director of Collections and Senior Curator, along with the Curatorial Assistant David Horowitz, for mounting a show that patiently lays out an often hermetic artistic output, capturing its momentum and elaborating on its logic. Certainly, these two know how to wow an audience. The opening gambit is impressive: nine towering canvases, each measuring around ten by eight feet, overpower the first gallery up the museum's ramp. Each picture is a candy-colored array of diagrammatic glyphs flexible enough in their allusions to encompass nature and mathematics, the astronomical, the cellular, and the sexual. The pictures are inventories, bumptious and random, of shape, line, and stray bits of verbiage. A clouded pedantry can be discerned: af Klint's pictographs

recall the discrete cataloging of items typical of nineteenth-century botanical illustrations. Their loop-the-loop iconography also brings to mind the later, geometrically inclined imagery of the pioneering abstract painter, Vasily Kandinsky. Actually, make that *one* of the pioneers. "Paintings for the Future" makes a case for af Klint as the first abstract painter (she began working non-representationally a good half decade before Kandinsky) and, as such, deserving of a prominent berth within the Modernist canon.

Af Klint was the fourth of five children born to Victor af Klint, an instructor at the Military Academy Karlberg, and Mathilda Sontag, an immigrant from Finland's Swedish-speaking minority. She went on to study at the Royal Academy of Fine Arts, earning not only honors upon graduation, but also studio space provided by the school. The latter privilege gives an indication of the esteem in which af Klint was held by the faculty and administration. Their authority paled, however, next to that of Amaliel, Ananda, Clemens, Esther, Georg, and Gregor, otherworldly powers known as The High Masters. Though af Klint participated in seances as a teenager, she didn't become an acolyte of spiritualism until her late twenties, joining the Swedish branch of the Theosophical Society and the similarly inclined *Edelweissförbundet*. Along with a cadre of like-minded friends, af Klint founded "The Five" in 1896—a group given to Biblical interpretation, meditation, phrenology, and communing with the dead. At one such communion, Georg and Ananda told of a temple to be built at a distant point in the future, a temple in need of paintings for its interior. Which of "The Five" would receive the commission? A message came from the ether; af Klint got the nod. In 1906, she began working on *The Paintings of the Temple*—among them, the spectacular pictures mentioned above.

Scoff all you want at the hocus-pocus informing af Klint's life and work. Woozy theorizing needn't lead to woozy results. It's worth recalling that the Guggenheim began as the Museum of Non-Objective Painting, an institution that had spiritualist aims at its foundation. Mondrian and Kandinsky took their cues from Madame Blavatsky, the pan-cultural guru of Theosophist doctrine, though, ultimately, they hewed to the strictures of the studio and the integrity of their artforms. Af Klint had integrity as well. Those weary of the cynicism engendered by the contemporary scene can't help but root for a figure who stipulated that her work not be exhibited until twenty years after her death. No marketing, branding, or hype for af Klint; the work would find its time when the time was right. An art of endurance, introspection, and foresight—can you imagine such a thing? Af Klint's work has since been filtering its way into the world, making its presence felt and gathering an enthusiastic following. The connection between af Klint and audiences here in the twenty-first century should not be lightly dismissed. Nor should it be accepted uncritically.

A smattering of early representational work is included at the Guggenheim, including portraits done in charcoal, crayon, and graphite; a light-filled landscape done in oils; and *Ketty*, an irresistible portrait of a dog rendered in lush and filmy blacks. It is after this skillful prelude that "Paintings for the Future" stumbles into the supernatural. Pictorial niceties are forsaken, if not entirely jettisoned, for a symbolism so byzantine it's difficult to navigate without crib notes. That af Klint's radiating mandalas, pyramidal forms, and geometric rebuses catch the eye speaks to an abiding knack for design and decoration. But these are the efforts of a visionary, not a painter. Color is subjugated to the emblematic, brushwork is pro forma, light is non-existent, and, with the stunning exception of *Group IX/SUW, the Swan*, *No. 9*, and, maybe, *No. 22* and *No. 23* from the same series (all 1915), elasticity of space is cursorily set into motion, if attended to at all. A painter friend described the Guggenheim show as "amateur hour"—an overly harsh assessment, I think, but not wholly inapt. Credit af Klint as the first abstract artist, and grant that "Paintings for the Future" highlights an intriguing alleyway of twentieth-century art. In the end, however, af Klint's quizzical achievement only goes to confirm that originality has its limits, and that quality will win out.

—Mario Naves

The renegade returns

by Eric Gibson

Throughout his sixty-year career, the art historian Leo Steinberg (1920–2011) was a prolific lecturer and contributor to scholarly and other publications. His work focused primarily on Michelangelo and Picasso, but it also ranged widely across Renaissance, Baroque, and twentieth-century art. He was also a famously fastidious writer. In 1982 he was invited to give the annual A. W. Mellon Lectures in the Fine Arts at the National Gallery of Art in Washington. But rather than publishing his lectures soon after delivery, as is the custom, he continued to revise and update them for the rest of his life. So when he died there was every expectation that a significant corpus of his output would remain unpublished and that those interested in his other writings, such as celebrated essays on Velázquez's *Las Meninas* and Picasso's *Les Demoiselles d'Avignon*, would have to scrounge around eBay for copies of them.

Happily, Steinberg had other ideas in mind. Shortly before his death, he directed Sheila Schwartz, his longtime associate, who worked with him from 1968 to his death, to arrange for the posthumous publication of essays written and lectures delivered throughout the course of his career. The first volume, devoted to Michelangelo's sculpture, appeared this November.[1] It is to be followed in the spring by one on Michelangelo's painting, and thereafter by volumes on Old Masters, Picasso, and modern masters. These new publications are, on many levels, occasions to celebrate.

Five of the nine essays in this volume focus on the *Pietàs*—the one in St. Peter's (1498–99), the Florentine *Pietà* (1547–55), now in the Museo dell'Opera del Duomo, and the Rondanini *Pietà* in Milan (begun in 1552 and still being worked on a week before Michelangelo's death in 1564)—and the *Madonna* in the Medici Chapel in Florence (1521–34). But it should be said at the outset that Ms. Schwartz's was no simple task of anthologizing. In order to create a cohesive publication that best represented Steinberg's thinking, Schwartz had to cross check various versions of different lectures and articles from the entirety of his career, eliminating redundancies and forging transitions throughout (all without the author around to answer questions or vet the final result). It's hard to imagine a more dedicated act of literary stewardship.

Despite being a tenured faculty member at the University of Pennsylvania for nearly two decades, beginning in the mid-1970s, and receiving a MacArthur Foundation Fellowship in 1986, Steinberg was always considered something of a renegade among art historians. (Richard Neer opens his introduction to this volume by quoting Sir Ernst Gombrich on Steinberg in *The New York Review of Books* in 1977: "A dangerous model to follow.") That's because he straddled two worlds. One was art history, which insists that only those arguments are valid which can be substantiated by documentary evidence such as letters, contracts, and bills of sale. The other was art criticism, where the emphasis is on the

1 *Michelangelo's Sculpture: Selected Essays*, by Leo Steinberg, edited by Sheila Schwartz; The University of Chicago Press, 226 pages, $65.

writer's individual response to works of art, one informed by, yet not confined to, primary sources and the existing literature.

At root, Steinberg was an iconologist. In his view, artists were a species of cryptographer, people who spoke in code, their codes symbols of their own devising and which it was the art historian's job to decipher and interpret. "What does this image mean?" was his abiding question. To that end, he didn't reject traditional art historical method so much as insist that it was but one avenue to understanding among many. The others included: close, first-person study of the artwork in question; the viewer's physical experience ("I once asked some premed students at the University of Pennsylvania whether they thought this body [Christ's in the Roman *Pietà*] was dead; they laughed."); paying attention to, rather than dismissing, the opinions of philistines and other dissenters ("faultfinders often see more acutely, more independently than the encomiasts whose acclaim is rarely specific"); and citing copies and as many other possible iterations of a subject such as the pietà down the history of art—in occasionally exhausting abundance—and interrogating them for what they could reveal about the object under consideration. It was these last, more than any paper documents, that were the "texts" that Steinberg found most reliable, most likely to make an interpretive case.

This methodology led him to advance a number of bold, even unorthodox opinions about Michelangelo. In Steinberg's view, the figure in Michelangelo's art existed not just as a celebration of human beauty, a carrier of emotion or of implied narrative. It was the means of giving concrete, symbolic form to certain aspects of Christian doctrine. Or as he writes in "Body and Symbol in the *Medici Madonna*," "In Michelangelo's hands, anatomy becomes theology." And so, he argues that, in the Roman *Pietà*, the significance of the oft-commented-upon youthfulness of the Virgin must be considered alongside Christ's youthful manliness to understand her as the Bride of Christ, a longstanding theological concept but one never before so overtly expressed in visual art; that the artist hacked away Christ's left leg in the Florentine *Pietà* because, though wanting to express a similar idea, he was afraid that, draped as it was across one of the Virgin's, it would be read as a purely carnal symbol (the way the same motif functions in Rodin's *Kiss*) rather than as the intended one of spiritual matrimony; that Mary's crossed legs in the *Medici Madonna* symbolize her eternal virginity. These pieces are as dazzling to read as they are exciting to ponder. Every time you think that the limb Steinberg has ventured out on is about to break, he slips underneath another persuasive strut to support himself. The result is some of the most intellectually stimulating art history and pleasurable prose to be found anywhere.

One of the most entertaining pieces in the book is "The Florentine *Pietà*: The Missing Leg Twenty Years After," from the September 1989 issue of *The Art Bulletin*, in which Steinberg catalogues, and responds to, two decades of scholarly reaction to his interpretation by eminences and Michelangelo scholars such as Sir John Pope-Hennessy, Frederick Hartt, and others. It offers a vivid demonstration of what one has always heard about academic politics—its pettiness and cutthroat nature—putting one in mind of the observation attributed to Henry Kissinger, that "the reason university politics is so vicious is because the stakes are so small."

One common denominator of the attacks is the effort to impeach Steinberg's credibility by deliberate misreadings and misquotations, most flagrantly by Pope-Hennessy in an appendix to the third edition of his landmark study, *Italian High Renaissance and Baroque Sculpture*, in which he altered Steinberg's original title, "Metaphors of Love and Birth in Michelangelo's *Pietàs*" to read "Metamorphosis of Love and Birth in Michelangelo's *Pietà*"—singular. Still, in responding to the Pope's sleight of hand, Steinberg shows that he could give as good as he got:

> The procedure here is fairly subtle, and students of Pope-Hennessy's polemical style will register it as an advance. For where he would formerly hurl an epithet such as "truck driver" at a scholar he differed from [this was H. W. Janson], now the Knight of Billingsgate deftly garbles a title, as if to intimate, by example, how perversity should be met. It's heartening to see a scholar in the ripeness of years still refining his gifts.

Also included here is a 1996 essay he wrote for *ARTnews* dismissing the attribution of what is now known as the *Young Archer* as a youthful work by Michelangelo. The attribution had been made in 1995 by Kathleen Weil-Garris Brandt, a professor at New York University's Institute of Fine Arts, after closely examining a marble statue that had long graced the lobby of the French Consulate on Fifth Avenue without attracting any notice at all. The claim put her on the front page of *The New York Times* and on *Charlie Rose* a few months later. I was *ARTnews*'s executive editor during this episode, and so I got a firsthand view of Steinberg's fastidiousness as a writer.

We'd been trying to find a scholar to comment on the attribution, but everyone we approached turned us down—academic politics again. Then, Steinberg's essay came in over the transom. This was a surprise, to say the least, since he and my boss, Milton Esterow, had had a legendary falling out two decades previously over the way the magazine had handled Steinberg's *Demoiselles* essay.

Steinberg reminded me of this when I called to say we'd like to run his piece. Ever since that unpleasant experience, he said, "You editors have writers' contracts; I have editors' contracts," and went on to explain how this was to work: "Your boss puts $1,000 into an escrow account, and if my article appears with any change, no matter how small, that I haven't approved, the money automatically defaults to his favorite charity." As I listened, I frantically tried to figure out a way to let him know that his idea would never fly with Milton, when he concluded with, "But you seem like a reasonable person, so if you can assure me that . . . ." I did, and the article went forward. But I was on such tenterhooks throughout the process that when, close to the end, I thought some minor punctuation change was called for, I made sure to check with him. Came the reply: leave it be.

The statue has been on display at the Met for ten years, yet nearly a quarter-century on the attribution is no more compelling than it was originally. Every time I see it, I feel a stab in my gut and the words "dead stone" play in my head. Given its current display, Steinberg's observations are worth quoting:

> I do not recognize the young sculptor's hand or mind in the statue's presumable gait (the legs from the knees down are lost); it suggests the light footfall of one delighted to be moving along. Nor can I find Michelangelo in the ease of the figure's frictionless spiral motion, as seen especially from sides and back. The sentiment of the cocked head seems too cozy, as does the smooth drop from chest to left thigh . . . . This Fifth Avenue sculptor dreams silhouettes, charming in linear flow, but without stress of substance. . . .
>
> As I see it, incoherence prevails, along with a sweetish allure that I find foreign to the twenty-year-old Michelangelo, who had done the figures of the San Domenico altar and was conceiving the *Bacchus* and the Roman *Pietà*.

