The New Criterion

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A monthly review *edited by Roger Kimball*

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Notes & Comments: September 2019

Experiments against reality

It is often remarked that life seems to speed up as one gets older. Writing at the end of what feels to have been an exceptionally abbreviated summer, we are reminded once again of the accuracy of that observation.

Perhaps less often remarked, but we think no less pertinent, is the sense that life's increasing velocity is often accompanied by an increasing disparateness, as if all the contending forces one encounters are centrifugal, pushing things apart, fissiparous. By rights, summer's season should be lush and tranquil—if not lazy, exactly, then at least not frenzied. Summer should be a time for storing up, consolidation. But this summer, with its mass shootings, international unrest, and mysterious though convenient suicide of the predator Jeffrey Epstein, has known little tranquility.

Was it always thus? Maybe. One of the great benefits of studying history is to remind us of the still points beyond or behind the kaleidoscope of our quotidian miscellanies. Some things, the most important, do not change, which is the gravamen of Horace's wry observation that "*Caelum non animum mutant qui trans mare currunt*": those who rush across the sea change the sky above them, not their soul. What is unchanging is by nature sobering, for it confronts us with the unbreakable hardness of fact. One of the most arresting passages in the *Nicomachean Ethics* comes in Book I when, citing Plato, Aristotle observes that only those who have been well brought up and already possess "noble habits" can really profit from the study of ethics. There is an important sense in which, when it comes to *politikon*, to the science of life, one must already know what one sets out to learn.

The contrast between Aristotle's capacious understanding of politics and that bickering, resentment-filled practice that travels under the same name today is instructive. For Americans, every summer presents the spectacle of July 4, with its invitation to think back to the stupendous intellectual and political labors that forged a commercial republican government founded on dispersed sovereignty and the virtue of prudence. That holiday is followed quickly by its demonic counterpart, Bastille Day, which is presented as a celebration of freedom but really commemorates the eclipse or perversion of freedom. After all, the "storming" of the Bastille in 1789 was the spark that started the conflagration of the French Revolution. Unlike its American counterpart, in which the rule of law and the institutions of civil society survived the change of governments, the French Revolution was one of the signal bad events in world history. It consumed civil society and the centuries-old institutions of civilization. It was an unalloyed triumph of the totalitarian spirit, and in this respect it presaged and inspired that even greater as-

sault on decency and freedom, the Bolshevik Revolution, the opening act of one of the darkest chapters in human history. The butcher's bill for the French Revolution is many tens of thousands. Soviet Communism was responsible for the deaths of tens upon tens of millions and the universal immiseration of the people whose lives it controlled.

Yet every July 14 is full of cheery stories about Bastille Day. Why? It is generally a bootless errand, we know, to oppose myth with history, but truth demands that the effort be made.

One canard we were all brought up on is that the Bastille was a loathsome dungeon full of innocent political prisoners. In fact, it harbored not hordes but precisely seven inmates when the mob stormed it. Contrary to what you have been told, the prisoners were detained in good conditions. At least one was attended by his own chef. Bernard-René de Launay, the warden, was by all accounts a fair and patient man. But that did not save him from the mob's "revolutionary justice." They dragged him out of the fortress and stabbed him to death.

In fact, Bastille Day should be a day of national mourning or contrition. That it is not tells us a great deal—about the persistence of human credulousness, for one thing, and the folly of subordinating the imperfect, long-serving structures of civilization to the demands of impatient people infatuated by their own unquenchable sense of virtue. Alexis de Tocqueville, in his book on the *ancien régime*, said that "the contrast between benign theories and violent acts" was one of the Revolution's "strangest characteristics."

Strange it may have been, but it has turned out to be a regular feature of the totalitarian sensibility. What could be more benign-sounding than slogans about "liberty, equality, fraternity," *O Citoyen*, but how oppressive, how murderous, were their implementation "on the ground"? Robespierre cut to the chase when he spoke of "virtue and its emanation, terror." He knew that the index of the sort of virtue he proselytized—a heady confection inherited from Rousseau—was the rapidity with which *le rasoir national*, the guillotine, set about its grisly business. The pursuit of virtue by communists is a hundred, a thousand times bloodier and more soul-blighting.

The strange new fashionableness of what we might call "totalitarian chic" is another good reminder of the importance of studying history. It was right around Bastille Day that we read a news report about Bernie Sanders, the aging socialist senator from Vermont who is once again running for the presidency of the United States. It has long been known that Senator Sanders had chosen to spend his honeymoon in the Soviet Union. But we just learned this summer that he never availed himself of the opportunity of visiting Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn when the great writer and moral witness was living as a refugee in Cavendish, Vermont. Some comments about that story put his negligence down to ideology, as if Sanders, being a fan of the Soviet Union, made a silent protest by ignoring the famous anti-Soviet figure in his midst.

But we think that the deeper reason for his neglect was a quality of the socialist or communist or revolutionary sensibility that is too little remarked. We mean its ingrained, indeed its programmatic, lack of curiosity about other people.

The philosopher Sir Roger Scruton, in a thoughtful anatomy of the French Revolution, is one of the few people to underscore this feature of the totalitarian habit of mind. "This absence of curiosity," Scruton notes,

> is a permanent characteristic of the revolutionary consciousness. It can be seen in Marx, in his impoverished and impatient descriptions of the "full communism" towards which history is tending. And it is even more evident in the writings of Lenin, in which blocks of wooden language are constantly shifted so as to conceal the goal of communism from view.

An important reason for this lack of curiosity (and this was something also grasped by

both Burke and Tocqueville) is the prominent role that abstractions play in the mental and moral metabolism of the totalitarian sensibility. This feature was articulated with some poignancy by Rousseau, who, at the end of his life, sadly observed, "I think I know man, but as for men, I know them not." Thus it should come as no surprise that Rousseau, in an influential prelude to totalitarian dramas to come, insisted that true liberty consisted in sacrificing all merely individual wills to the imperatives of a "general will" whose dictates were as peremptory as they were abstract. As Rousseau put it in *The Social Contract*, anyone who would dare to undertake the creation of a people must feel himself capable of "changing human nature." Human reality is drained of dignity and becomes material to be shaped and formed according to the schemes of utopian power. Hence the terrifying logic of Stalin's observation that a single death is a tragedy, but a million deaths is a statistic. Revolutionaries do not trade in individuals, only masses.

We were struck by the story of Bernie Sanders's curiosity deficit because it seems to be such a widespread liability of our political class. Absorbed by their ideological battles, the political actors of the establishment—and we include here the army of consultants, lobbyists, staffers, and pundits as well as elected officials—seem to have constructed an all-but-impenetrable carapace that protects them from the unwanted intrusion of empirical reality. Their lives are given up entirely to politics. They thereby neglect the non- or pre-political reality which is the end for which politics labors, or should labor. This disaster was promulgated by the architects of the French Revolution, for whom there was no private sphere apart from the imperatives of the state, and perfected by Soviet Communism and its progeny, for whom the individual is faceless datum, a "cog" as Lenin put it, in the party machine.

The cruel and suffocating intrusiveness of those dystopian "experiments against reality" are not so seamlessly or so thoroughly implemented in American society. But anyone who looks around at the vast, unaccountable, self-engorging bureaucracy of the so-called administrative state, anyone who watches the ignorant and vituperative grandstanding of so many of our elected officials, cannot help but mark the parallels with the remorseless incuriosity that stood behind the totalitarian juggernaut as it systematically discounted truth for the sake of the accumulation of power. All of which is to explain why we regard Bastille Day as a sobering reminder of man's pernicious folly rather than an occasion for celebration.

Some family news

Attentive readers will note an important change on our masthead. The post of Poetry Editor, which was filled for many years by David Yezzi, is now occupied by Adam Kirsch. David, who has been associated with *The New Criterion* in various capacities since 1995, has for the last few years been editing *The Hopkins Review*, a fine literary quarterly published by Johns Hopkins University, where David now teaches. We will miss David's editorial interventions but look forward to his continued contributions to our pages. We also look forward to working with our new Poetry Editor, the redoubtable Adam Kirsch, winner of the 2002 New Criterion Poetry Prize, author of a shelf-full of books, and sometime literary editor for *The New York Sun*, *The New Republic*, and other publications. Adam now helps to edit the weekend Review section of *The Wall Street Journal*. Upon accepting the post, Adam wrote, "Readers of *The New Criterion* know that it has always played a unique role in contemporary poetry. Under David Yezzi, the magazine has done an unrivaled job of publishing poems that are informed by tradition yet genuinely original—poems that combine artistry and thoughtfulness in a high degree. I'm excited to take on the role of Poetry Editor in order to continue that mission, ensuring that *The New Criterion* remains a home for the best poetry being written today." We are delighted to welcome Adam to the *New Criterion* editorial team.

How the great truth dawned
by Gary Saul Morson

Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn's three-volume opus, *The Gulag Archipelago*, which some have called the most important masterpiece of the twentieth century, is subtitled: "An Experiment in Literary Investigation." Consider how odd that is. No Westerner would call such a work "literary," lest someone discount its documentary value. Literature is one thing, truth another, isn't that correct? But Solzhenitsyn insists that absolutely everything included is strictly factual, a claim validated when the Soviet Union fell and archives were opened. What, then, is literary about the book? It is worth noting that Russia's most recent winner of the Nobel Prize for literature, Svetlana Alexievich, also produced literary works that were purely factual. With these two writers we encounter something essential to the Russian tradition.

Russians revere literature more than anyone else in the world. When Tolstoy's novel *Anna Karenina* was being serialized, Dostoevsky, in a review of its latest installment, opined that "at last the existence of the Russian people has been justified." It is hard to imagine Frenchmen or Englishmen, let alone Americans, even supposing that their existence required justification; but if they did, they would surely not point to a novel. Would we mention the iPhone? But to Russians Dostoevsky's comment appeared unremarkable.

We usually assume that literature exists to depict life, but Russians often speak as if life exists to provide material for literature. Russians, of course, excel in ballet, chess, theater, and mathematics. They invented the periodic table and non-Euclidian geometry. Nevertheless, for Russians literature is in a class by itself. The very phrase "Russian literature" carries a sacramental aura. The closest analogy may be the status of the Bible for ancient Hebrews when it was still possible to add books to it.

The "canon," a term originally applied to authoritative Biblical books, still carries sacred significance for Russians, and even the Soviets did not challenge the status of nineteenth-century classics. Anyone who denigrates Russia's greatest poet, Alexander Pushkin, is likely to be called, without irony, a blasphemer. We think of Stalin as a thug, but he read literary manuscripts and sometimes decided what should be published. His phone call to Mikhail Bulgakov, which allowed the politically suspect writer to keep working, achieved mythic status. The poet Osip Mandelstam observed that only in Russia is literature so important that one can be shot for a poem.

If Americans want the truth about a historical period, we turn to historians, not novelists, but in Russia it is novelists who are presumed to have a deeper understanding. Tolstoy's *War and Peace* contradicted existing evidence, but for over a century now it is his version that has been taken as correct. The reason is that great writers, like prophets, see into the essence of things. And so Solzhenitsyn undertook to reach a proper understanding of the Russian Revolution by writing a series of novels about it, *The Red Wheel.* He made extensive use of archives, as any historian would, and his representation of historical events never

contradicts the documents. His fictional characters are often based on real people and are always historically plausible. From a Russian perspective, he expressed what even the best of historians could not: the truth. In his view, postmodern, relativist denial of truth betrayed the whole Russian literary tradition.

Solzhenitsyn claimed in his Nobel Prize speech: "Writers . . . can vanquish lies! In the struggle against lies, art has always won and always will. . . . Lies can stand up against much in the world but not against art. . . . *One word of truth outweighs the world* [according to the Russian proverb]." Proclaimed by a writer who survived seven years in the Gulag, such statements were not mere rhetoric, as they would be if uttered by an American writer—that is, if an American writer could do so with a straight face. They derive from a tradition in which great writers enjoy an almost mystical access to truth and bear the enormous responsibility of using their gift to discover and express it.

Nikolai Dobrolyubov, a disciple of Nikolai Chernyshevsky, Russia's most influential nineteenth-century critic, justified interpreting "the phenomena of life on the basis of a literary production" by arguing that great writers are, consciously or not, the greatest sociologists.

> We have no other way of knowing . . . what is beginning to permeate and predominate in the moral life of society but literature. . . . The author-artist, although not troubling to draw any general conclusions about the state of public thought and morality, is always able to grasp their most essential features. . . . As soon as it is recognized that an author-artist possesses talent, that is, the ability to feel and depict the phenomena with lifelike truth, this very recognition creates legitimate grounds for taking his productions as a basis for the discussion of . . . the epoch.

To be sure, a writer cannot begin with a thesis; he must rather use his writerly sensitivity to intuit what is going on, even if he cannot understand its implications. It is that sensitivity, and not any technical skill, that *makes* him a great writer. Though they hated the radical Dobrolyubov, Dostoevsky and Tolstoy would surely have agreed.

In assuming the role of "Russian writer," Solzhenitsyn was therefore claiming a status less comparable to "American writer" than to "Hebrew prophet." One of his characters asks: "Hasn't it always been understood that a major writer in our country . . . is a sort of second government?" In Russia, Boris Pasternak explained, "a book is a squarish chunk of hot, smoking conscience—and nothing else!" As conscience, literature demanded loyalty transcending all others. It was one's identity, even one's nationality. When the writer Vladimir Korolenko, who was half-Ukrainian, was asked his nationality, he famously replied: "My homeland is Russian literature." In her 2015 Nobel Prize address, Alexievich echoed Korolenko by claiming three homelands: her mother's Ukraine, her father's Belarus, and—"Russia's great culture, without which I cannot imagine myself." By culture she meant, above all, literature.

In principle, the relation of literature to history, with the former having greater access to the truth, applied to all disciplines concerned with human affairs. Chernyshevsky explained:

> In those countries where intellectual and social life has attained a high level of development, one can speak of a "division of labor" among the various branches of intellectual activity. Only one of those branches is known to us: literature. For that reason . . . literature plays a greater role in our intellectual life than French, German, and English literature play in the intellectual life of their respective countries, and it bears greater responsibility than the literature of any other nation. Russian literature . . . has the direct duty of taking an interest in the kind of subject matter that has elsewhere passed into the special competence of other fields of intellectual activity.

Chernyshevsky wrote when Russian achievements in numerous fields were just getting underway, but his view that literature must "take an interest" in all cultural areas explains why characters in Russian novels engage in long arguments about everything from the philosophy of language to the philosophy of history, as in Pasternak's *Doctor Zhivago*, and from ethics

and politics to theology and the implications of neurology, as in Tolstoy's *Anna Karenina* and Dostoevsky's *Brothers Karamazov*.

Thus for much the same reasons, the greatest works of Russian thought, aside from literature itself, typically take the form of literary criticism. Mikhail Bakhtin's remarkable contributions to philosophy, linguistics, psychology, folkloristics, and ethics occur in books on Dostoevsky, Rabelais, and the theory of the novel. To understand Russian theology and existential philosophy one needs to read Nicholas Berdyaev on Dostoevsky and Lev Shestov on Chekhov. Russian intellectual histories typically focus almost entirely on literary authors and critics, as none would do in England, where that would mean omitting Isaac Newton, Thomas Hobbes, John Locke, Adam Smith, and Charles Darwin.

Once in the West, Solzhenitsyn was understandably bewildered when Westerners were put off by his moral earnestness, which for him was essential to any significant author. They didn't like "how closely I identified with what I was portraying. In the West nowadays, the colder and more aloof the author, and the more a literary work departs from reality, transforming it into a game . . . the higher a work is esteemed." He had sinned against both existing literary norms and "political decency."