One of the special pleasures of this book is the priority it gives to the act of looking. Steinberg was a relentless scrutinizer of artworks, and in these pages we feel ourselves being led by our eyes around and through Michelangelo's work. Often the revelations are large, as in his explanation for one of the ways the artist got the body of a grown man—Christ—to fit across the lap of the Virgin:

> [T]he sculptor keeps expanding the Virgin's physique from the top down. The augmentation begins at her head, a small head enveloped in many layers of drapery. And this superfluity of cloth, rather than the head itself, scales the next phase. Those turbulent draperies mask a continuous escalation of shoulders, bosom, and waist; they luxuriate about knees and legs that seem measureless.

Elsewhere, his eye will zero in on a telling detail—such as, in the Florentine *Pietà*, the loose end of Christ's winding sheet that falls between him and the Mary Magdalene figure at the left—prompting him to dilate on its symbolism.

And herein lies the importance of this volume and the entire series. Steinberg returns the act of looking to center stage, insisting on it as the primary, indispensable instrument for understanding works of art. In an intellectual climate that holds that reading—critical theory—is the only true path to wisdom, the return of Leo Steinberg's singular eye and mind could not be more timely or necessary.

Music

New York chronicle

by Jay Nordlinger

The new music director of the Metropolitan Opera is Yannick Nézet-Séguin, and his first opera, as title-holder, was *La traviata*, Verdi's masterpiece (one of them). The prelude was tentative and mannered. Nézet-Séguin has been this way before. I thought, not for the first time, "It's gonna be a long forty years." (The maestro is relatively young, at forty-three, and he enjoys an excellent press.) As the prelude continued, it was imprecise, almost clumsy. I thought, "This is no longer James Levine's orchestra."

Remember him? He was a colossus, a few minutes ago. Levine was the music director at the Met from 1976 to 2016. Last year, he was removed from any position whatsoever at the Met after being accused of grave sexual misconduct. (These accusations are all too credible.) In the same week as the *Traviata* conducted by Nézet-Séguin, there was an *Otello* at the Met, conducted by Gustavo Dudamel. In a review, I did some reminiscing about old *Otello*s at the Met—headlined by Plácido Domingo. And conducted by Levine. I wrote, "Pretty much the greatest conductor who ever lived sits at home, presumably, just blocks from the Met, unthought about and untalked about, as far as I'm aware. This oblivion is perhaps deserved. It is also understandable. But it's also a stunning development, isn't it?"

I know a fellow critic who regards Levine as one of the all-time greats. He says he finds himself unable even to listen to recordings by Levine. Many others know this feeling.

In any event, I received an email from a friend, after my review of *Otello* appeared. He said, "I am a very big fan of Maestro Levine's, but 'pretty much the greatest conductor who ever lived'? Don't you think that's going a little too far?" I had some fun in my reply. "Nope. You're lucky I put the 'pretty much' in."

As that *Traviata* continued, the new music director, Nézet-Séguin, found some discipline and verve. Flaccidity was overcome. There were incisive pages—many of them. I would have liked more underlying tension here and there, but Nézet-Séguin was effective. Act III's prelude was nicely shaped. At the very end of the opera, I like more anger—even savagery—than most conductors deliver, but Nézet-Séguin delivered plenty. This was a well-conducted *Traviata*, and, for me, a reassuringly conducted *Traviata*.

Outstanding in the orchestra was the clarinet, who has an important role in the opera. That was Anton Rist, a young American, recently appointed a co-principal of the section.

In the two leading roles of the opera were two light (or lightish) lyrics: Diana Damrau, the German soprano, who sang Violetta, and Juan Diego Flórez, the Peruvian tenor, who sang Alfredo. In an interview with me several years ago, Marilyn Horne voiced a common complaint: singers are cast in roles too big for them. This has been a trend in opera for a long time. In a sense, this *Traviata* at the Met was a micro-*Traviata*. At the same time, the two voices matched. As a friend of mine pointed out, it might have been awkward if one voice had been of traditional size and the other not.

There have been undersized—or at least non-big—Violettas before. I think of Hei-

Kyung Hong, the Korean-American soprano, at the Met. She was a beautiful and affecting Violetta. A phrase such as "Amami, Alfredo" should be *overwhelming*. Hong could not make it so, and neither can Damrau. But there are compensatory qualities.

In the course of the opera, the ear adjusted to the size of Damrau's voice (a famously beautiful and elastic one). Damrau sang with great finesse and intelligence. I thought of Yuja Wang, the Chinese pianist, in the Liszt Sonata. (Bear with me.) At Carnegie Hall one night, she could not play this piece with the proper sound: big, rich, lush—deep into the keys. She played with what she had, and the piece has never sounded more nimble. Also, it was practically Debussyan in spots. I liked this performance, unorthodox as it was. Damrau, too, was extraordinarily nimble. She also sang in long, long lines. Her technical control was unquestionable. Her high *pianissimo*s—not *piano*s, mind you, but *pianissimo*s—were exemplary. Her soft, inward singing was superb. In "Non sapete," she exhibited that hunted quality, which Callas had. Damrau's acting was better than opera acting—it was more like *theater* acting. And she had that ingredient she has always had, from the first day she stepped onto a stage, and which I have noted many, many times: lovability. Violetta is one of the most lovable, pitiable characters in opera, and she was doubly so as portrayed by Diana Damrau. I have never seen a more effective Violetta.

Juan Diego Flórez? He was an effective Alfredo, singing stylishly, aristocratically. In a recital at Carnegie Hall the month before, he sang arias belonging to roles that he would not ordinarily sing on the opera stage (because those roles are too big for him). "Che gelida manina" (Rodolfo in *La bohème*) was one of them; "Nessun dorma" (Calàf in *Turandot*) was another. Is he too small for Alfredo? Yes, but, like his Violetta, he has compensatory qualities.

The Germont had no problems with volume. He was Quinn Kelsey, a baritone from Hawaii. He owns a big, handsome instrument. He acquitted himself admirably—but, in the future, he may sing the role with more refinement and suavity.

On the stage was a new production, overseen by Michael Mayer, of Broadway fame. He directed the Met's *Rigoletto*, which premiered in the 2012–13 season. This is the one that transfers the action to the Rat Pack's Las Vegas. The first thing one might say about Mayer's *Traviata* is that it is beautiful to look at. Some people might scoff at this, but I say it counts. The costumes (by Susan Hilferty) are splendid; the lighting (by Kevin Adams) is utterly apt. You could complain that there is not much variety in this *Traviata*; then again, you might commend it for continuity. As far as I can remember, Violetta's bed never leaves the foot of the stage.

The dancing at the party in Act II is excitingly choreographed (by Lorin Latarro). And this production has something I had never seen before—or rather, some*one*: Alfredo's sister, who haunts the proceedings like a fleshly ghost.

In Weill Recital Hall, there was an unusual program, performed by a singer with an unusual name. She is J'Nai Bridges, a mezzo-soprano from Washington state. She once seemed destined to be a professional basketball player. A 2016 article about her was titled "The rising opera star who traded layups for librettos." In Weill, she was accompanied by Mark Markham, who proved a very capable partner.

I would like to pick on his bio for a second—not to pick on *him*, but to make a general point about bios, a point I have made before. This is not so much a point as a peeve! In concert programs, bios aren't really bios. Often, they fail to include basic biographical information, such as nationality. Instead, they are pieces of PR, prone to absurdity. Listen: "Pianist Mark Markham is considered one of the finest artists of his generation." Okay. By whom? "The breadth of his repertoire is unrivaled." Not just *unsurpassed*, but *unrivaled*? By Marc-André Hamelin, for example? By Antonio Pappano? This is embarrassing—and it should be embarrassing not least to Markham himself. I wish the music world would cut this out.

Bridges and Markham performed a program of American music—a hymn, art songs, an opera excerpt, and spirituals—along with cycles by Mahler and Ravel. Oh, this leads me to another peeve: music administrators and others love or need a theme—some organizing principle—and if there is not a natural one, they will force one.

Listen to our program notes: "two European song cycles . . . align with the themes of the songs that surround them." Come on. Can't you just sing or play music because you want to sing or play it? Can't you do it without apology, or fakery? I say yes.

When J'Nai Bridges took the stage, there was whooping from the audience, and a man behind me said, "She's beautiful." She and Markham opened with "I Love to Tell the Story," the old rugged hymn, in an arrangement by the performers themselves (both singer and pianist). This was a rare and arresting way to begin a recital. A wonderful way, too. A bit later, there was an excerpt from *Margaret Garner*, the 2005 opera by Richard Danielpour. The opera is based on *Beloved*, the novel by Toni Morrison, who wrote the opera's libretto. Danielpour attended the recital, by the way. He owns (a) one of the most beautiful names in music and (b) one of the most impressive heads of hair—Muti-level hair.

I will make some general remarks about the singing of J'Nai Bridges. She has a very good voice, rich and beautiful. Also smoky (as may befit a mezzo). She can offer a variety of colors. On this night, her top notes were often frayed, but she explained at the end of her recital that she was suffering from a cold. She said she was simply glad to "get through" the evening. As a rule, she sang with dignity and feeling. Also sincerity. Sincerity is key for a performer, and maybe especially for a singer, as the act of singing can be so personal.

That Mahler song cycle was the *Kindertotenlieder*, or *Songs on the Death of Children*. I thought of something that Christa Ludwig said, in an interview with me four years ago. Indeed, let me quote from the piece I wrote:

> When she was young and childless, she got very emotional in the *Kindertotenlieder*. One night, in Brussels, she was singing "Wenn dein Mütterlein" and had to leave the stage. "I was crying. I couldn't sing anymore." But when she had a child of her own, she had no such problems in the *Kindertotenlieder*.
>
> "I was too sentimental when I didn't have a child. You have not to be sentimental in Mahler. That's it. No, because if it is sentimental, it is not right."

How did J'Nai Bridges sing these songs? I think I will use the words I used above: "with dignity and feeling." With sincerity, too. Her Ravel cycle was *Shéhérazade*, which, for my money, requires some French coolness. Bridges emphasized the sensuality of the work: its passion. But I thought of Vladimir Horowitz in *L'isle joyeuse*, the Debussy piece. (Bear with me.) He did not play it in what you might call the classic French manner. He played it more like he played his Rachmaninoff and Scriabin. But I liked it, loved it.

On the second half of the recital, there was a new spiritual—yes, a new spiritual, something I did not think could be. Called "Oh, Glory," it's by Shawn Okpebholo, a composer born in 1981. He teaches at Wheaton College, in Illinois. His spiritual is composed from the point of view of a slave (new spiritual or not): "I'll see my child that was once sold away. In mansions bright, we'll dwell for endless days." This is a moving song.

Then came a song—an art song—we used to hear Leontyne Price sing: "Minstrel Man," by Margaret Bonds. Then came another spiritual, a classical spiritual, arranged, like the opening hymn, by Bridges and Markham. It was "Plenty Good Room." And since I have picked on the program notes, let me cite a wonderful note from them: this spiritual is "about the radical inclusiveness of God." Indeed. It goes, "Plenty good room, plenty good room—good room in my Father's kingdom. Plenty good room, plenty good room, so won't you choose your seat and sit down?"

The printed program ended with "Ride On, King Jesus," in the arrangement by John D. Carter. It is a fine arrangement. But my ear wants the Hall Johnson arrangement, which is the one I grew up with, and next to which everything else sounds wrong, I'm afraid.

J'Nai Bridges returned to the stage clutching roses, which meant that she would sing the Habanera, which she did. (The previous month, another mezzo-soprano, Elīna Garanča, sang the Habanera as an encore, and, before she did, she exclaimed to the audience, "Now you'll know why I'm wearing a red dress!") From J'Nai Bridges and her excellent partner, Mark Markham, this was a

feel-good evening, and it can feel good—very good—to feel good.

A concert of the New York String Orchestra in Carnegie Hall began with *Lyric for Strings*, by George Walker. (The composer himself used to call it, simply, "the *Lyric*.") Walker was born in 1922 in Washington, D.C.; he died last summer in Montclair, New Jersey, where he had long lived. He was ninety-six. Walker had many "firsts" to his credit: the first black person to graduate from the Curtis Institute of Music, the first to earn a doctorate at Eastman, etc. His sister, Frances, had some firsts of her own. She was the first black woman to achieve the rank of full professor at Oberlin. She was a pianist (as George was, too). Like George, she died last summer, at ninety-four.

The *Lyric* is George Walker's best-known piece, by far. And he wrote it early on, when he was but twenty-four. Although he chafed at the comparison (believe me), it has something in common with Barber's *Adagio for Strings*. (By the way, both men studied with the same composition teacher at Curtis, Rosario Scalero.) Barber drew his *Adagio* from his string quartet; Walker drew his *Lyric* from a string quartet of his own. In Carnegie Hall, at the NYSO concert, I discussed this with Barber's esteemed biographer, Barbara Heyman.

Walker called the *Lyric* "my grandmother's piece." He dedicated it to his maternal grandmother, Malvina King, who lived with the family when George was growing up. She was an ex-slave. She had had two husbands. She lost the first when he was sold at auction. Mrs. King never talked about the experience of slavery, ever—except once, when her grandson pestered her about it. She spoke one sentence, only: "They did everything except eat us."

I knew George in the last couple of years of his life. It started when I went to his home in Montclair to interview him. Listening to the New York String Orchestra play the *Lyric*, I felt I had a connection to it, somehow.