The very intellectuals who had once defended Solzhenitsyn condemned him when they discovered he did not share some of their views. They could not entertain the possibility that *they* had something to learn from a very different set of experiences. No, no, it was only *his* experience that was eccentric, while theirs reflected the way things really are! Foolishly, this survivor of Communist slave labor camps revealed himself "to be an enemy of socialism." Solzhenitsyn recalls a Canadian TV commentator who "lectured me that I presumed to judge the experience of the world from the viewpoint of my own *limited* Soviet and prison-camp experience. Indeed, how true! Life and death, imprisonment and hunger, the cultivation of the soul despite the captivity of the body: how very limited that is compared to the bright world of political parties, yesterday's numbers on the stock exchange, amusements without end, and exotic foreign travel!"

What most disturbed Solzhenitsyn was a "surprising uniformity of opinion" that life was about individual happiness—what else *could* it be about?—and that it was somehow impolite to refer without irony to "evil." Still worse, Solzhenitsyn traced this trivializing of human existence to "the notion that man is the center of all that exists, and that there is no Higher Power above him. And these roots of irreligious humanism are common to the current Western world and to Communism, and that is what has led the Western intelligentsia to such strong and dogged sympathy for Communism." After the Gulag, such ostensibly sophisticated sympathy seemed at best the most hopeless naïveté.

But wasn't Solzhenitsyn himself once an atheist and a Communist? Indeed he was, and *The Gulag Archipelago* narrates how, bit by bit, he changed his view of life. The book is not only a history but also an autobiography, and because Solzhenitsyn's experience was shared by so many others, *Gulag* offers itself as a *collective* autobiography. *I* was arrested this way; here are the ways others were arrested. I suffered *this* brutal interrogation; *others* underwent these other kinds of torture. As we examine the progress of souls in extreme conditions, a story—or rather a set of closely related stories—unfolds, and these suspenseful narratives command considerable dramatic interest. One way the book works as literature is as a sort of encyclopedia of possible novels.

Stalin famously remarked: one death is a tragedy, a million is a statistic. Literature exists to make us imagine a million tragedies.

For all prisoners, the first discovery was of unprecedented evil, evil they could never have imagined and in as pure a form as possible. One way Solzhenitsyn conveys this evil is to compare it with earlier supposed embodiments of it, especially the tsarist regime, which, throughout the Western world, was regarded as the symbol of pure oppression. Solzhenitsyn reflects: From 1876 to 1904, a period when Russian terrorists killed many top officials, including Tsar Alexander II, the regime executed 486 people, or 17 per year.

From 1905 to 1908—including the period of the revolution of 1905—executions "rocketed upwards" to 2,200, or 45 per month before coming to an abrupt halt. Although terrorists in those years killed more tsarist officials than that—were more sinning than sinned against—such brutality "astound[ed] Russian imaginations, calling forth tears from Tolstoy and indignation from Korolenko." Of course, from 1917 to the death of Stalin in 1953, 2,200 was about the number of people killed on an average *day*.

Solzhenitsyn often cites the memoirs of the revolutionary R. V. Ivanov-Razumnk, who compared his imprisonment under tsars and Soviets. Under the tsars, interrogation never involved torture, while under the Soviets it was routine. The tsars never thought of arresting relatives of criminals: Lenin remained free and was accepted to higher education although his brother had been hanged for his role in a conspiracy to murder Tsar Alexander III. The Soviets built camps for "the wives of the accused," and "member of the family of a traitor to the motherland" became a criminal category. In some periods, the children of these traitors were put in orphanages, where most died, while in others they were simply executed. The tsars never conducted arrests at random, but Stalin issued quotas for each district, and Lenin explicitly called for the arbitrary execution of innocent people, since killing the innocent, he explained, would create a terrorized, therefore submissive, population.

Solzhenitsyn's comment about "the tears of Tolstoy" exhibits the peculiar irony with which *Gulag* is narrated. Indeed, the book's closest literary relative is probably Gibbon's *Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*, which is also a masterpiece of history as irony. But even Gibbon never produced passages as savage as this one:

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

What sort of people were these interrogators and those who directed them? What went through their minds? To understand evil one must probe the souls of evil-doers, and Russian history offered ample material. That question arises frequently in a literary genre Russians invented, the prison-camp novel, beginning with Dostoevsky's harrowing *Notes from the House of the Dead* (1860–1862). But even this experience seems positively balmy compared to Stalin's slave labor camps. The unprecedented Soviet experience prompted memoirists to ask how people could do these things, although the Nazi, Maoist, Khmer Rouge, and other totalitarian regimes that followed did so again.

Compared to Soviet interrogators, Solzhenitsyn observes, the villains of Shakespeare, Schiller, and Dickens seem "somewhat farcical and clumsy to our contemporary perception." The problem is, these villains recognize themselves as evil, and say to themselves, I cannot live unless I do evil. But that is not at all the way things are, Solzhenitsyn explains: "To do evil a human being must first of all believe that what he's doing is good, or else that it's a well-considered act in conformity with natural law. . . . it is in the nature of a human being to seek a *justification* for his actions."

Why is it, Solzhenitsyn asks, that Macbeth, Iago, and other Shakespearean evildoers stopped short at a dozen corpses, while Lenin and Stalin did in millions? The answer is that Macbeth and Iago "had no *ideology*." Ideology makes the killer and torturer an agent of good, "so that he won't hear reproaches and curses but will receive praise and honors." Ideology

never achieved such power and scale before the twentieth century.

Anyone can succumb to ideology. All it takes is a sense of one's own moral superiority for being on the right side; a theory that purports to explain everything; and—this is crucial—a principled refusal to see things from the point of view of one's opponents or victims, lest one be tainted by their evil viewpoint.

If we remember that totalitarians and terrorists think of themselves as warriors for justice, we can appreciate how good people can join them. Lev Kopelev, the model for Solzhenitsyn's character Rubin, describes how, as a young man, he went to the countryside to help enforce the collectivization of agriculture. Bolshevik policy included the enforced starvation of several million peasants, and Kopelev describes how he was able to take morsels of food "from women and children with distended bellies, turning blue, still breathing but with vacant, lifeless eyes," in the ardent conviction that he was building socialism. Other memoirs of this period also describe how a loyal communist at last awoke to what he (or she) did. In this way, the Soviet experience inspired a rebirth of conversion literature, and Solzhenitsyn's *Gulag*, which details his own change from Bolshevik to Christian, is a prime example.

Each conversion memoir reports that change was immensely hard. For one thing, as Arthur Koestler's novel *Darkness at Noon* (1941) correctly divined, the Party was one's purpose in life and constituted one's whole family. Challenging it was as unthinkable as simultaneously renouncing one's education and all one's friends and relatives. For another, one was taught that Marxist theory was a hard science, and so rejecting it was like denying evolution. This science had purportedly proven that human sacrifice was as inevitable to saving humanity as surgical cutting is to an operation. To build communism for innumerable future generations of perfect people, the sacrifice of the relatively few, imperfect homunculi of the present was a small price to pay. For that matter, compared to the infinite future, every one alive would be a trivial number. In any case, as it was often phrased, the deaths were caused not by us but by History.

What is more, the people killed were class enemies, which meant that even if they had not committed counter-revolutionary crimes, they were *potential* criminals. Vasily Grossman, the first significant writer to report the Holocaust when he saw it unfolding on Nazi-occupied Soviet territory, was not unique in pointing out that the exact equivalent of the Nazi category of "race" was the Soviet category of "class." Social class, like race, was inherited, not chosen, and could not be changed. In the newspaper *Red Terror*, Feliks Dzerzhinsky, the founder of the secret police, explained in 1918:

> We are not fighting against single individuals. We are exterminating the bourgeoisie as a *class*. It is *not* necessary during the interrogation to look for evidence proving that the accused opposed the Soviets by word or action. The first question which you should ask him is what class does he belong to, what is his origin, his education and his profession. These are the questions which will determine the fate of the accused. Such is the sense and the essence of red terror.

Or, as one of Grossman's characters observes, "the concept of innocence is a holdover from the Middle Ages."

Solzhenitsyn reports how it was mere chance that *he* did not become supremely evil. When he was finishing his education, he and his classmates were offered the opportunity to do something nobler than physics, a job of great moral importance which also entailed social prestige and material reward: they could attend the NKVD training school. These students had been raised to regard the NKVD as a supremely moral organization. Realizing how close he came to becoming an interrogator himself, Solzhenitsyn reflects: "And just so we don't go around flaunting too proudly the white mantle of the just, let everyone ask himself: 'If my life had turned out differently, might I myself not have become just such an executioner?' It is a dreadful question if one answers it honestly."

Solzhenitsyn turned down this coveted offer out of some inner intuition "not founded

on rational argument. . . . It certainly didn't derive from the lectures on historical materialism we listened to: it was clear from them that the struggle against the internal enemy was a crucial battle front, and to share in it was an honorable task. . . . It was not our minds that resisted but something inside our breasts. People can shout at you from all sides: 'You must!' But inside your breast there is a sense of revulsion, repudiation. I don't want to. *It makes me feel sick*. Do what you want with me. I want no part of it." And yet, he reflects, some of us did join, and if enough pressure had been applied, perhaps all of us would have. In that case, "what would I have become?" The passage that follows is one of the book's most famous:

> So let the reader who expects this book to be a political exposé slam its covers shut right now.
>
> If only it were all so simple! If only there were evil people somewhere insidiously committing evil deeds, and it were necessary only to separate them from the rest of us and destroy them. But the line dividing good and evil cuts through the heart of every human being. And who is willing to destroy a piece of his own heart? . . . From good to evil is one quaver, says the [Russian] proverb. And correspondingly, from evil to good.

The contrary view, held by ideologues and justice warriors generally, is that our group is good, and theirs is evil. "Evil people committing evil deeds": this is the sort of thinking behind notions like class conflict or the international Zionist conspiracy. It is the opposite of the idea that makes tolerance and democracy possible: the idea that there is legitimate difference of opinion and we must not act as if God or History had blessed our side as always right. If you think that way, there is no reason *not* to have a one-party state. The man who taught me Russian history, the late Firuz Kazemzadeh, used to say: remember, there are always as many swine on your side as on the other.

A heart is not good or evil once and for all. Sometimes a heart "is squeezed by exuberant evil[;] and sometimes it shifts to allow space for good to flourish. One and the same human being is, at various ages, under various circumstances . . . close to being a devil, at times to sainthood." We are never closer to evil than when we think that the line between good and evil passes between groups and not through each human heart.

Let me return to the passage in which Solzhenitsyn imagines Chekhov's characters learning about "the secret brand." Beginning in mid-1937, *every* interrogated prisoner was subject to torture. Such Soviet practices raise a question that Solzhenitsyn, along with Grossman, Nadezhda Mandelstam, Varlam Shalamov, and other writers have sought to answer: *Why* engage in such practices? What purpose could they possibly serve?

And why make people confess to absurd crimes that the interrogators knew were fabrications? Apart from the few who confessed during show trials, none of these extracted confessions would ever be made public. Think of the manpower and the cost expended for no evident purpose. The question has puzzled many scholars.

Consider Solzhenitsyn's chapter on how prisoners were transported to camps. Typically, they were loaded into cattle cars—unheated in winter, unventilated in summer—packed as densely as possible, meaning that sometimes there was so little space that some prisoners *hung* between others without their legs reaching the floor. They were barely fed—or fed on salt herring, and not given water. Some days they weren't fed at all. Soon the prisoners "started to die off—and the guards hauled the corpses out from under their feet. (Not right away, true, only on the second day.) In this way a trip from Moscow to Petropavlovsk took *three weeks*."

With his trademark irony, Solzhenitsyn repeats that none of this was done to torture the prisoners! What he means, we soon understand, is that such treatment was so routine it did not count as torture. Why treat people like this? If the point was to kill them, it was a lot easier to shoot them straight off, as, in fact, was done to millions. If the point was to provide manpower for the slave labor

camps, as Anne Applebaum has suggested, then why let so many laborers die en route?

To answer this question, one must first grasp Bolshevik ethics. So far as I know, it has no precedent in world history.

Bolshevik ethics explicitly began and ended with atheism. Only someone who rejected all religious or quasi-religious morals could be a Bolshevik because, as Lenin, Trotsky, Stalin, and other Bolshevik leaders insisted, the *only* standard of right and wrong was success for the Party. The bourgeoisie falsely claim we have no ethics, Lenin explained in a 1920 speech. But what we reject is any ethics based on God's commandments or anything resembling them, such as abstract principles, timeless values, universal human rights, or any tenet of philosophical idealism. For a true materialist, Lenin maintained, there can be no Kantian categorical imperative to regard others only as ends, not as means. By the same token, the materialist does not acknowledge the supposed sanctity of human life. All such notions, Lenin insisted, are "based on extra human and extra class concepts" and so are simply religion in disguise. "That is why we say that to us there is no such thing as a morality that stands outside human society; that is a fraud. To us morality is subordinated to the interests of the proletariat's class struggle," which means to the Party. Aron Solts, known as "the conscience of the Party," explained: "We . . . can say openly and frankly: yes, we hold in prison those who interfere with the establishment of our order, and we do not stop before other such actions because we do not believe in the existence of abstractly unethical actions."

Until recently, I supposed such statements meant that *if* it should be necessary to kill people, then it is permissible to do so. That is what the anarchist Peter Kropotkin had maintained, but the Bolsheviks rejected this formulation as sheer sentimentality. Kropotkin's way of thinking suggests that revolutionaries must meet a burden of proof to overcome the moral law against killing: no more killing than *necessary*. For the Bolsheviks, there was no such moral law. The *only* moral criterion was the interests of the Party, and so they trained followers to overcome their instinctive compassion. Reluctance to kill reflected an essentially religious (or "abstract humanist") belief in the sanctity of human life.

In short, all things equal, violent means were *preferable*. Mercy, kindness, compassion: these were all anti-Bolshevik emotions, and schoolchildren were taught to reject them. I know of no previous society where children were taught that compassion and mercy are vices.

Do unto class enemies what you would not want them to do unto you. That is why, starting in mid-1937, torture became mandatory. What objection could be raised? It was positively good to arrest the innocent. When Stalin assigned arrest quotas, local NKVD branches asked to arrest even more.

Kopelev accepted that hesitation to kill showed "intellectual squeamishness" and "stupid liberalism." In her memoir *Hope Against Hope*, Mandelstam reflects that "the word 'conscience' . . . had gone out of ordinary use—it was not current in newspapers, books or in the schools, since its function had been taken over . . . by 'class feeling.' 'Kindness' became something to be ashamed of, and its exponents were as extinct as the mammoth." *Positive* words now included "merciless" and "ruthless." A good Bolshevik spied on his friends, and children were taught to denounce their parents. A speaker at the Party Congress in 1925, held a year after Lenin's death, reminisced: "Lenin used to teach us that every Party member should be a Cheka agent—that is, he should watch and inform . . . if we suffer from one thing, it is that we do not do *enough* informing."

We sought an explanation for those prisoner cattle cars, but it should now be clear that it is not cruelty that requires explanation but the reverse. To ask the reason for cruelty is to ask the wrong question. People sometimes ask the reason for slavery, but since slavery was practiced everywhere for most of human history, the right question is the opposite one: why was slavery eventually abolished in many places? In the Bolshevik context, it is mercy and compassion that require explanation.

Is it any wonder that many Russians began to accept absolute standards of right and wrong? This was the great conversion. They discovered what Solzhenitsyn calls "conscience" (*sovest'*), by which he means the conviction that good and evil are one thing and effectiveness is quite another. Kopelev, Solzhenitsyn, and others describe the key event of their life as the discovery that just as the universe contains causal laws it also contains moral laws. Bolshevik horror derived from the opposite view: that there is nothing inexplicable in materialist terms and that the only moral standard is political success.