The NYSO is composed of players from age sixteen to age twenty-three. They gather in New York at Christmastime to train and perform. Young people have been participating in this program for fifty years now. I sat with a friend and critic who attended the first concert. The difference between then and now? Then, the participants were mostly Jewish, probably; now they are Asian. Once, I asked Lorin Maazel (who had been a violin prodigy himself) about the future of classical music. The first words out of his mouth were, "Thank God for China."

This year's participants came from institutions all over America. Most of the older students are at prestigious conservatories, but a few are at humbler places. As for the high-schoolers, at least one is being home-schooled. (Were we doing that in 1969?)

Conducting the *Lyric for Strings* was Karina Canellakis, who is awfully young herself, or looks so. She is an American who is set to take over the Radio Philharmonic Orchestra in Holland. She conducted the *Lyric* smoothly and ably, without a baton, as probably befits so sweeping and, well, lyrical a piece. The kids' pizzicatos weren't together, but whose are? Not the Berlin Philharmonic's, not anybody's.

Next on the podium was Jaime Laredo, who has long been associated with the NYSO. He conducted the Brahms Violin Concerto, in which the soloist was Joshua Bell. Laredo is a violinist too, and a distinguished one. Both he and Bell studied with Josef Gingold. Meaning no disrespect whatsoever to Maestro Laredo: can you imagine how thrilling it was for these young musicians, especially the violinists, to play with Joshua Bell? I had a little fun with math. The sixteen-year-olds in the orchestra were born in 2002. Going strictly by the numbers, Bell is to them what violinists born in 1932 were to *him*. Laredo is to the sixteen-year-olds what Enescu or Thibaud was to *him*.

Anyway, Bell played the Brahms concerto in his typical fashion. He was both serious and swashbuckling (or seriously swashbuckling). I could go into detail, but let me tell you something about the cadenza in the first movement: Bell gave an example of Romantic and violinistic heroism. I watched the players watching him. They were (duly) enthralled. And at the end of the concerto, they both applauded and stamped their feet for Bell. You felt almost parental, looking on.

The media

Geography lessons

by James Bowman

During the closing months of the old year, as I saw article after article in the old media, especially *The New York Times*, attacking the new media, especially Facebook, I couldn't help wondering if there were not a certain overconfidence behind their offensive. Perhaps some editor at the paper, mindful of the rise in online subscriptions to *The Times* and other avowedly anti-Trump organs and full of rosy, if still-uncertain, expectations of a damning report forthcoming from Robert Mueller, had persuaded the powers that be that their campaign against the president was all but won and that they could turn to a new enemy before having quite subdued the old one.

Could this be *The Times*'s own Operation Barbarossa? That, as you will remember, was the code name given to the German invasion of Russia in 1941 when Adolf Hitler, having grown drunk with power and the confidence born of previous successes, made the catastrophic mistake of opening a second front in his war for global domination before defeating a still-dangerous Britain, her empire, and her potential American allies in his rear. In the case of Facebook and other so-called "social media," the temptation for conservatives must be to take Henry Kissinger's view of the Iran–Iraq war of the 1980s and hope that somehow both sides in this new struggle can lose. But it might be more realistic for embattled Trumpsters to take Churchill's approach and welcome the devil himself as an ally against the ideological totalitarians of the established media, who are the more immediate threat.

Unfortunately, Facebook et al. are unlikely to want or need any allies in what increasingly appears to be an unequal struggle against the media establishment they are in the process of replacing. Not only are the new media hardly more sympathetic to conservatives, let alone Trumpites, than *The New York Times* or CNN, but they also have less to fear from the waning power of the old media than do Republicans, who have grown so accustomed to cringing before their onslaughts that it has become second nature. That's why Mr. Trump came as such a rude shock to them: he was the only Republican who fought back. Moreover, although the ostensible *casus belli* in the attacks on social media is the elite's firm conviction that Facebook's cooperation with Cambridge Analytica in 2016 helped to elect the hated Mr. Trump, the antagonism between old and new media, especially on the old media side, has much deeper roots—and much greater potential for harm for the established media and the larger establishment of which they are a part.

In a ten-thousand-word article for *The London Review of Books* before Christmas, James Meek set out the origins of this antagonism:

> There were high hopes that [*The Guardian*'s] extraordinary expansion in readership around the world, particularly in America, would lead to a corresponding boom in U.S. advertising: that being able to market millions of readers to advertisers, rather than the hundreds of thousands who read it in the pre-internet days, would

> compensate financially for the loss of income from plummeting print circulation and its refusal to put up a paywall. But just when *The Guardian* seemed poised to take advantage of its new reach, the digital advertising market got swallowed up by Facebook and Google, internet phenomena that weren't so much websites as technology platforms created to profit from the content of others. The era of programmatic advertising arrived.
>
> It's hard to convey the strangeness of programmatic advertising. As Carl Miller describes it in *The Death of the Gods: The New Global Power Grab*, "You do not buy space in a particular publication; you buy space in front of a particular kind of person, wherever they happen to go on the internet." . . . In the mid-2010s big news publishers that had just begun to think they might have righted the ship found themselves obliged to run Google or Facebook advertising scripts on their sites which, after the giants took their cut, left them with a pittance. In 2017, the duopoly took 63.1 per cent of the total digital ad spend in the U.S.; the figures in Britain are believed to be comparable. More recent figures show a dent in the Google–Facebook rise, but only to the benefit of other internet giants like Amazon and Snapchat.

When you add to the new media's greater appeal to advertisers their lower costs and greater maneuverability as aggregators rather than originators of content, you can see why the great lumbering beasts of the legacy media, with their comparatively enormous overheads, would regard the new media as existential threats.

Yet for all the acuteness of his analysis of media economics, Mr. Meek suffers from a typical case of blindness on the part of the media to their own role in driving away potential customers. He comes close to a juster view of the subject when he writes, possibly paraphrasing David Kolbusz, that "open journalism was based on the idea that non-journalists would help news organizations navigate their way to an objective truth, when the world we're actually in is one where different sets of people subscribe to different geographies of truth altogether." Like most media folk, however, he seems to regard his own position on the truth map as the only true one. This is basically the position of the privileged class represented by *The Guardian*'s readership, identified by Mr. Meek as "the hundreds of millions of university-educated, left-leaning, avowedly tolerant, socially concerned people around the world—global liberaldom, for want of a better expression."

His idea of "geographies of truth" seems to correspond to what I wrote about in this space last year (see "Constituting truth" in *The New Criterion* of September 2018) as "constituencies of truth" or what Michel Foucault, who was more kindly disposed toward them than I am, called "regimes of truth." Under any name, you would think that the idea must represent at least the glimmering of an understanding that at some point the media are going to have to come to terms with the fact that it is not only Hillary Clinton's "basket of deplorables," a vicious minority written off as beyond redemption anyway, who don't take it for granted that the media are automatically to be considered the arbiters of truth *tout court*. Such, however, appears not to be the case. Elsewhere, Mr. Meek's flickerings go out, as when he cites "the Russian election interference scandal in the U.S. and the Cambridge Analytica affair in the U.K." and sounds the usual media notes of outrage.

It's a familiar posture among good-faith left-wingers who try to write with a modicum of honesty, rather than strict ideology, about our changing political landscape. Elsewhere, also in *The Guardian* and at about the same time Mr. Meek was writing, William Davies managed to get through almost six thousand words of a "long read" article on declining trust in "elites" without so much as a word of criticism against his own bit of the elite, the academic and journalistic one. He was willing to go so far as to admit that "there are copious explanations for Trump, Brexit, and so on, but insufficient attention to what populists are actually saying, which focuses relentlessly on the idea of self-serving 'elites' maintaining a status quo that primarily benefits them." This

is news to *Guardian* readers, apparently. Yet in taking the populist objections seriously, he somehow never sees himself or his friends in the media as being among these "self-serving 'elites'" —who are kept safely at a distance from reality as well as from himself by quotation marks.

The elites he *is* willing to condemn include social media, crooked politicians, security forces, bankers, big business, and even PC politicians who allow criminal behavior to go on for fear of being called "racists" (see "The irony of PC" in *The New Criterion* of March 2015). But among journalists, only a now-shuttered (and Murdoch-owned) tabloid newspaper and, in one instance, the BBC are said to have besmirched the good name of the elite—and these were exposed by the more respectable sort of journalists. There is a noticeable dearth of criticism directed at "university-educated, left-leaning, avowedly tolerant, socially concerned people" like, say, Mr. Davies and other members of an academic elite that prides itself on its rhetorical anti-elitism. Self-criticism, like paying taxes (in the view of Leona Helmsley), is only for the little people. Why, even Jill Abramson appeared, at least for a moment, to have been able to recognize the damage her former employers at *The New York Times* have done to their, and its, credibility by being so "unmistakably anti-Trump" in their reporting and analyzing of the news—not that she is any more mistakably anti-Trump herself. As Howard Kurtz reported at Fox News after seeing an advance copy of Ms. Abramson's book, *Merchants of Truth*:

> Abramson defends *The Times* in some ways but offers some harsh words for her successor, Dean Baquet. . . .
>
> "Though Baquet said publicly he didn't want *The Times* to be the opposition party, his news pages were unmistakably anti-Trump," Abramson writes, adding that she believes the same is true of *The Washington Post*. "Some headlines contained raw opinion, as did some of the stories that were labeled as news analysis."
>
> What's more, she says, citing legendary twentieth-century publisher Adolph Ochs, "The more anti-Trump *The Times* was perceived to be, the more it was mistrusted for being biased. Ochs's vow to cover the news without fear or favor sounded like an impossible promise in such a polarized environment."
>
> Abramson describes a generational split at *The Times*, with younger staffers, many of them in digital jobs, favoring an unrestrained assault on the presidency. "The more 'woke' staff thought that urgent times called for urgent measures; the dangers of Trump's presidency obviated the old standards," she writes.
>
> Trump claims he is keeping the "failing" *Times* in business—an obvious exaggeration—but the former editor acknowledges a "Trump bump" that saw digital subscriptions during his first six months in office jump by six hundred thousand, to more than two million.

All this would hardly count as news in a sane media environment, as the truth of it has long been obvious to the meanest intelligence that is still unencumbered by the ideological blinders worn by pretty much everybody in the news business these days. The words quoted by Mr. Kurtz above may amount to the most sustained piece of honesty Ms. Abramson has been guilty of in her lifetime—and yet she couldn't hightail it fast enough to *Politico* in order to disavow it all:

> Former *New York Times* editor Jill Abramson says Fox News host Howard Kurtz took her forthcoming book, *Merchants of Truth*, "totally out of context" in his Wednesday report headlined "Former *NY Times* editor rips Trump coverage as biased" . . . .
>
> "His article is an attempt to Foxify my book, which is full of praise for *The Times* and *The Washington Post* and their coverage of Trump" [Ms. Abramson said].

With the clever coinage "Foxify," Ms. Abramson of course alludes to the obligatory left-wing axiom that anything said on Fox News Channel is not to be trusted because it is not in harmony with what is being said on all the other networks, but the term is also a reiteration of the equally axiomatic but insanely arrogant proposition that anything said by those—like herself—who *are* so in

harmony is to be trusted implicitly, even if it is blatantly self-contradictory or obviously false.

A similar arrogance was apparent in *The Washington Post*'s granting a forum to a transparent bit of self-puffery from the incoming junior senator from Utah, Mitt Romney, publicly thanking his Mormon God that he is not like the particular sinner now sitting in the White House—where, by the way, he should have been instead. Of course it was all just grist to the media's Trump-discrediting mill, but how drunk with self-importance do you have to be to imagine that people can't see through this kind of thing and instead take it all at face value, as if *The Post* expected Trump supporters all over the country to be saying, "I never thought of it before, but now that that nice Mr. Romney mentions it, I *do* think someone like him would have made a better president"?

Or consider the *New York Times* report by Jonathan Martin, Maggie Haberman, and Alexander Burns on the reactions among Republicans to Senator-elect Romney's op-ed:

> Senator Rand Paul of Kentucky, viewing Mr. Romney's offensive as an opening to nurture his ties with the media-obsessed Mr. Trump, scheduled an afternoon conference call with reporters to target his soon-to-be colleague.
>
> "I just don't think the president deserves to have a new senator coming in attacking his character," said Mr. Paul, accusing Mr. Romney of acting "holier than thou."

Of course *The Times*, like *The Post*, was trying to get the maximum possible ink out of Mr. Romney's attack on the President—as Mr. Romney must have been smart enough to know they would. But look at that curious explanation of Senator Paul's attack on Senator Romney's attack "as an opening to nurture his ties with the media-obsessed Mr. Trump." Grammatically, "his ties" must refer to Mr. Romney's ties, but this makes no sense. How could Mr. Romney be nurturing his ties—ignoring for the moment the fact that "ties" are not among the things in nature that can be nurtured—to the president by attacking him? What the writers must mean, though they haven't said it, is either that the "ties with the media-obsessed Mr. Trump" to be nurtured are Senator Paul's, or, as I believe, that Mr. Martin (or Ms. Haberman or Mr. Burns) originally wrote *not* "the media-obsessed Mr. Trump," but "the Trump-obsessed media"—and then Ms. Haberman (or Mr. Martin or Mr. Burns) changed it, sacrificing accuracy and even sense to the media's pretense that they are not themselves involved in this squabble between Republicans but are merely silent observers of it.