In her celebrated memoir *Into the Whirlwind* (1967), Evgeniya Ginzburg describes how her NKVD interrogator tempted her to implicate another person who, he said, had already denounced her. "That's between him and his conscience," she demurred, thereby appealing to a moral standard independent of consequences. "What are you, a gospel Christian or something?," the interrogator replied. "Just honest," she said, an answer that provoked him to give her "a lecture on the Marxist-Leninist view of ethics. 'Honest' meant useful to the proletariat and to the state." As a good Leninist herself, she must agree. She has invoked standards that a Christian, but not a committed atheist, would accept.

Gleb Nerzhin, the autobiographical hero of Solzhenitsyn's novel *In the First Circle*, declares: "An objective moral order is built into the universe." A friend agrees: "We ought to spell Good and Evil not just with capitals but with letters five stories high!"

Many, including Solzhenitsyn, took the next step and accepted God. Why not remain an atheist who believes in an absolute moral law? Here again we must understand the thought-shaping power of Russian literature, particularly Russia's specialty, the great realist fiction of ideas. Great novels test ideas not by their logical coherence, as in academic philosophy, but by the consequences of believing them. Novels of ideas—whether by George Eliot or Tolstoy, Joseph Conrad or Dostoevsky, Henry James or Turgenev—exhibit a masterplot: a hero or heroine devoted to an idea discovers that reality is much more complex than the idea allows. For example, a materialist believes that love is nothing but physiology and that individual people differ no more than frogs, yet he falls deeply in love with a particular woman (the plot of Turgenev's *Fathers and Children*). A moralist asserts that only actions, not wishes, have moral value, yet winds up consumed by guilt for a murder he has fostered only by his wish for it (the plot of Dostoevsky's *The Brothers Karamazov*). For Innokenty Volodin, the Epicurean hero of *In the First Circle*, the experience of arrest shows the limitations of his favorite philosopher's ideas. Epicurus, the great materialist of the ancient world, had said: "'You should not fear physical suffering. Prolonged suffering is always insignificant; significant suffering is of short duration.' But what if you are deprived for days of sleep in a box without air? What about ten years of solitary confinement in a cell where you cannot stretch your legs? Is that significant or insignificant?"

Volodin recalls Epicurus's words: "Our inner feelings of satisfaction and dissatisfaction are the highest criteria of good and evil," and only now does he understand them. "Now it was clear: Whatever gives me pleasure is good; what displeases me is bad. Stalin, for instance, enjoyed killing people—so that, for him, was good?"

How wise such philosophy seems to a free person! But for Volodin, good and evil are now distinct entities. "His struggle and suffering had raised him to a height from which the great materialist's wisdom seemed like the prattle of a child."

Thinking novelistically, Solzhenitsyn asks: how well does morality without God pass the test of Soviet experience? Every camp prisoner sooner or later faced a choice: whether or not to resolve to survive *at any price*. Do you take the food or shoes of a weaker prisoner? "This is the great *fork* of camp life. From this point the roads go to the right and to the left. . . . If you go to the right—you lose your life; and if you go to the left—you lose your conscience." Memoirist after memoirist, including atheists like Evgeniya Ginzburg, report that those who denied anything beyond the material

world were the first to choose survival. They may have insisted that high moral ideals do not require belief in God, but when it came down to it, morals grounded in nothing but one's own conviction and reasoning, however cogent, proved woefully inadequate under experiential, rather than logical, pressure. In Shalamov's *Kolyma Tales*—I regard these stories, which first became known in the late 1960s, as the greatest since Chekhov—a narrator observes: "The intellectual becomes a coward, and his own brain provides a 'justification' of his own actions. He can persuade himself of anything" as needed.

Among Gulag memoirists, even the atheists acknowledge that the only people who did not succumb morally were the believers. Which religion they professed did not seem to matter. Ginzburg describes how a group of semi-literate believers refused to go out to work on Easter Sunday. In the Siberian cold, they were made to stand barefoot on an ice-covered pond, where they continued to chant their prayers. Later that night, the rest of us argued about the believers' behavior. "Was this fanaticism, or fortitude in defense of the rights of conscience? Were we to admire or regard them as mad? And, most troubling of all, should we have had the courage to act as they did?" The recognition that they would not would often transform people into believers.

Read as autobiography, the key moment of *Gulag* may be Solzhenitsyn's conversation with "a pale, yellowish youth, with a Jewish tenderness of face," named Boris Gammerov. Solzhenitsyn happened to mention a prayer by President Roosevelt and "expressed what seemed to me a self-evident evaluation of it: 'Well, that's hypocrisy, of course.'" Gammerov replied: "Why do you not admit the possibility that a political leader might sincerely believe in God?"

> And that was all he said! But what a direction that attack had come from! To hear such words from someone born in 1923! I could have replied to him very firmly, but prison had already undermined my certainty, and the principal thing was that some kind of clean, pure feeling does live within us, existing apart from all our convictions, and then it dawned on me that I had not spoken out of conviction but because the idea had been implanted in me from outside. And because of this . . . I merely asked him: "Do you believe in God?" "Of course," he answered tranquilly. . . . Was it not here, in these prison cells, that the great truth dawned?

The great truth dawned: unexpectedly, astonishingly, this harrowing story of cattle cars and the secret brand has a redemptive ending. A person—not a hero, just a flawed person—finds faith. Everybody has been indoctrinated with the slogan that, in a material world where nothing beyond the laws of nature exists, "The result is all that counts." But camp experience taught that that was a lie. "It is not the result that counts . . . but *the spirit!*" Once you realize this, "then imprisonment begins to transform your character in an astonishing way." You begin to appreciate friendship differently. Recognizing your own weakness, you understand the weakness of others. When another prisoner relates how he became a Christian, Solzhenitsyn recognizes that when he had been most certain he was doing good he was actually doing evil. He understands "the truths of all the religions of the world: They struggle with the *evil inside a human being* (every human being)." He reflects on prison and on literature:

> Leo Tolstoy was right when he *dreamed* of being put in prison. . . . I . . . have served enough time there. I nourished my soul there, and I say without hesitation:
>
> *Bless you, prison*, for having been in my life!

The country house today
by Clive Aslet

Forget Brexit. We're all thoroughly fogged, if not despairing—perhaps angry, impatient, and worn down. Fortunately, there is another world. It's represented by the country house. I've spent all my working years, over forty of them, writing about country houses, which might be regarded as a Wodehousian existence (just ask my wife). Strangely, with affairs of state so tangled, the country house has come to seem a lot more like real life than real life.

I make this reflection as I research a book examining what these extraordinary cultural entities mean by looking at just twelve in particular. Those that have staggered on through the dark times, avoided the terminal consequences of wastrel heirs, dodged the worst of taxes, and escaped the leveling tendencies of the age have morphed. They are rarely completely private (all my dozen open to the public in some way). When I was beginning my career, acres of ancestral roof might be replaced by full or partial government grant: a reflection both of the impoverishment of ancient families and the historic importance of their homes. Those days have long passed. Economic conditions have improved in the interim; taxation is lower. But the state still helps out, by exempting important objects and works of art from inheritance taxes in return for a degree of public access. It also interferes. Statutory legislation to protect the fabric of significant buildings (not just stately homes) means that they cannot simply be upgraded to meet the requirements of modern life. This only happens after a process of negotiation with officialdom. So we have a paradox: private properties that are not wholly private packed with treasures that cannot realistically be sold; family homes that are also businesses; patches of rural paradise that will throw open their creaking gates for any event that cares to pay, from wedding parties to rock concerts.

The ways of these places are sometimes esoteric. Their values do not in every respect accord with those of today. The fortunes that built them came from dubious sources, often involving peculation on a grand scale or selfish exploitation of the earth's resources. Industry polluted; the hugely profitable sugar economy of the West Indies ran on slavery; the corruption of the East India Company was legendary. Too much of the life supported by these ill-gotten gains was spent gambling, drinking, fox-hunting, and whoring. Of course, I write of past times. Gone are figures like the Fifteenth Lord Saye and Sele, whose profligacy, in the first half of the nineteenth century, caused every stick of furniture to be sold from Broughton Castle; when a new servant asked if he had any orders, he was told, as his lordship went in to dinner: "Place two bottles of sherry by my bedside, and call me the day after tomorrow." In this fallen age, there are fewer butlers and the substance of choice would not be sherry.

Gone—but the country houses remain. The world at large now knows more about them than might have been the case before the first season of *Downton Abbey* was broadcast in 2010. I have a friend who has done quite well from

introducing rich Asian businessmen to dukes; they want to have dinner in white tie (because dukes always wear white tie) and have a selfie taken with His Grace. While their historical or cultural interest in the stately surroundings is limited, they know their dukes from their earls and viscounts, and they pay accordingly.

But then, for those who have been brought up in one of these mega-dwellings, they are also homes. It is fairly obvious that they are different from other kinds of homes. They are, to put it mildly, larger than the national average. Young children were romping in the kitchen of a house I visited recently—all part of normal family life, except that the young ones were dwarfed by the height of the room, which was twenty feet. One of the delights of being an eleven-year-old daughter of the Duke of Argyll is that you can ride a Segway around the basement corridors of Inveraray Castle (not allowed on the ground floor, she told me, because it might damage the paintwork, but the basement is stone). Unlike other homes, they are often shared with members of the public (warning: change out of your pajamas before they come). They are also very old.

Again, that might seem self-evident. It has struck me in a new light while researching my new book. Each of the houses I have included turns out, by complete chance, since this was not a criterion for selection, not to have been sold for five hundred years. (Well, all right: four hundred years in the case of Burton Agnes Hall in Yorkshire. *Parvenus*.) It's not absolutely true to say that they've been in the unbroken ownership of the same family. They often went down the female line—a fact disguised by the husbands who married heiresses, taking the family surname and sometimes its title. A hiatus in the transmission of Doddington Hall came in the nineteenth century. Beer brewed for young John Delaval's coming-of-age party is still in the cellars: he died of consumption before the event. This meant that the house descended to a relation, Sarah Gunman. Sarah was about to marry, for the second time, when she too was carried away by consumption. As a testament to her love, she left Doddington to her fiancé—a dashing soldier. It went out of the family, but it has not been sold.

Half a millennium is, by anybody's standards, a long time. These country houses represent continuity on an epic scale. It is not so surprising in Britain, where families such as the Grosvenors in Cheshire or the Clintons in Devon still own land that they acquired in the years after the Norman Conquest in 1066. But many of Britain's biggest landowners are now not families, as would have been the case in the nineteenth century. Rather they are institutions such as the Forestry Commission, the Ministry of Defence, and the National Trust. In London, there are no houses, beyond the royal palaces, that are still owned by their eighteenth- or nineteenth-century families; very few people live in the same properties as their grandparents. It is different in the country.

In 1982, Yale University Press published my book *The Last Country Houses*. It would have been better if I had stuck with my first thought for a title, which was *The Edwardian Country House*. Admittedly, the reign of Edward VII, the nine years from 1901–10, did not quite fit the chronological range, since I was looking over a period from 1890 until the Second World War—initially a time of supreme comfort and, sometimes, wild creativity, in which the enormous fortunes amassed from finance, commerce, armaments manufacturing, oil, and South African gold and diamonds opened the door to fantasy, idealism, and excess. The back of this movement was broken by the First World War. In 1938, Noël Coward parodied the bankrupt state of country houses, as well as their idiotic owners, in "The Stately Homes of England":

> Though the pipes that supply the bathroom burst
> And the lavatory makes you fear the worst,
> It was used by Charles the First
> Quite informally,
> And later by George the Fourth
> On a journey north.
> The State Apartments keep their
> Historical renown . . .

Most people, including Evelyn Waugh in *Brideshead Revisited*, thought that the Second World War had delivered the *coup de grâce* to

this way of life. There followed a long twilight, as country houses struggled—or failed—to recover from being requisitioned by the armed services. The Victoria & Albert Museum's "Destruction of the Country House" exhibition in 1974 catalogued a dismal toll of demolitions. Where new country houses were being built, they were part of managed retreat, providing a neat neo-Georgian box, perhaps on a site previously occupied by a larger edifice, into which the owner of a massive pile could downsize. Hence *The Last Country Houses* . . .

It seemed to me then that the conditions that gave rise to the Edwardian country house had gone forever. It was not that certain rich individuals could no longer afford to live on the scale of the plutocracy of previous ages, but rather that the desire to do so had passed; hostesses did not want to be bothered with dozens of weekend guests, preferring to pack most of their visitors off to their own homes, easily accessible by car, after entertaining them for dinner; the desire for privacy militated against employing the battalions of servants who would have been needed to run mega-houses. There were exceptions, for whom entertaining was often seen as an extension of the business realm, but not many.

I should, though, have called my book *The Last Mammoth Country Houses*. Because since 1982 there has been a revival of country house building, admittedly not on the scale of loose baggy monsters such as Tylney Court or Danesfield, built at the turn of the twentieth century, but gathering an ever-greater head of steam with the re-emergence of plutocratic super-wealth. In the second decade of the twenty-first century, with the rise of a global class of billionaires, for whom owning property in the United Kingdom seems to be practically *de rigueur*, it is almost as though Edwardian conditions are reasserting themselves. *The Last Country Houses* was indeed a poor choice of title. The breed survives.

The 1980s turned out to be a decade of some glory for the country house. It was a noisy time of Big Bangs and Lawson booms. In 1985, the magnificent "Treasure Houses of Britain" exhibition opened in Washington, feeding a taste for the "country house look"—swagged curtains, fringed upholstery, "tablescapes"—which not only colonized the drawing rooms of Manhattan but also found an echo in the council houses that had been sold to tenants in Margaret Thatcher's property-owning democracy, their windows hung with festoon blinds. Carried on the new political winds of the 1990s was a different attitude to the home. Chintz sofas and tasseled tie-backs blew out of the window. Into the vacuum came minimalism. For some, the preferred building type was a converted loft rather than a country house. But the long boom that only ended with the crisis of 2008 generated the money for many country houses to be built.

And even 2008 did not restrain all appetite to build. If anything, those who had the money to create palatial homes did so on a larger scale. Modern requirements have ballooned. Space is needed for contemporary art installations and collections of classic cars. Swimming pools are accompanied by spa suites and party barns. The master bedroom, with attendant closets, dressing rooms, and bathrooms, may take up an entire floor. Space is a luxury, and the rich want plenty of it. The owners of ancient country houses are not usually in this league of super-wealth; if they have assets, they are difficult to get at. But they do not feel quite as isolated from their peers as their parents or grandparents might have.

For to keep an ancient country house going through the dark decades after the Second World War, when the country was on its knees, taxation high and labor expensive, required an obsessive devotion on the part of some families. They exchanged the chance of a comfortable existence in London, or a manageable farmhouse, for a daily battle against antiquated plumbing, leaky roofs, and dry rot. Even today, the Victorian wing of one house takes two whole weeks to heat up to an acceptable temperature; the surrounding moat does no favors on that score—although the owner does get pleasure from raising the drawbridge at night. That house had been all but abandoned in the 1930s. Fortunately, the owner who inherited after the Second World War was a businessman, able to contribute

money generated from a source besides the landed estate. But he had to start a dairy herd to get electricity installed—new lines could only be laid to agricultural units, not homes.

The doggedness with which impoverished aristocrats clung to their ancestral but practically uninhabitable piles would not have been easily understood in other countries. In the United States, hundreds of homes on the scale of country houses, often surrounded by their own land and farming operations, were built outside New York, Boston, Chicago, Philadelphia, and other great cities between 1890 and the Wall Street Crash of 1929. Few of them were intended as dynastic seats. Owners rarely expected them to be occupied beyond their own generation. Mature trees were brought in, fully grown, to provide an instant landscape; the idea that a landowner would plant his park with timber that could only be enjoyed by his grandchildren did not exist. When the disaster of the Depression struck, taste moved on, and so did owners. Whole areas went out of vogue, and the houses in them were demolished or forgotten. When I began work on a book on some of these dwellings, published as *The American Country House* by Yale in 1990, some of my American friends refused to believe they had ever existed. The houses were too un-American to have done so.