Such denials of the obvious began with the media's denials of their own biases and have now spread to much worse things than mere bias. They have also spread to other branches of the elite, the loss of trust in which Mr. Davies laments. When Chief Justice John Roberts rebuked the president for merely stating so obvious a fact as that the judiciary in our time has been politicized—what did he think the lately concluded Kavanaugh hearings were all about?—and then stuck so firmly to his absurd contention that we don't have Democrat or Republican judges, even to the point of rewriting the Constitution to limit the powers of a Republican president, you had to feel something close to despair that the public's trust in their rulers, official or unofficial, can ever be restored. I'm inclined to believe that the only way we can all be brought together again, as Mr. Romney claimed to want, is by ceding all political authority to Google, whose motto, it is said, used to be "Don't be evil." It is at least as possible to believe that they won't be evil as that the media will start telling the ungeographized truth again or that judges will cease being political.

Books

Surrounding the Firm

by Simon Heffer

Editing a newspaper some years ago, I had to rebuke a reporter who had written about the House of Windsor using the terms "Royal Family" and "Royal Household" interchangeably throughout. To most, I hope, the distinction is obvious. The family are those related, by blood or marriage, to the Sovereign; the household is that army of people, from courtiers at the high end to flunkeys at the bottom, who ensure that the institution of monarchy continues to function. Some of their posts date back centuries—there is still a Grand Hereditary Carver, though, as Adrian Tinniswood points out in this superb book, he doesn't do a great deal of carving—but these days Queen Elizabeth II also has in her entourage press officers and IT experts, something Queen Elizabeth I, with whom Tinniswood begins his account of life behind palace doors, could not in the first instance have imagined necessary or in the second have believed possible.[1] The journey of 450 years between the two Glorianas makes Tinniswood's story. It combines accounts of family and household, showing the distinction between, but also the interdependence of, the two.

The author relates how Elizabeth I, never less than majestic, learned much about attitude from her father, Henry VIII. Lacking husbands to decapitate, she nonetheless asserted her authority by deeds and by her simple presence. She would smack round the head any courtier whom she found disobliging, and when she came before her court, bewigged and in dresses that dripped with jewels, grown men would fall on their knees. That was in the age before constitutional monarchy; part of Tinniswood's tale is how the English (and later the British) monarch came to hold his or her place by consent rather than by the potential for brutality.

Henry VIII had owned fifty houses: Tinniswood tells how some more came, and many went, over the years, either because they were given away, used as grace-and-favour residences for extended family or for the court, expropriated, or sold. One continuing saga has been the tussle with parliament about money: until the time of King William IV (r. 1830–37) virtually no year passed without the monarch living beyond his or her means. Some were ostentatiously lavish. William's elder brother, the porcine and unlovely George IV, commissioned extravagant building projects and lived high off the hog. His father, George III, paid the then-astronomical sum of £161,000 to settle a part of his son's debts in 1787, and raised his allowance by £10,000 a year in the hope of its never happening again—this at a time when the average working man made, if he was lucky, £25 a year. The first episode of George III's madness, which Tinniswood also catalogues, occurred shortly afterwards.

The Hanoverians especially were bad managers of people and of cash. William IV was an exception. Perhaps conscious of his late

1 *Behind the Throne: A Domestic History of the British Royal Household*, by Adrian Tinniswood; Basic Books, 416 pages, $32.

brother's reputation, he had used money he had saved to refit Buckingham Palace—only in the family since 1820—so that when his young niece Queen Victoria inherited she would at least have a comfortable home in which to base herself. Once Victoria married Prince Albert of Saxe-Coburg-Gotha, she acquired a husband whose ideals of economy and responsibility exceeded even those of her late uncle. Staff were fired, sinecures ended, and pointless divisions of labor and petty bureaucracies streamlined. The sinecures were a particular problem: the wet-nurse for the future George IV managed to stay on the books until the boy was twenty-one. Conspicuous consumption was also encouraged in the household, especially in the kitchens, because the servant class made money out of it: they could collect the stubs of candles and sell the tallow on, in addition to tons of leftover food, animal skins, and down from swans and geese. Albert introduced, among other things, a directive ordering that candles be burned down properly before being decommissioned.

In the early days, money was spent in huge quantities on court entertainments such as masques; with the Hanoverians, however, the main extravagance was music—George I brought with him one Georg Frideric Handel. Until the Hanoverians, the court and the political class were often indistinguishable: the Cecils who attended Elizabeth I and James I and VI were half–private secretary to the monarch, half–prime minister. Because George I spoke no English, he had to rely on a political class to run his country for him, and Sir Robert Walpole, from 1721, became what we now know as Britain's first prime minister. This led directly to the "constitutionalising" of the monarchy, a process that had begun when Charles I lost the English Civil War—and his head—and which was accelerated by the Glorious Revolution, which settled for all time that a Roman Catholic could not occupy the English throne.

Yet politics still intruded in court life down to the nineteenth and even twentieth centuries. The immature and, frankly, ignorant Victoria caused a constitutional crisis when she refused to accede to Sir Robert Peel's demands, on his becoming her prime minister, that the Whig ladies with whom she surrounded herself at court be replaced by Tory ones. Victoria also caused one of the greatest court scandals, shortly after her accession, when she accused one of her mother's ladies-in-waiting, Lady Flora Hastings, who was unmarried, of being pregnant. Lady Flora's swelling was abdominal cancer, of which she died. London was outraged and the Queen kept her head below the parapet for some time.

But it was also under Victoria that some sort of modernization of the court began. A series of senior military men became private secretaries and assistant private secretaries, and were often succeeded by family members; the royal family liked to employ as their most trusted servants those who had grown up in the atmosphere. The household expanded with Victoria's family (she had nine children) to include nursery staff and tutors. The importance of keeping expenditure under control meant that ancient offices, such as the Keeper of the Privy Purse and the Master of the Household, took on new significance. But the courtiers also came to reflect the need for the monarchy to change its ways in an era of democracy, when—as Walter Bagehot might have put it—daylight had finally been let in on the magic. When one of the more legendary figures at court, Sir Frederick "Fritz" Ponsonby, played against George V at real tennis, the King was annoyed to lose, but Ponsonby counseled other courtiers not to "kowtow" to the Sovereign, and instead to treat him like a normal human being.

The early twentieth century was a time when the monarchy, as a means of developing its relevance and appeal, became increasingly reliant on display and ceremony, and Tinniswood describes well the army of staff and functionaries that became essential to maintain the show. There is a wonderful tale of a Guards band having to scale the walls of Windsor Castle to be able to play at a dinner given by Queen Victoria, thereby avoiding having to walk through the dining room itself. The 1953 Coronation is described in meticulous detail, with the people participating being managed by the Earl Marshal, the Duke of Norfolk, while the Minister of

Works, David Eccles—known as "the Abominable Showman"—handled the infrastructure.

What also changed in the twentieth century was that royal servants began selling their stories to the press. Marion Crawford—"Crawfie," the present Queen's nanny—caused outrage among the Windsors when she published a book of entirely harmless memoirs in 1949, and many of her successor colleagues followed suit. Perhaps most damaging were the recollections of Paul Burrell, the rather sleazy factotum to the late Diana, Princess of Wales, who made the cash register ring loudly after his mistress's untimely death, when, it seemed, anything went. They said in Victorian times—apparently in reference to the unbowdlerized representation of Cleopatra on the stage—"how different, how very different, from the home life of our own dear Queen!" Our own dear Queen, in 2019, in her ninety-third year, maintains impeccable standards others have long disregarded; yet one cannot exactly know whether Tinniswood is describing an enduring state of affairs or something that may be on the cusp of changing forever.

Edward Lear's pilgrimage

Jenny Uglow
Mr. Lear: A Life of Art and Nonsense.
Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 598 pages, $45

reviewed by Richard Tillinghast

Sometimes it seems to me that the lives of the Victorians show more color, more ambition, more brilliance, more eccentricity, more sheer energy, more strangeness than the cast of characters from any other historical period I know of. Perhaps it's an illusion, a trick of hindsight. In some ways our own age and Victorian England have a lot in common. In science, both periods could boast of brilliant advances: ours has been the age of Einstein, theirs the age of Darwin. In technology, theirs was the Age of Steam, when railroads collapsed distances throughout the world, speeding the products of the industrial revolution to consumers, while in our Information Age, computers have altered practically everything about how we conduct our lives.

Though we may consider nineteenth-century British society rigidly stratified in contrast to our apparently more fluid, democratic culture, consider the distinguished career of the architect Sir John Soane, who built the Bank of England: he was the son of a bricklayer, while a close friend, the painter J. M. W. Turner, was the son of a barber and wigmaker. In contrast to our almost manic sexual permissiveness, theirs was an age of propriety, repression, and denial, at least on the surface. One could say that hypocrisy was their defining characteristic—except that no age excels at hypocrisy more than our own. Still, at least since the publication in 1966 of Steven Marcus's *The Other Victorians*, it has been clear that the subjects of Queen Victoria were people who made a fine art of compartmentalization. This Victorian attitude is captured in the rumor that spread about John Ruskin: many claimed his exposure to the female body had been limited to those sculpted in marble, so that the sight of his bride's pubic hair on their wedding night unmanned him.

Our own era has produced no shortage of singular geniuses—think of Robert Lowell, Leonard Bernstein, and Francis Bacon, to name just a few. But for intellectual precocity, who can top the Victorian child prodigy John Stuart Mill, who wrote, "I have no remembrance of the time when I began to learn Greek. I have been told that it was when I was three years old"? (Up to that time, he had played with Hebrew alphabet blocks his parents had provided him.) And what could be much more peculiar than the terms of the bequest left by Mill's teacher, the philosopher and political thinker Jeremy Bentham, who left his fortune to University College London? Bentham's will specified that his body be embalmed and mummified, dressed in a suit of his best clothes, and wheeled out to sit in on meetings of the college's governing board. The minutes would read: "Bentham present, not voting."

Reading Jenny Uglow's excellent *Mr. Lear: A Life of Art and Nonsense*, one can hardly help

considering why someone like Edward Lear (1812–88) was able to flourish during the Victorian age and why we have nothing like his equivalent today. I do believe this question may be answered partly by some of the Victorian characteristics I have already invoked. Lear's attraction to other men would not have caused him many serious worries had he lived today, so perhaps the games of hide-and-seek that he played in his nonsense verse would not have come into play. It's hard to say. All in all, I think it is the lack of high seriousness in our own culture that leaves little room for Lear's brilliant nonsense. Since our art and literature, theater and music already embrace the ridiculous and the absurd—and I don't necessarily mean that in a derogatory way—there is no need for a subversive agent provocateur to puncture an uninflated balloon. And Lear's nonsense is never merely silly. He was a learned, questing man who read Homer in Greek, and his poems often borrow the rhythms and atmosphere of the great poetry of his day.

Most readers might be assumed to know one or two of Lear's poems for children, "The Owl and the Pussy-cat," for example, or some of the limericks at which he excelled. His limericks differ from the more familiar form of such classics as "There once was a man from Nantucket." Rather than using the last line to cap the limerick's brief narrative, he rounds his quatrain off less sensationally—sometimes with a cozy familiarity, sometimes disturbingly:

> There was an Old Man who supposed,
> That the street door was partially closed;
> But some very large rats ate his coats and his hats,
> While that futile old gentleman dozed.

When he started out, Lear had a reputation, in Uglow's words, as "the young painter of birds and beasts: toucans with huge beaks, like his own big nose, flaming red parrots, the horned owl with ruffs round his eyes, the wildcat with its soft fur." With British curiosity about exotic plants and animals piqued by the voyages of Captain Cook and other navigators who brought back specimens from the far corners of the globe, there developed a vogue for all things unfamiliar and strange. The young Lear set up his easel in the London Zoological Society in Regent's Park and quickly found buyers for his brilliantly colored studies of parrots and other birds. Birds were close to Lear's heart, and early on he began drawing himself as a strange and awkward bird, part human, part avian. In his limericks birds freely infiltrate people's lives:

> There was an Old Man with a beard,
> Who said, "It is just as I feared!—
> Two Owls and a Hen, four Larks and a Wren,
> Have all built their nests in my beard!"

From his early successes as a painter of birds, he went on to become an astonishingly prolific landscape painter, traveling all over the Mediterranean from Italy to Egypt and eventually as far as India to make sketches from which he produced the serene, atmospheric canvases that were popular with his moneyed patrons. I was unfamiliar with these landscapes before looking at the reproductions of them in Uglow's book, but I think they are very fine—atmospheric, serene, finished with impressive technique. Lear hated the rainy, cold English winters and managed, through hard work and resourcefulness, to live in places like Greece and the South of France, returning to Blighty only to sell paintings and visit old friends. In a letter he wrote, "if you are absolutely alone in the world, & likely to be so, then move about continually & never stand still." Eventually he went beyond painting scenes from exotic locales and began writing narratives like his *Journals of a Landscape Painter in Greece and Albania* (1851).

Lear's gift for friendship and for what we would call networking ran alongside a sometimes intensely painful private life. He was epileptic, so he would regularly have to withdraw into himself to endure the attacks he suffered. Uglow shows how deliberately he created a persona for himself, adopting a middle-aged affect even while he was young: "Lear began to draw a line around his own image, like a cut-out figure, a semi-cartoon." While he was all business in the marketing

of his art, there was also "the private Lear of his letters . . . a man lucky in his friends, happy in his travels but dreaming of domestic bliss—or at least of puddings and sharp pencils. Beneath this ran the admission that he was in essence a man who would live his life alone, and, perhaps, lonely." A kindly uncle, and, in some cases, godfather, to the children of his friends, he wrote his nonsense poems to entertain them.