As Lewis F. Allen, the author of *Rural Architecture*, put it in 1852, "an attachment to locality is not a conspicuous trait of American character." The architecture journalists Harry W. Desmond and Herbert Croly, in their opulent *Stately Homes in America from Colonial Times to the Present Day* (1903), agreed: "Houses are built, destroyed, and rebuilt with a celerity for which there has been no parallel in Europe." The British are notorious sticks-in-the-mud, and not just the high-born. While social change and the automobile have scattered many families, particularly those with ambition, thousands of others are reluctant to stray from their places of birth. Hence the success of immigrants from Eastern Europe and elsewhere, who have been prepared to move to the centers of economic activity, London and the Southeast of England, and take jobs that native Brits do not care for. Crucially, these migrants have also been prepared to live in hostels and crowded rented accommodation—conditions that do not attract British workers from depressed post-industrial cities that offer little employment. Encouraged by tax breaks, British families spend a large proportion of their incomes on real estate, tying up capital that is then unavailable for investment. Economists regard our love of home as an incubus. But then, at life's banquet economists always count the potatoes.

So the sacrifices that were made by the post-war generation—and are sometimes still being made by their successors—to keep the family show on the road, and the family seat from falling down, are more explicable in Britain than in the United States. We also have a Northern European joy in solitude. In France, great families who were forced to economize in the twentieth century unfailingly sacrificed their châteaux in order to keep up their *hôtels particuliers* in Paris. Italians would no more think of giving up their city life in favor of a *castello* on a mountaintop than they would fly to the moon. Which is why so many remote rural properties on the southern end of the Continent can be eagerly snapped up by Danish, Dutch, and British buyers, whose domestic dreams are predicated on the absence of other people. In Britain, privacy has become so desirable that even country house owners who need—and could afford—staff to help them run their unwieldy domestic operations dislike employing them. Who wants other people watching as you eat breakfast? Earlier generations treated servants with an emotional detachment that now seems brutal. The artist and versifier Edward Lear was one of the most delightful of people to meet in a drawing room, but he did not bother to discover even the most basic facts about his faithful servant Giorgio Kokali, with whom he traveled for several years. Lear was astounded to discover that Kokali had a wife and family on Corfu, living in what turned out to be squalid conditions. I notice that the new generation of country house owners, when they have staff at all, prefer to employ young people—a butler of a tender twenty-four, in one case—rather

than ancient retainers. They multi-task. They are more fun to have around.

Those families who managed to hang on live in happier times than their immediate forebears. Wives as well as husbands can take high-paying jobs. There are new sources of income on the estate. Weddings have been a boon: some country houses have proved such popular venues that the families, ironically, have moved out to live somewhere else—a case of the tail wagging the dog. Firle Place was being cleared for the filming of *Emma* when I visited (you can never have too many *Emma*s). Even the central heating radiators were being dismantled. The riding house was recently converted to semi-permanent kitchens for television's *Great Celebrity Bake-Off* (a program about competitive baking). Some owners insist that their homes are not homes at all but businesses, and that they always have been. What was a medieval coat of arms, asked one, but a logo? Why did his ancestors want so much land but to enrich themselves?

This strikes me as disingenuous. These are not businesses in the conventional sense. They cannot be sold as such. One that is struggling in a depressed area of the country cannot be lifted up and restarted in a more prosperous region. Certainly estates are more efficiently run than would have been the case a generation ago (land agents are being replaced by CEOs), their assets made to "sweat," but I still detect a special pleading. The business card is played because that is what the public understands. Despite *Downton*, the populace at large finds country houses difficult to ken. Visitor figures to houses (though not gardens) are falling. When Longleat and Woburn turned themselves into amusement parks after the Second World War, the public flocked to them. There was little choice of entertainment. The idea may have lingered in some minds that viewing the treasures of our nation's history was self-improving—good for the children. Now, people are more likely to go shopping. Old craftsmanship is no longer something to be marveled at, but is instead lumped with the rest of the general category of "brown furniture" as something woefully out of fashion. Privilege is now hated. Deference is dead. Celebrities are the new aristocracy. Country house owners who might once have been looked up to with a certain awe are now, in the public eye, regarded as weird. No wonder some of them want to present themselves as businesspeople instead.

The fundamental values of the country house are, more than ever, in opposition to the direction of travel taken by the age. Life, powered by the internet, seems to be getting ever faster. Fashion changes more quickly, due to social media. News is instant, but dies away as quickly as it came. Yet the country house stands for longevity and rootedness. For that reason, estates are proving to be far better at building much-needed new homes than the volume house builders, because the people who own the land know that they will have to live with the consequences, as will their heirs. They take a hundred-year view, rather than expecting to get a quick return. They do not build, sell, and move on. They are long-term players, and in this they have something to offer the modern world. One thing that links all owners of country houses is the knowledge that their time is short. Their tenure of thirty years or so will not seem long in the grand scheme of family history, and in relation to their family's association with that place. Whatever happens with Brexit, whether or not the dogmatic, unlearned Jeremy Corbyn comes to power, they or other descendants will still be there. I find that comforting.

Nuclear holiday
by Nicola Shulman

Tourism is low in Ukraine. War in the east and radiation in the west have taken their toll on the figures: 1.06 million foreign tourists visited Kyiv in 2017, compared with Warsaw's 2.7 million, Krakow's 2.8 million, and St. Petersburg's 3.4 million. Aside from commercial and political, there appear to be two principal categories of visitor. The first are attendees at one of the arsenal of book fairs, expos, festivals, and the like, which Kyiv is developing to attract new visitors. The second are mainly Jews: Israelis who left Ukraine in 1991 and now return to visit relatives here; and the descendants of those other, earlier Jews who fled the pogroms of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, coming from the West in search of ancestral remnants. Then there are visitors to the Chernobyl Exclusion Zone, paradoxically enough the fastest-growing attraction in the region. As tourists, my brother Jason, my sister Alexandra, and I were at the sweet spot of the Ukrainian tourism Venn diagram. We came because Alexandra was talking at a book fair. We came to look at my grandmother's birthplace, Zhytomyr, a city west of Kyiv. Granny escaped as a young girl (class of the pogrom of 1905) to make another life in Canada. Later, her son, our father, settled in London, where he lived for fifty grateful years untroubled by curiosity about his origins. We're the first generation to be able to afford the nostalgia. Likewise, we are far enough away from the Chernobyl disaster in time and space to be interested. No one we met in Kyiv had been there, or wanted to go.

Nevertheless, they were agog to know what it was like. A hard question to answer in a sentence, because what it was like, more than anything I have ever experienced, was a tangle of contradictions: severity and leniency, rules and anarchy, preservation and decay, pride and dismay, sincerity and cynicism—where every impression that you form is undone by a counter-impression, either at once or later on. The process of application is the first taste of this. You apply through a designated tour company (there is no other way), which means filling in online forms of a minatory officialdom seldom met with nowadays in the hospitality industries. If you do not do this, or that, if you wear the wrong kind of shoes or shirt, or leave your passport behind, if you are one minute late, *you will not be admitted*. You are required to carry first-aid and antibiotic cream, waterproof clothing, mosquito repellent, food, and water. But once you have sent off your forms, then a rarity of the opposite type arrives: not an automated response, but a friendly, welcoming reply from an actual human being named Olena.

This same Olena was one of two guides who counted us onto the bus when we arrived, early on Sunday morning, to board it outside the Kyiv railway station. She turned out to be a sparky young woman in cargo pants, with a background in television journalism and a flinty sense of humor. Her audience, in contrast, had come with solemn faces befitting the scale of the disaster, an attitude somewhat at odds with Olena's worldly and practical banter. They didn't laugh at her jokes.

We consisted, in the main, of gay couples and people past their childbearing years. Uneasily, I recalled what our twenty-something guide in Zhytomyr had said about Chernobyl: "my grandfather made me promise not to go in there until I'd had my children."