As he became well known, he made many friends among the wealthy and aristocratic classes who bought his paintings and drawings and entertained him as a house guest at their estates. The young Queen Victoria herself was a fan of Lear's travel journals and asked him to give her drawing lessons. A gaffe he made and later shared with others occurred when the Queen was showing off her display cases to him and he exclaimed, "Oh! How *did* you get all these beautiful things?" Victoria replied mildly, "I inherited them, Mr. Lear."

The "domestic bliss" Lear dreamed of involved a years' long fantasy of marrying, even though it was clear that his romantic inclinations did not lean toward women. Still, he had been raised and coddled by his sisters and was very close to several female friends. Partly, the impulse sprang from a feeling of being left out when many of his friends were marrying: "Every marriage of people I care about rather seems to leave one on the bleak shore alone," he wrote. No doubt Uglow is right when she says, "It was the idea of marriage, not the woman, that he was in love with." The wonder is that Lear toyed with the idea so long, carrying on a long, ultimately unsatisfactory courtship with a woman named Augusta Bethell. But in saying that, perhaps one is underestimating the power of fantasy in the emotional life of someone who lived to such a degree in a world of make-believe.

Lear's mixed feelings about marriage are certainly reflected in one limerick:

> There was an Old Man on some rocks,
> Who shut his wife up in a box;
> When she said, "Let me out," he exclaimed,
> "Without doubt,
> You will pass all your life in that box."

A rosier view can perhaps be gleaned from "The Owl and the Pussy-cat," where these two very dissimilar creatures achieve married bliss:

> They dined on mince, and slices of quince,
> Which they ate with a runcible spoon;
> And hand in hand, on the edge of the sand,
> They danced by the light of the moon.

One of the pleasures of this book is seeing how connected Edward Lear was with his age. He became close friends with a stalwart of the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood, William Holman Hunt, who taught him much about the use of pigments and precision in rendering natural details. We know the Victorians from a distance, through their writing and painting, and to read that Lear was present at a party the novelist Wilkie Collins gave for the painter John Everett Millais, who was about to marry Effie Ruskin (whose unhappy first marriage to John Ruskin I mentioned earlier) seems slightly surreal. Lear was, among his many other talents, a gifted musician. He made settings of Tennyson's songs and liked to perform them in company. To meet and become friends with the Tennysons was gratifying for him, even though Tennyson was a difficult friend. One of the major projects of Lear's last years was a series of paintings based on lines from the laureate's poems. The real closeness was with Alfred's wife, Emily, and when Lear built a house for himself in San Remo, he called it the Villa Emily.

My own favorite among Lear's verses is his self-portrait, "How Pleasant to Know Mr. Lear," an example of the persona he created which brilliantly mixes the self-deprecatingly humorous with seemingly trivial details, rounding out into a very affecting portrayal that is, at moments, personally revealing. We see both the mask and the face behind the mask. Over the years I have turned to this poem, by turns funny and sad, for pleasure and reassurance. Here are the first three stanzas:

> How pleasant to know Mr. Lear!
> Who has written such volumes of stuff!
> Some think him ill-tempered and queer,
> But a few think him pleasant enough.

His mind is concrete and fastidious;—
His nose is remarkably big;—
His visage is more or less hideous;—
His beard it resembles a wig.

He has ears, and two eyes, and ten fingers,—
(Leastways if you reckon two thumbs;)
Long ago he was one of the singers,
But now he is one of the dumbs.

That third stanza, starting with its self-evident, seemingly idiotic recitation of features everyone shares, is reminiscent (to me anyway) of such comedic masters of deadpan as Jack Benny and Tommy Smothers. It moves surefootedly to the last, capping two lines of the third quatrain, their pathos reinforced by how they are set up. Few artists can mix comedy and pathos—Chaplin was perhaps the master—but Lear achieves it brilliantly in the poem's last stanza:

He reads but he cannot speak Spanish,
He cannot abide ginger beer.—
Ere the days of his pilgrimage vanish,—
How pleasant to know Mr. Lear!

Pelagic thoroughbreds

Steven Ujifusa
Barons of the Sea, and their Race to Build the World's Fastest Clipper Ship. Simon & Schuster, 448 pages, $29.99

reviewed by James Ewing

On April 20, 1854, the clipper ship *Flying Cloud* sailed into San Francisco's Golden Gate, setting a record of eighty-nine days and eight hours out from New York City. This would stand for 145 years, broken only in 1989 by a contemporary offshore racing yacht. That this record stood for so long, and that it was held by a commercial vessel no less, stands as a testament to the greatness of these pelagic thoroughbreds and the mariners who sailed them.

The clipper era was brief. As the historian Samuel Eliot Morison remarked, clipper ships were "our Gothic Cathedrals, our Parthenon; but . . . carved from snow." These swift, lithe steeds raced not only each other, but also the inevitable steamship and railroad, and were soon wounded by the American Civil War and thence dispatched by the transcontinental railroad, a great golden spike through these hulls of oak. Thanks to naval historians like Morison, the clippers continue to occupy an outsized place in our national mythology, their metaphorical names familiar to many today: *Flying Cloud*, *Sovereign of the Seas*, *Great Republic* (*pace* the *N. B. Palmer*, a swift ship saddled with a decidedly terrestrial name). The clippers were among the first industrial triumphs of the young republic, built initially to best the merchant ships of the British Empire at its apex. Now Steven Ujifusa, in his well-researched *Barons of the Sea, and their Race to Build the World's Fastest Clipper Ship*, offers us a fresh perspective on this fleeting era. In the book he follows some of the families of New York and Boston who made their fortune in the opium-trading factories of Canton before turning their sights to servicing the California Gold Rush. Many of the family names remain familiar today—Forbes, Delano, Low—while others have faded with time. These families and their competitive instincts spurred the development of the clipper ships, whether they were racing the British to Canton, the steamers that ran to and from Panama, the burgeoning railroads, or each other.

Barons of the Sea is two histories in one: the first about the families and fortunes made in the Canton trade, and the second about the great ships and shipwrights of the clipper era. Ujifusa frames the book around the families, but the best of the book is reserved for the ships and their passages. These two stories sometimes come into conflict with one another, with family histories interrupted by digressions on naval architecture and engineering, reminiscent of the meanders of the contemporaneous *Moby-Dick*—written towards the start of the clipper ship era—if somewhat less profound.

Trade with China is as old as the republic itself, blossoming initially out of Salem, Massachusetts, and then later usurped by New York–based merchants. Much as today's young

entrepreneurs may head to Silicon Valley in search of venture capital and the next Facebook, young men of the early twentieth century set out for Canton to earn a "competence," or a small fortune that they could bring home. The trade ostensibly was for tea, though the barter was illicit opium. It is in Canton that we first meet the Delano brothers Warren and Franklin of New Bedford, Massachusetts, as well as the Forbes brothers Robert and John Murray. Eager to catch up with their British peers and kowtow to Houqua—the mogul on whose good graces all of these fortunes depended—these men accepted and embraced almost every invitation to imbibe or ingest, whether over whist with the Brits or exotic Cantonese delicacies with the then-wealthiest man in the world. Sybaritic temptations loomed, and social clubs quickly formed.

Meanwhile, their firms were competing to bring tea—and opium—across the oceans as swiftly as possible, as the first to market would set the price and reap the spoils. While the British were content with larger vessels that could haul more tea, the Americans focused on speed, hoping to win the race to market with their "clippers." These light and long craft pushed physical limits with their acres of canvas aloft and captains who were reluctant to reef. Masts snapped, rigs were lost, and crews often washed overboard—a death sentence at the time. But records were set and fortunes duly made.

Brief biographical sketches abound in *Barons of the Sea*, and the most engaging describes a man who was far from a tycoon and died nearly bankrupt: the shipwright Donald McKay. An immigrant from Nova Scotia, McKay built many of the great clippers in his yard in East Boston, including *Flying Cloud*. A true entrepreneur, when he did not have a buyer for a new clipper ship he would underwrite its construction and then sail it on a maiden voyage himself to promote it, sometimes with disastrous consequences. McKay's story of striving, building his business, and then going bust on the final clippers he built too lavishly and too late is the best of the book, and McKay could make an interesting biographical subject for Ujifusa one day. Another biography could be written on Josiah and Eleanor Creesy, a married couple who served as the master and navigator of *Flying Cloud* in an era when wives rarely went to sea, much less served in the second-most important role on the ship.

Throughout, Ujifusa generously refers to histories such as Richard Henry Dana Jr.'s *Two Years Before the Mast* (1840), which is the best first-hand account we have of an American's life at sea in the early nineteenth century. He also pays homage to Matthew Fontaine Maury's groundbreaking *Sailing Directions*, which was the original "big data" amalgamation of global winds and currents and revolutionized oceanic passage-making when published in 1850. Ujifusa's research also makes generous use of private club and family records, and his occasional peeks behind the Delano family curtain are enlightening, if in the end they sometimes are tangential to the core of the book.

Barons of the Sea concludes as the clipper era ends in the wake of the Civil War. While some American clippers remained in trade for a few decades to come, none were to survive into the twentieth century. What remains with us today are names: the names of the great ships and the names of the families whose fortunes were made by them. *Barons of the Sea* is a fascinating chronicle of both.

Not half bad

David Gilmour
The British in India:
A Social History of the Raj.
Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, 640 pages, $35

reviewed by Jeremy Black

"The answer is rape and rapine, as evidenced in the parliamentary impeachments of Robert Clive and Warren Hastings . . . the plunder economy that led to the deaths of half of the population of Bengal." This view, that of an intemperate fellow academic, is fortunately not the one offered by David Gilmour in his thoughtful, ably grounded, and well-balanced account of the most successful empire in

history. Fascinating on its own terms, Gilmour's book is important not only for its account of the Raj, one that successfully captures the varied motivations at play and the many experiences involved, but also for what it says about empire itself.

The reputation of the British Empire takes a battering around much of the places it formerly held sway, but especially so in India, as in Shashi Tharoor's deeply flawed *Inglorious Empire: What the British Did to India* (2017). To Tharoor, a politician in India, British rule was "a totally amoral, rapacious, imperialist machine bent on the subjugation of Indians for the purpose of profit." Such charges explain why Gilmour's book is so important, and also help to elucidate the present-day significance of the broader debate.

There is, of course, the problem of emphasis. Take, for example, railway construction, a process that Gilmour reveals as highly important to the British in India. This has also been criticized in terms of the burden of the work and the direction of profit. Or, consider the success of the penny post, which was similarly important. It helped end the tyranny of distance and was subject to scant censorship. Postal services, however, also helped support British imperial transport links, notably the extension of regular steamer routes by the Peninsula & Oriental Steam Navigation Company. The presentation of British rule as an economic burden that delayed the development of the country ignores the value and creativity of British rule and the extent of Indian cooperation in this rule. These were, and are, not part of the equation for many polemicists who write about the Raj. Nor do commentators always engage with the problems within the Indian economy prior to British rule, such as the restricted degree of market integration in India. Rarely is mentioned the extent to which Britain had only limited control over its developing economic relationships with India.

Britain, therefore, neither deserves all the credit in India, nor all the blame, a point that is more generally true about imperial rule. Linked to this, there is, as Gilmour makes clear, the multiple refractions of personality between governors and governed. They contributed to the complexities and ambiguities of imperial rule, and indeed of the conceptualization of modernity and the implementation of progress, and also the extent to which imperialism itself was always being shaped and reshaped in the processes of imposition and continuation.

Already the author of an impressive account of the Indian Civil Service, Gilmour probes more broadly to consider the range of British life, including both men and women in his account. The key element was fortitude. If getting to India was for many years hard and uncertain, life in India was also often lonely and uncomfortable. This was particularly so for those scattered in distant areas within the subcontinent.

Even new technology did not necessarily help. For example, as Gilmour points out, motoring in India was far from easy. Dust on the plains made motorbiking very difficult, even with goggles. Discarded crescent-shaped ox shoes were a hazard to cars, as was the overtaking of oxcarts on narrow roads.

Yet, despite the hardships, what is striking was the selfless dedication shown by officials in carrying out their duties. This included their willingness to stand up against planters who treated Indians harshly. Many of the planters had a dull time. For example, indigo planters lived isolated lives in what the travel writer Emma Roberts (1794–1840) termed "barbaric grandeur" and had to be prepared to ride forty or fifty miles for a party. At the same time, indigo planters tended to have the worst industrial relations, in part due to the unpredictability of their business, and in part due to their intimidatory behavior toward the growers. The planters were prone to using "bludgeon men" to enforce their views. The decline of the industry at the hands of synthetic indigo left the planters without assets. The old planting families that had intermarried tended to stay put, living in crumbling mansions among empty factories and half-empty stables, hemmed in by a jungle that was gradually reclaiming the land their ancestors had cleared. Tea was more profitable, but the planters still fought loneliness and ill-health.

Gilmour's discussion covers many groups of people: Old Etonians, the military, as well as

the Indian Medical Services and the police. The Odessa-born Inspector Simon Favel, a winner of the King's Police Medal, was also a beneficiary of payoffs from the Bombay (Mumbai) brothels he was charged with supervising. His superior, "Fatty" Vincent, proved more lenient than the Indian government found appropriate. Hector Munro ("Saki") and Eric Blair ("George Orwell"), two among the ninety British police officers in Burma, were very different.

Few went too far, although one who did, and who was regarded as a brilliant impersonator of natives, was Richard Burton, whose "research" into the homosexual brothels of Karachi was deemed too diligent for an army officer. But fewer Britons took up Indian customs and habits as the nineteenth century wore on. ("Fakir missionaries," however, abandoned British-style life in order to live in the wilderness.) And at least by the late Raj, few officials in India copied the political agent to the Naga Hills, a Surgeon-Major Brown, who "registered the birth of two of his children by separate women on the same day." A few women went native, and fascinating examples are discussed, notably Ursula Graham Bower, who did so in the Naga country in 1938, being treated as the reincarnation of a former goddess. There is also an impressive section on "quaint loafers," who, as a category, it must be said, are not limited to the Raj.

Somewhat differently, Gilmour notes that those successful in the arts tended to be painters, for example Thomas and William Daniell. Gilmour could have made more of William Hodges, Johann Zoffany, and Tilly Kettle. In contrast to the visual arts, the British audience in India for professional theater was small. Amateur dramatics were popular but dangerous. Maud Driver observed in 1909 that "the two most insidious" pitfalls for women on their own "were amateur theatricals and the military man on leave," which together were "accountable for half the domestic tragedies in India." Keeping a piano or church organ fit for use also proved very difficult.

All of life is here, including drunkenness and work, adultery and food. "Bibis," native mistresses, played a particularly important role in British India until the arrival of large numbers of Evangelicals. Marriages at all levels of society were less frequent than relationships with a bibi, although David Ochterlony, the Resident in Delhi early in the nineteenth century, is reported to have had thirteen wives, each of whom had her own elephant in order to accompany him on his evening ride around the city walls. There were affectionate relationships as well as others that were somewhat different. In the middle of the nineteenth century, Colonel Meadows Taylor was found living at Sholapur like "a Turkish pasha in the midst of a well-filled harem" that included one girl whose sole duty was to "mull" the colonel's eyebrows. The late-Victorian move away from such relationships, however, meant not just a decline of intimacy but also a loss of understanding and connection between the British and the natives.

Nevertheless, in Burma (Myanmar), where the climate was considered too harsh for British women, liaisons with local women continued to be commonplace for far longer. Purity campaigners came into play in the 1900s. Ada Castle and her husband Reginald criticized officials who lived with Burmese women, which led to pressure from British higher-ups to part with them. In the end, however, most of the relevant officials married their mistresses.

In the 1930s, printed apology cards were in circulation in India that included options for ticking if guilty of inebriation, singing ribald songs, breaking china and glassware, or insisting on telling naughty stories. Such activities frequently were inspired by boredom, and Gilmour shows that there was much of that, and at all levels of British society. Loneliness was not the sole issue. In addition, adventurous officers found they saw scant action. As a result, they used to volunteer for wars outside India, notably in Africa prior to the First World War. Churchill's peripatetic Indian career provides a good example of the search for gallantry. He left India, then returned to serve on the Malakand Field Force, left to go to the Sudan, went back to India to play polo, and finally departed for the Boer War.

Gilmour discusses the difficulties facing British women, both married and not. Many

women were married straight "off the ship" in Bombay. They often became disillusioned with colonial life, not least because of the practice of transferring employees frequently. They also discovered that many of their homes lacked the amenities found in Britain. After the First World War, both women and men became accustomed to a different social life in which mixing with Indians in public became more common, notably in bridge parties, tennis parties, lawn parties, and even dances. Gilmour argues, however, that, until the last years of the Raj, genuine interracial friendships were rare. As he notes, the obstacles of power, prejudice, race, and religion were too forbidding. The responses of writers, including E. M. Forster and Paul Scott, are profitably discussed in this section. Other issues tackled include homosexual relationships, servants, the need to eat fish at breakfast because it went off quickly (hence that delicious Anglo-Indian dish called kedgeree), and the role of club life. This is a superb book, interesting throughout and well-written. It will do much to revise popular misconceptions of British rule in India.

Optimists, not madmen

Boris Groys, editor
Russian Cosmism.
The MIT Press, 264 pages, $27.95

reviewed by Andrew Stuttaford

If nothing else, the Bolshevik Revolution was seen as an absolute break with the past. That is how it was planned, how it was hymned ("We'll burn up Raphael for our Tomorrow's sake," wrote Vladimir Kirillov; he was shot twenty years later), and how many of its opponents understood it. With the exception of those realists who regarded it as a reversion to barbarism, Red October was perceived as something essentially modern, or, even, to some, as rather more than modern, a pathway, to borrow a pre-revolutionary phrase from Trotsky, towards a "radiant future."

The imagining of that radiant future owed more to ancient fantasies than a Lenin or Trotsky would ever admit, even probably to themselves. But burrow through their verbiage, eliminate the preoccupations of time and place—czars and capital and imperialism—and it becomes obvious that the Bolsheviks, or at least their truest believers, were merely the latest generation of millennialist fanatics to bother our planet, even if they wanted to build rather more of Heaven here on earth (or "earths"—I'll get to that) than their predecessors. "We are kindling a new eternity," declaimed the poet Vladimir Mayakovsky shortly after the revolution—and a decade or so before his suicide.

Read the words that follow Trotsky's reference to "a radiant future" and the breadth of his vision is impossible to miss: "Man, strong and beautiful, will become master of the drifting stream of his history and will direct it towards the boundless horizons of beauty, joy and happiness." Trotsky returned to this mirage just over twenty years later in some passages in *Literature and Revolution* (1924). The communist Heaven on earth was to be Promethean, with man moving "rivers and mountains." Man himself would be its greatest project. "The most complicated methods of artificial selection and psychophysical training" would be used to "create a higher social biologic type, or, if you please, a superman."

Trotsky clearly anticipated that his superman would be able to live a (very) long time, but he doesn't seem to have expected him to be immortal. Compared with what the Russian philosopher Nikolai Fedorov (1829–1903) had in mind, Trotsky's was a narrow, crabbed, shirker's Prometheanism. Fedorov dreamed bigger dreams. He insisted that humanity's (compulsory) "common task" should be not the postponement of death but its defeat, a demanding enough objective even without Fedorov's typically maximalist twist. Immortality was not enough. All the dead must also be brought back to life. In a rare nod to practicality, Fedorov admitted that completing the common task would take a very long while. In the meantime, however, it would provide mankind with a great unifying purpose (under the direction, conveniently, of a Russian autocrat). It would also push our species into space, as we

searched for the particles necessary to restore long-perished ancestors, many of whom would have to be re-engineered (in ways infinitely more extensive than anything envisaged by Trotsky) so that they could survive on some distant planet: all those Lazaruses, you see, would be too numerous for earth (by this time transformed into a spaceship, "a great electric boat") to host.

An eccentric's eccentric (slept on a trunk, vegetarian, librarian, odd views about sex, mistaken for a beggar in the street, impressed Tolstoy), Fedorov wrote reams and attracted a few devotees but published very little during his lifetime. Nevertheless, he became known as the father of "cosmism," an ill-defined mishmash of beliefs, convictions, and delusions, not all of which he would have shared. Cosmism, or ideas that could be squeezed into that obligingly elastic pigeonhole, drew growing attention before the revolution, and considerably more in the decade of utopian hysteria that followed it, including, in every probability, from Trotsky. In his introduction to *Russian Cosmism*, a collection of writings by some of the better-known (in Russia at least; over here, well . . .) cosmists published last year, the New York University professor Boris Groys observes how many cosmists took Trotsky's side during his duel with Stalin.

Stalin, who had his own more downbeat take on the future, did not approve of cosmism and would not have been convinced by post-revolutionary efforts to strip it of its mystical baggage. He thought even less of those who sympathized with Trotsky. Under the circumstances, it is unsurprising that a number of cosmists were forced into the queue for resurrection earlier than they might have hoped. Others served long terms in the Gulag. But some "scientific cosmists" (cosmism is a tree with many branches), valuable to the regime in other respects, were tolerated so long as they kept their esoteric philosophizing mainly to themselves. Konstantin Tsiolkovsky (1857–1935) may have been inspired by Fedorov's visions of space travel, but he was also the father of Russian rocketry, and, despite official unease over some of his views, was supported by the Soviet state.

Other cosmists' encounters with science were less successful. Alexander Bogdanov (1873–1928), an early associate of Lenin and a revolutionary, doctor, science-fiction writer, and much more besides, recommended blood transfusions from the young to the old as a way of reversing aging. As the appearance of a "blood boy" in an episode of the television show *Silicon Valley* suggests, this theory is going through a revival, but it killed Bogdanov. He died after an exchange of blood with a student who had been written off by her doctors owing to malaria and tuberculosis. She, amazingly, recovered.

Interest in cosmism within Russia began to pick up again in the waning days of the Soviet Union and has gathered speed since. Anton Vaino, Vladimir Putin's chief of staff since 2016, no less, has claimed to be the co-inventor of a "Nooscope," a device designed as a technocratic tool to study humanity's collective consciousness. This is a questionable proposition at many levels, but it was undoubtedly inspired by the thinking of Vladimir Vernadsky (1863–1945), some sort of cosmist, but a good enough geologist to be awarded a Stalin Prize rather than a stint in the Gulag—or worse. Cosmism's comeback in post-Soviet Russia is part of a much broader effort to reconnect with an intellectual heritage wrecked by the long communist ascendancy. It has also helped that Fedorov's preference for autocracy and his belief in a uniquely Russian form of manifest destiny fits into attempts to cobble together an ideological structure for a Putin regime that no longer finds Western liberalism compatible with its ambitions.

Cosmism is a slippery, protean concept. Anyone hoping that Professor Groys's book will offer anything approaching a precise definition of what cosmism was (and is) will inevitably be disappointed. To be sure, Groys's introduction does include some useful clues, notably the contrast between the cosmists' view that science could fulfill the millennialist hopes of the past and the Futurist conviction that the new technologies of the twentieth century represented a chance to start again from scratch. Groys also spells out how Fedorov's ideas were

(at least notionally) rooted in materialism: to Fedorov, the soul had no existence separate from the body, let alone any prospect of outlasting it. But because, as Groys summarizes it, everything was "material, physical, everything [was] technically manipulable," a properly organized society—a requirement that aligned some initially unsympathetic cosmists with Soviet statism and, in some cases, totalitarianism—should, in the end, be able to bring back the dead. Indeed, it had a moral obligation to do so. Why should admission to Utopia be confined to the (currently) living?

Yes, this was nuts, but it was a nuttiness not so far removed from what some in the Bolshevik hierarchy were saying (Trotsky was not alone), and it was embraced with enthusiasm by zanier elements on the revolutionary fringe. The Biocosmists-Immortalists called for "immortality, resurrection, rejuvenation . . . and the freedom to move in cosmic space." They were "daring," one prominent Biocosmist conceded, but "optimists, not madmen."

After his introduction, Groys throws the reader in at the deep end, leaving him to work his own way through a well-chosen selection of writings (many only recently republished in Russian, and never translated before into English) that are both of scholarly interest and an intriguing glimpse into a certain state of mind. They can be heavy going—"Here I present only sixteen theorems of life"—but are not without their highlights, among them weather control, intra-atomic energy, a worldwide labor army, homes in the ether, the colonization of space, a spot of eugenics, "happy atoms," and a mad sci-fi story from Bogdanov: "Margarita Anche, a blossoming woman of seven hundred and fifty . . . " But any newbies relying solely on Groys's introduction for their understanding of cosmism will be left somewhat bewildered. This book is better read alongside works such as George M. Young's *The Russian Cosmists* (2012) and *The Occult in Russian and Soviet Culture* (1997), edited by Fordham University's Bernice Glatzer Rosenthal. The title of the latter is yet another much-needed reminder that Soviet history is not always what we have been led to believe.

Demolition man

Sue Prideaux
I Am Dynamite!:
A Life of Nietzsche.
Tim Duggan Books, 464 pages, $30

reviewed by Henrik Bering

It is one of those famous meetings in history, and it starts on a note of farce. It all began on November 9, 1868. Returning to his digs after having delivered a lecture for Leipzig University's Classical Society, the twenty-four-year-old student Friedrich Nietzsche finds a note waiting for him: "If you want to meet Richard Wagner, come at 3:45 p.m. to the Café Théâtre," signed Windisch, a fellow student.

Locating his friend to ask him what this was all about, Nietzsche learns that Wagner has slipped secretly into town and has been told that Nietzsche already knows Walther's prize-winning song from Wagner's brand-new opera *Die Meistersinger*, the score for which was just out. Nietzsche relays: "Joy and amazement on Wagner's part! Announces his supreme will, to meet me incognito; I am to be invited for Sunday evening."

Wagner was the toast of Europe: in London he met Queen Victoria and Prince Albert, in Paris Princess Pauline Metternich, and to King Ludwig of Bavaria he was "my adored and angelic friend." In his youth, however, Wagner had been a radical, manning the barricades in Dresden in 1849 and so was living in exile in Switzerland at this point.

The occasion obviously calls for the proper duds, and Nietzsche's smart new evening suit arrives just in time. But then comes the delicate question of payment: the little old messenger insists on cash on delivery. Nietzsche details the chaotic scene:

> I am amazed and explain that I will not deal with him, an employee, but only with the tailor himself. The man presses. Time presses. I seize the things and begin to put them on. He seizes the things, stops me from putting them on—force from my side; force from his side. Scene: I am

fighting in my shirttails, endeavoring to put on my new trousers.

A show of dignity, a solemn threat. Cursing my tailor and his assistant, I swear revenge. Meanwhile he is moving off with my things. End of second Act. I brood on my sofa in my shirttails and consider black velvet, whether it is good enough for Richard.

Outside the rain is pouring down. A quarter to eight. At seven thirty we are to meet at the Café Théâtre. I rush out into the windy, wet night, a little man in black without a dinner jacket.

Fortunately, the evening is a success: Wagner performs "all the important parts of the *Meistersinger*, imitating each voice and with great exuberance." He "wants to know exact details of how I became familiar with his music." The two of them engage in a vivid conversation about the philosopher Arthur Schopenhauer, whom they both admire.

Nietzsche gushed, "Finally, when we were both getting ready to leave, he warmly shook my hand and invited me with great friendliness to visit him, in order to make music and talk philosophy."

The trouser fight kicks off Sue Prideaux's life of Nietzsche, *I Am Dynamite!*, which marks a natural progression from her previous two biographies of Munch and Strindberg. To those of us who value common sense, sound judgment, and quiet elegance, these three men are not exactly favorites—and nor is Wagner—but such reservations are blown away by the author's formidable narrative powers, confirming her place among Britain's top biographers.

Prideaux's books brilliantly evoke the decadent atmosphere in Europe of that time, with its toxic mix of nationalism, rampant anti-Semitism, anarchism, and hate-filled malcontents going off to found colonies in South America. Summing up the doom-laden mood of the day is the Swiss symbolist Arnold Böcklin's painting *Island of the Dead* (1880), which shows a tall, ghostly figure and a coffin being rowed over to something like Venice's Cemetery Island, a print of which was a must for every self-respecting intellectual from Strindberg to Freud. Needless to say, Hitler liked it, too.

Born in the Saxon town of Röcken to a Protestant clergyman who died early due to "brain-softening," Nietzsche was always a delicate child: from the age of eleven, the boy had blinding headaches and fits of vomiting, forcing him to lie in a darkened room because of extreme sensitivity to light.

"Precocious" seems a somewhat inadequate word when applied to Nietzsche. His philosophical bent had revealed itself early. Determined though he was to follow in his father's footsteps, his beliefs at the age of twelve did not altogether square with the official version. Considering the construction of the Holy Trinity of God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit illogical, he came up with a "marvelous" Trinity all his own, consisting of "God the Father, God the Son, and God the Devil."

Nietzsche explained: "My deduction was that God, thinking himself, created the second person of the godhead, but that to be able to think himself he had to think his opposite, and thus had to create it.—That is how I began to philosophize."

Teachers at Schulpforta, the elite school he subsequently attended, worried about his unhealthy fascination with the poet Friedrich Hölderlin and "the soul-shaking, godforsaken internal territory that Hölderlin explores," in Prideaux's words. After going mad, the poet had ended up as a tourist attraction living in a tower ruin in Tübingen "full of owls"—what Nietzsche called Hölderlin's "grave of long madness."

"By the age of seventeen, then, a pupil at the foremost German school devoted to the civilized cult of Olympic reason and clarity, Nietzsche was exploring the idea of emancipatory insanity and the validity of the irrational," writes Prideaux. At Schulpforta, his illness continued: the headaches and the nausea. He was given colored glasses to protect his eyes, and his doctor predicted he would go blind.

Having passed his *Abitur*, he enrolled at the University of Bonn's theological faculty, but he soon transferred to Leipzig, having dropped theology in favor of classical philology. Shortly after meeting Wagner and though still a student, he was offered the Chair of Classical

Philology at Basel University, the youngest ever to be accorded this honor.

The central relationship in the book is Nietzsche's friendship with Wagner, who, as Prideauz makes clear, "is the person who features more often in Nietzsche's writing than any other, including Christ, Socrates or Goethe."

Music had been Nietzsche's great passion ever since his school days, when he had discovered Wagner. He wrote: "All things considered, my youth would have been intolerable without Wagner's music." Though he had dropped his initial ambition of becoming a musician, he was an accomplished singer and pianist, known for his frenzied improvisations.

The bond established on their first meeting secured him an invitation to Tribschen, Wagner's villa in Lucerne which the composer shared with his future wife Cosima (one of Franz Liszt's daughters), their son Siegfried, their huge Newfoundland dog Russ, and their two peacocks Wotan and Fricka.

Descriptions of the pink nightmare that was Tribschen never fail to amaze: its walls covered in red and gold damask, or in "a special shade of violet velvet" designed to set off the marble busts of Wagner and King Ludwig, the windows "muted by drifts of pink gauze and shimmering satin." And let's not forget the carpet, fashioned from the "breast feathers of flamingos bordered with peacocks' feathers."

The "heavily operatic atmosphere," in Prideaux's words, was heightened by the paintings from Wagner's operas—Brünnhilde, Siegfried and the dragon, the Valkyries—and by the laurel wreaths scattered like "hunting trophies" throughout. "The perfume of roses, tuberoses, narcissi, lilacs and lilies hung heavy on the air," writes Prideaux. "No scent was too narcotic, no price too extravagant" for these striking blooms.

Like some force of nature, Nietzsche's host would sweep into the room in his full Rembrandt get-up,

> grasping the velvet beret that hung down over his left eye like a black cockscomb . . . all the while talking, talking, talking . . . . Now smiling ear to ear, now turning emotional to the point of tears, now working himself up into a prophetic frenzy, all sorts of topics found their way into his extraordinary flights of improvisation . . . Overwhelmed and dazed by all this, [we] laughed and cried along with him, sharing his ecstasies, seeing his visions; we felt like a cloud of dust stirred up by a storm, but also illuminated by his imperious discourse, frightful and delightful at once.

So well did they hit it off that Nietzsche was granted his own room at Tribschen, the only person apart from King Ludwig to be accorded this honor, notes Prideaux. His room became known as the *Denkstube*, "the Thinking Room." Wagner told him, "I now have nobody with whom I can take things up as seriously as you, with the exception of the Unique One," meaning Cosima.

This was a great honor, writes the author, but it was a two-way street: it was useful for Wagner to have a promising young man such as Nietzsche championing his music. Nietzsche's first book, *The Birth of Tragedy from the Spirit of Music* (1872), thus glorified Wagner's Music of The Future, which through its Dionysian quality was going to reawaken mankind from mediocrity.

Nietzsche also came in handy for more lowly tasks such as buying silk underpants in Basel for the Great Man. As he confessed on the occasion: "Once you've chosen a God, you've got to adorn him."

The smart set visiting Tribschen were equally perfumed and included the decadent poet Catulle Mendès ("a blond Christ" but with a personality so poisonous that Guy de Maupassant dubbed him "a lily in urine") and his smoldering wife Judith Gautier with her "buxom figure and nonchalance of an Oriental woman," as Théodore Aubanel described her: "One ought to see her lying on a tiger-skin and smoking a narghile."

In a class all his own is of course Mad King Ludwig, Wagner's benefactor. At his own Schloss, after having breakfasted at seven in the evening, surrounded by sixty candles, "his night was usually spent gliding through his moonlit gardens in his swan-carved sleigh to

snatches of Wagner's music performed by concealed musicians," Prideaux writes.

Nietzsche considered the time he spent at Tribschen the happiest of his life, but once Wagner and Cosima moved to Bayreuth, his relations with them cooled. Nietzsche came to see Wagner as "a disease," and his music "a befogging metaphysical seduction." He was no longer content to be a worshipper at somebody else's altar. Wagner was now relegated to being a mere "interpreter and transfigurer of a past," while Nietzsche reserved for himself the part of "seer of a future."

Prideaux traces his development as a philosopher, from his early fascination with Schopenhauer, who claimed that behind the physical world lies a rapacious metaphysical will, and with Burckhardt, who killed off the notion of objectivity, followed by a brief flirtation with rationalism, and then on to his ultimate rejection of any kind of belief system, be it religious or scientific.

Accordingly, Nietzsche pronounces God dead and with him the Christian values which he views as a resentful slave morality in its glorification of self-abnegation and suffering. Instead of being life affirmers, Christians were life deniers. The notion of pity he dismisses as part of the slave mentality. Science builds on equally shaky ground, where theories fervently held today turn out to be duds tomorrow.

The "superman," then, is the person who is able to live with uncertainty, who, having moved beyond good and evil, embraces his fate and his mortality. "Want nothing different, neither backward or forward for all eternity. Not just to tolerate necessity—but to love it," Nietzsche wrote in "Why I Am so Clever" from *Ecce Homo*.

Exactly how this enviable state of equanimity is achieved is left up to the individual. To this reviewer, at least, his ideas appear a hopeless mishmash of other peoples' thoughts, though no one can deny his genius for coming up with the arresting phrase.

As for the evolution of his writing style, Prideaux finds it closely linked to his afflictions. His frequent bouts of illness, ascribed by some of his doctors to the pernicious effects of masturbation, made him unable to write for weeks, sometimes months, at a time.

Without a doubt, his poor health had a strong psychological component, which he himself grants: "People like us . . . never suffer just physically—it is all deeply entwined with spiritual crises—so I have no idea how medicine and kitchens can ever make me well again."

Dependent on the help of friends to decipher his notes, says Prideaux, he turned his handicap into a strength by resorting to aphorisms. Starting out as "fortune-cookie mottoes," they soon acquired their full punching power—"What doesn't kill me makes me stronger" or "No victor believes in chance"—no mean feat, she remarks, given the "cumbersome" requirements of German grammar.

According to his own definition, "an aphorism, properly stamped and molded, has not been 'deciphered' when it has simply been read; rather, one then has to begin its *exegesis*."

Moving on, we learn about his infatuation with the Russian aristocratic femme fatale Lou Salomé; his restless travels lugging along his "club foot" of one hundred and four kilos of books; and his increasingly erratic behavior and galloping megalomania, until he suffered a complete breakdown in Turin, possibly triggered by the sight of a horse being whipped.

His friends brought him back to Basel and then to a psychiatric clinic in Jena. Given his long fascination with madmen as prophets, they were not altogether certain that this was not an act, but the doctors at Jena had no doubts. They diagnosed him as being in the end stage of syphilis.

Nietzsche was no stranger to brothels and had been treated for gonorrhea twice, notes Prideaux. But given the fact that his father had died from a brain malady and that he went on to live for eleven more years, she regrets that he was not examined by the head doctor at Jena on admission.

His mother was granted custody of her son. Having returned from a failed venture to found a German colony in Paraguay, his sister Elisabeth joined them, and when the mother died, she took full control of Nietzsche. By this time, Nietzsche's work had been championed

by the influential Danish literary critic Georg Brandes and by Munch and Strindberg, and he was suddenly a hot name in Berlin and Paris.

With funds provided by a rich Nietzsche admirer, Elisabeth bought a house in Weimar, Villa Silberblick, setting up a kind of competing temple to that of Cosima Wagner in Bayreuth, with herself as the chief priestess.

"Elisabeth liked to display [Nietzsche] after dinner. Often she arranged for him to be half-glimpsed through a misty curtain, like a spirit at a séance," writes Prideaux. When in Weimar on publishing business, the young Count Harry Kessler would spend the night at the villa and would be awakened by Nietzsche's "long, raw moaning sounds, which he screamed into the night with all his might; then all was still again," as he described it in his diary.

Nietzsche died on August 25, 1900. Elisabeth did not find his first death mask satisfactory, so ordered a second one with a heightened forehead and more hair.

"I know my fate. One day there will be associated with my name the recollection of something frightful—of a crisis like no other before on earth, of the profoundest collision of conscience, of a decision evoked *against* everything that until then had been believed in, demanded, sanctified. I am not a man. I am dynamite," Nietzsche wrote in "Why I Am a Destiny" from *Ecce Homo*.

Do these words make Nietzsche the ur-Nazi? According to Prideaux, the passage has been wrongly interpreted as a prophecy of the coming of the Third Reich and as a kind of advance approval of its deeds. Rather, it refers to the self-imposed demolition job he undertook of blowing up the moral values of the past.

Unlike Wagner, she states, he was a committed European, he was not an anti-Semite, and, as the self-described "philosopher of 'perhaps,'" he welcomed contradiction and provocation.

As for the notion of "the blond beast," which Nietzsche claims will be let loose on the world at regular intervals, this is not necessarily meant as a racial term. Prideaux quotes from Nietzsche's *On the Genealogy of Morality:*

> At the center of all these noble races we cannot fail to see the beast of prey, the magnificent *blond beast* avidly prowling round for spoil and victory; this hidden center needs release, from time to time the beast must out again, must return to the wild:—Roman, Arabian, Germanic, Japanese nobility, Homeric heroes, Scandinavian Vikings—in this requirement they are all alike. It was the noble races which left the concept of the "barbarian" in their traces wherever they went; even their highest culture betrays the fact that they were conscious of this and indeed proud of it.

Prideaux paraphrases the Nazi intellectual Ernst Krieck: "apart from the fact that Nietzsche was not a socialist, not a nationalist and opposed to racial thinking, he could have been a leading National Socialist thinker."

This being said, Prideaux admits that "there is no doubt [his writings] contain ugly elements which could be developed further into incitements to racism and totalitarianism. It would be naïve simply to ignore them as a starting point for the connective power of thought to spread infection."

Villa Silberblick was crawling with Nazi types, as Prideaux observes, precisely the kind of scum Nietzsche had warned could hijack his ideas: "Thus I counsel you my friends: mistrust all in whom the drive to punish is strong! Those are people of bad kind and kin; in their faces the hangman and the bloodhound are visible . . . ."

Hitler and Speer showed up, and Elisabeth gave Hitler Nietzsche's walking stick on one occasion. But it is unclear if Hitler ever studied him. Prideaux quotes an exchange between Leni Riefenstahl, the director of *Triumph of the Will*, and her Führer. She asks him if Nietzsche was among his sources of inspiration. "No, I can't really do much with Nietzsche . . . he is not my guide."

"The complicated ideas contained in the books were of no use to him," writes Prideaux, "but simple slogans and titles such as the *Übermensch*, the 'will to power,' 'master morality,' 'the blond beast,' and 'beyond good and evil' could be put to infinite misuse."

They certainly were.

Notebook

Naming things as they are

by Christopher Childers

In August 2017, during the Charlottesville riots, I was on the Gulf of Corinth for a two-week Ancient Greek seminar with a focus on Hesiod, when the old antagonism between letters and life reared its head again. American academics, musing aloud, wondered why we had chosen Classics over direct engagement: who cares about the minutiae of Dark Age wagon construction now? In Greece the murderously neo-Nazi Golden Dawn, bolstered by the financial and immigration crises, had finished third in the 2015 elections, but commiserations of the Greeks were little comfort. Few of us could recall a time when our own national attempt at *Eunomia*, good order, seemed so precarious, when the groundwork of achieved civilization felt more like a rug being pulled out from under our feet. (Needless to say, in the interim those anxieties have hardly diminished.)

We might have been heartened to learn that, not twelve hundred kilometers away, the American poet A. E. Stallings was putting the finishing touches on her translation of the *Works and Days* and forcefully arguing for Hesiod's enduring value.[1] Her work offers an implicit rebuke of the old Eliotic "dissociation of sensibility," or what I will call, less catchily, intellectual expatriation, a learned hyperopia that emphasizes the distance between past and present, object and subject, and resists analogies between them. Though born of conscientiousness, this habit of mind "others" its partisans from their native soil while never quite letting them feel at home in another. Intellectually, it's like spending all your time in a museum, seeing everything clearly, behind glass. Stallings, however, is an actual expatriate who uses Hesiod's language to buy bread and raise her children among the ruins; she (as she says) went to school in Athens, Georgia, and now resides in Athens, Greece. Her mind is assimilative, evidently unable to make sharp distinctions between her life on the page and off it. Another term for this chronic condition might be "poet."

So it's refreshing when Stallings claims the poet's prerogative of grounding her slender book in its own time and place in a way no original can avoid but which translations rarely attempt. Stallings speaks to translating Hesiod *now*:

> I even took, while working on the *Works and Days*, to describing Hesiod as though he were a contemporary poet I was translating, one living out in the boondocks of Boeotia, agitated about the corrupt government, in a lawsuit with his wastrel of a brother. Greeks would nod their heads in recognition. . . . When Hesiod says: "I would not be an honest man, not now,/ Nor wish it for my son—when I see how/ It's evil to be honest in a land/ Where crooks and schemers have the upper hand," he seemed to be speaking to the present moment, and for the average Greek citizen.

Hesiod's obsession with themes of debt, profit, and money Stallings connects to the on-

1 *Works and Days*, by Hesiod, translated by A. E. Stallings; Penguin Classics, 112 pages, $9 (paper).

going financial crisis in Greece, and his biography, as the son of "an economic migrant from Asia Minor," to the influx of refugees from the Middle East. Stallings has volunteered at a shelter in Athens for several years now, teaching poetry and baseball. She's written about the refugee crisis, too, in verse and prose; for the verse, read the brilliant and uncompromising "Empathy," or this found poem, from a list of useful phrases in a Volunteer's Guide:

> sorry it has run out
> we do not have it now
> new shoes only if yours are broken
> wait here, please
> I will return soon

I like to think of Stallings assisting Hesiod's immigration to the present in much the same way she does for the refugees passing through Piraeus. Such assistance is the opposite of *xenophobia*: *xenophilia*, perhaps, or *philoxenia*, all words that have made it to us from Hesiod's language. There is also simply *xenia*, hospitality. Greek poets commonly apply the epithet *Xenios*, God of Hospitality, to Zeus, who punished one famous failure of it with the Trojan War. We could do worse than think of translation as a kind of philoxeny, and *xenia* as the attitude proper to translator and reader alike.

Not that Hesiod's poem maps onto the contemporary landscape in any transparent way, or that the didacticism he basically invents is any more fashionable now than it ever was. The *Works and Days* is timely only in its timelessness, in the paradoxical sense by which the universal takes root in the local and the general in the specific. In the poem, Hesiod's brother, Perses, is the target of his lecturing, which mixes pithy aphorism and mythological digression (Pandora, the Five Ages of Man) with reflections on justice, hard work, the seasons (don't set sail in spring until figs are the size of a crow's foot), and the poet's own life. Some of his sayings have an enduring wisdom ("The greatest treasure/ Among men is a chary tongue; the pleasure,/ A tongue that moves in measure"), while others seem less applicable: "Make sure you do not stand/ Facing the sun when you piss." In general, the poem is less a Dark Age Farmer's Manual, to be consulted for advice on wagon construction (and good luck with that!), than a vehicle for Hesiod's personality and an articulation of his world, a capsule from a distant place and time—as, incidentally, Stallings's translation also is from a much nearer one.

Hesiod may be a little long in the tooth, but this new *Works and Days* is not a long book; it barely breaks a hundred pages, and does so only by virtue of notes and glossary; the front matter, comprising an introduction and translator's note, is a full twenty pages longer than the poem itself. (I should note that my name appears in the acknowledgments, as one of several readers fortunate to read parts of the translation in manuscript.) It is strange that this volume does not include Hesiod's other major surviving poem, the *Theogony*, about the origins of the universe from Chaos and the birth of the gods. Stallings discusses the *Theogony* extensively in her introduction; I wish she had also translated it.

In prose, Stallings makes for an appealing guide, elegant and accessible, intelligent and breezy. Her virtues include an intimate knowledge of modern Greece and a complete lack of dogmatism. She has no axes to grind. She weighs evidence and arrives at conclusions, sometimes even changing her mind in the process: Is Homer or Hesiod older? (She votes Hesiod.) Is Hesiod a misogynist? (More of a misanthropist.) She is also often funny. When asked by some incredulous scholar if she *really* believes that Hesiod was in a lawsuit with his brother, she answers instinctively, as a Greek might: "Who would make up being from *Ascra*?" As a poet, she suspects that when poets seem to be talking about their lives, they probably are. (Truth is easier than fiction.) In general, she is not so much intellectual as simply intelligent; she does not impose some theoretical point of view, but allows the poet's to emerge, as it were, from the ground up. That ground includes modern Greece, with references to which she often illuminates the text. Here, for example, is her Fermor-esque evocation of a pilgrimage to Ascra:

> The road swarmed with tractors and wagons—
> though not wagons anyone had had to fangle
> himself, out of a hundred timbers and baffling
> measurements—piled precariously high with
> grapes from the harvest. The streets swam with
> the juice of crushed grapes, and the air shim-
> mered and thrummed with must-inebriated bees.

That the past borders on the present, and is always there to be welcomed; that poems are made by people, not paradigms; and that poetry may change through the years, but "poets, not so much"—these are a few of the assumptions underlying this impressive performance.

On turning to the translation we first notice rhyming pentameter couplets. It would be wrong to call them "heroic," since they are open (enjambed) as often as closed; the better term is "riding rime," first used to describe the easy movement of the *Canterbury Tales*. Though Hesiod's poem is stichic, Stallings uses her distichs to full advantage, employing them flexibly to write with or against the rhyming closure as the occasion demands. When Hesiod, as often, packages his wisdom in a pithy aphorism, Stallings's couplets are up to the task with well-turned antitheses that are even Augustan:

> He harms himself who harms another man;
> The plotter is the worst hurt by the plan.
> . . .
> Befriend a friend, go meet the man who'll meet
> you.
> Give to a giver; don't to one who'll cheat you.
> Give begets gift, grasp: grudge. For Give is breath
> While Seize is evil, and her wages, death.
> . . .
> There's no shame
> In working, but in shirking, much to blame.

The last of these three has a particularly fine play of sense and rhyme, as the antithetical chimes of "working/shirking" contrast with the complementary "shame/blame" pair to create a kind of compressed envelope which is instantly memorable—important, if we countenance the Hesiodic genealogy that makes the Muses daughters of Memory.

Not every line is an aphorism, and Stallings's flexibility allows her to write against the rhymed enclosures as well, for variety and expressive effect. Take this description from the excellent passage on the winter month of Lenaion, in which the movement of the syntax through the lines is made to evoke the unstoppable wind:

> Falling on crowds of lofty oaks and dense
> Groves of fir, in the mountain dales, it bends
> Them down to the rich earth; the whole wood
> wails.
> The creatures shiver, and they tuck their tails
> Under their genitals; no matter how thick
> Their fur, the wind's cold cuts right to the quick.

The kinetic torque in the "dense/bends" rhyme is an especially fine touch. This passage in particular recalls another of Stallings's models for Hesiod's voice, Robert Frost, according to her "the most Hesiodic of modern poets in English." Frost is also a great master of writing against formal structures, as in the sonnet "Once by the Pacific," which the above lines recall and even replicate in technique. Both poets know their way around a couplet.

The interplay between closed aphoristic couplets and open discursive ones is on full display in the proem, where Stallings as it were sets out her prosodic stall:

> Muses from Pieria, whose song is fame,
> Come. Hymn your father Zeus, through whom
> a name
> Is won by mortal men, on every tongue,
> Or through whose mighty will they go unsung
> In anonymity. With ease he makes
> The weak man strong, with ease the strong he
> breaks,
> He brings forth the obscure, he levels the great,
> He withers the tall, and makes the crooked
> straight.
> Hear me, Sky-shaker, You who dwell on high,
> With justice put our laws to rights, while I
> Tell Perses the plain truths to steer him by.

Fluent enjambment in the first two couplets leads seamlessly into the snappily closed epigram of the next two, only to land on the

emphatic concluding triplet. But the virtuosity extends further—the sound does seem an echo to the sense. In line six notice the contrast between the recalcitrant strong stresses of "weak man strong" and the easy lockstep of "with ease the strong he breaks," as if the rhythmic resistance has broken before our eyes (or ears). This expressive flourish creates a similar effect in the fifth foot anapest of "levels the great." Now, as if a pattern were developing, another anapest quickly follows ("withers the tall"), providing a foil for the "straightened" rhythm of "makes the crooked straight." Thus the poet-translator is to her meter as Zeus to mortal men. Put next to, say, the opening of Emily Wilson's celebrated *Odyssey*, Stallings's versification will seem positively freewheeling. If writing in meter is like learning a language, in these two we can hear the difference between the linguist's deliberate correctness and the easy spontaneity of the poet "speaking her sweet and secret native tongue."

This is technical virtuosity, but it is more than that, too—it is assimilation. Literature is a complex system of relations among poets echoing and arguing with each other, declaring affinities and enemies, and marking off their own personal territory. In English, much of this system has been organized by the techniques Stallings employs so deftly here. Unlike many poet-translators, Stallings is not simply translating into Stallings, in whose own work other influences predominate: Housman, Byron, Bishop, Wilbur. Yet in using technical means to connect Hesiod with Chaucer, Frost, Cowper, and others, Stallings makes a home for him in the English poetic landscape, where he can live the sort of idiosyncratic life that he enjoys in Greek, at once timeless and contemporary. A master technician has not imposed her own style on her poet, but has chosen, from among those available, the most appropriate.

T. S. Eliot describes the assimilative instinct as follows:

> When the mind of a poet is perfectly equipped for its work, it is constantly amalgamating disparate experience; the ordinary man's experience is chaotic, irregular, fragmentary. The latter falls in love, or reads Spinoza, and these two experiences have nothing to do with each other, or with the noise of the typewriter or the smell of cooking; in the mind of the poet these experiences are always forming new wholes.

The poet-translator also forms a new whole, which takes its place in relation to the poet's own work, to contemporary poetry, and to the larger whole of poetry in English. In Stallings's hands, the compass widens further, to include modern Greece and the greater inhabited world (the *oikoumenē*). As such, her book offers an implicit answer and rebuke to my and my colleagues' soul-searching last August. Hesiod is alive and relevant to any mind lively enough to attend.

I suspect that Stallings is drawn to Hesiod not so much because he is somehow like her, *sympatico* as they say, but because he isn't. Or, he is, though not in any superficial way—reading the same newspapers, voting the same ticket—rather as one human being is like another when both are alive to the vagaries of experience, its dangers, drudgery, beauty, and transience, and share in the common struggle to articulate as much of it as possible. Are we alike or are we different? Well, yes. Similarly, should we try to wrangle a political opinion out of Hesiod, to place him, say, with the xenophobes or the xenophiles, we are unlikely to get very far. Instead, we are told, "Trust and mistrust alike have ruined men." His most direct statement seems to be the following:

> But when men deal in justice straight and fair
> Alike to citizen and foreigner
> And do not overstep law or presume,
> Their city flourishes, their people bloom.

His most oblique: "Few name things as they are." It is the effort to "name things as they are" that engages both Hesiod and Stallings, and to which we owe this wonderful little book.