You spend a lot of time on the bus. It takes two and a half hours to get to the Exclusion Zone, and when you get there it's so immense that even though we walked twelve kilometers, you still feel as if you've barely alighted from the vehicle. But we were not bored. As we set off, Olena gave us a lucid account of the accident at reactor number four on the night of April 26, 1986, the result of a failed turbine experiment, and the frantic, hopeless efforts on the part of the Soviet government to conceal its dreadful outcome. Small drop-down screens then showed us Thomas Johnson's short 2006 documentary *The Battle of Chernobyl*. The film includes an interview with Mikhail Gorbachev, sounding plaintive and uncomprehending of why nobody wanted to tell him what was going on at the time, as though a culture of factual disclosure had been the keynote of his government. "[Scientific director of the reactor] Aleksandrov told me [the reactor] was no more dangerous than a samovar," he says reproachfully. But it was: with the result that thirty years later here we were, with Olena distributing yellow flip-phone-sized radiation dosimeters to those tourists who had booked them, with the air of a guide on a diving trip handing out the snorkels. Dosimeters are set, she said, to give warning at a certain level of radiation. But, this means, they will be going off many times. If we are irritated by the noise, she can re-calibrate the level for us.

As she explained how they work, an open landscape trundled by, lampposts decorated with the Ukrainian red-flower symbol, farmhouses with steep pitched roofs in the Austrian style, low-eaved barns, black-soiled fields furring up with pelts of spring wheat. Forty minutes from the checkpoint, the woods closed in. Nothing but trees on either side of the road, supposedly the legacy of the region's historic function as a princely hunting ground. Yet most of them were the fast-growing species, poplars and white-flowering acacias, that were planted in the seventies and eighties: cover of a different kind for the sequestered nuclear plant.

At the checkpoint of the exclusion zone, the Army is in charge. No photographs allowed. Uniformed police mounted the bus, unsmilingly removed our passports, and jerked their chins in the direction of the door to indicate we should disembark at once. We were then funneled into a concrete outbuilding where we passed through a wall of radiation detectors. All in a line, we stepped up under a row of metal arches, placed our palms on radiation-sensitive plates, and waited there, placidly attached to these contraptions like cows in a milking parlor, until one of two grimy lamps on our respective arch flickered on. We went through a lot of these. The official who curtly returned our passports had a dog at his side, tagged at the ear with a radiation monitor.

Anyone thinking, *aha*, here is a taste of Old Soviet—which was all of us at this point—was then obliged to recalculate when the first thing we saw in the Exclusion Zone proper was the gift shop. Here, along with a small range of lackluster snacks and Chernobyl-branded gifts, stood a refrigerator painted with a nuclear symbol advertising "Chernobyl Ice-cream" and a rudimentary mannequin modeling a decontamination suit, available in sizes XS to XXL. Tempting, but hard to think of places you would wear it. Apart from here, that is, and as we've been assured that the dose of radiation for the day is no more than you would absorb on a long-haul commercial flight, it might look churlish to get back on the bus in full hazmat gear.

What I did have, however, was my own dosimeter, already reading higher than the one the tour had supplied to my sister. I had no idea how to recalibrate its hazard warning level, so when the bus set us down to wander through an abandoned village, evacuated in the days following the explosion, I could feel it jumping and beeping crazily in my shirt pocket.

The village of Zalissya has largely succumbed to nature. The small wooden houses slump at curious angles. The trees have spread their saplings to the doors. Inside—where we

ventured at our own risk, struggling under low branches—ceilings lie in heaps of lathe and plaster on the floors. A collaboration between looters and rain has left little to suggest what lives were lived here. You may see a sideboard, a tiny kitchen range, a plastic tablecloth with a pattern of purple grapes, a coarse lace curtain in what was once a latticed window. Here and there a bald and bruised children's doll stared out, placed by visitors in scary postures as props for the "inappropriate" and "disrespectful" photos that have squeezed some outrage from the British press of late. Our guides, however, were neither dismayed nor surprised by such touristic high jinks. Even before we got to the village, or the even-more-gothic primary school, where rows of little iron bunks and painted lockers sagged, rat-eaten and urine-soaked, in the tree-strangled light at the window, Olena had instructed us in the how-tos of creepy selfies: "Please, do not take crippy dolls for souvenirs," she said crisply. "Or soon, will be no more crippy dolls for selfies. Also, dolls are radioactive."

It struck me suddenly that this isn't disaster tourism, as practiced at, say, Auschwitz or Buchenwald, where the tourist buses also come rolling in. A terrible thing has happened here, but the relationship between that terrible thing and the people who suffered has become less straightforward over time. As far as I know, there are no jokes in Auschwitz. There were no heroes in Auschwitz, save for the occasional gesture of futile resistance. Here there were heroes: firemen and miners and nurses and doctors and engineers who endangered their lives to save the people of Chernobyl and the wider world. The extent to which their actions were voluntary may be disputed, likewise the actions of those who tried to contain the truth. Yet it's possible to construct a narrative where, regardless of compulsion, enough good was achieved at enough personal risk for a monument to be erected to the first responders. Then there is the fact that the explosion, as Gorbachev himself has said, was the event that blew apart the fractures in the Soviet Union, a regime much deplored in this part of Ukraine. In the years after, Chernobyl has grown to become an emblem of Soviet lies and incompetence, and a living metaphor—with all its language of leakage, fallout, and incontinence—for the welcome collapse of Soviet control. So when Olena talked about the regime's inane attempts to contain the truth even while radioactive clouds were drifting over Europe, she could barely repress her admiration at the sheer anarchic disobedience of gamma radiation, passing unseen through checkpoints and borders, and its genuinely equitable treatment of persons, in contrast with Soviet hypocrisy in such matters. As she caustically reminded us: "In Soviet Union, all people are equal, but some are more equal."

There were no sightings today of the lynxes and wolves which are said to be thriving in the zone. All the same, anarchy is everywhere here, in the form of unhusbanded nature. The grimness of a distant catastrophe can be hard to recollect when all around you the late-sleeping Ukrainian spring has finally jumped out of bed and is doing cartwheels around your head. Skeins of little birds weave patterns in the sky. Birdsong rings from all directions. Wild roses burst out through stone, tree trunks absorb iron fences. It was hard to know if what we were looking at was hope or despair. What was certain is that this is a very unusual tourist site, having no curator to impose the "official version." No visitor's center, no glass cases of pitiful belongings; no reconstruction, no conservation, no guidance or tutelage, because nothing can be touched. It leaves the site exposed to the winds of interpretation, which can change in an instant.

Back on the bus, we turned into the forest and burrowed down an apparently endless lane, both sides of which were thick with trees, their branches almost brushing our windows. Olena was apologizing about the state of the toilets, which seemed to be an obsession of hers. I thought they were fine. But toilets, I later learn, have a history here as a source of concern. In 1986, when Hans Blix, the director-general of the International Atomic Energy Agency, came to inspect the site after the explosion, the authorities had to decide what would be worse: take him by car and expose him to the truth about Soviet toilets, or take

him in a helicopter and risk him seeing the thing we were now about to see: the Radar Duga-1, a vast, top-secret anti-ballistic missile warning system hidden in the woods. (They chose the helicopter.)

The idea that Duga-1 was ever secret is boggling to the mind. Imagine an electricity pylon as tall as the Eiffel Tower, then repeat it for the length of a New York City block. As we stepped into its clearing, we leaned and craned our necks, but could see neither the top nor the end of it.

On the sandy floor beneath our feet were some outcrops of tiny wild mushrooms, about two centimeters high and bearing the same height relation to us as we did to the Duga-1. Mushrooms, with their extensive underground traceries and absorptive fruiting bodies, are radiation hotspots, so Alex and I squatted down to take their readings, careful not to touch them, as instructed. When the numbers settled, we compared notes: 5.32 microsieverts (Sv) per hour for the tour's dosimeter; 9.86 Sv/h for mine. For scale, the room in the English countryside where I am writing this gives a reading of 0.09 Sv/h. The highest hotspot-reading of the day in Chernobyl was 19.6 Sv/h for my dosimeter, 5.38 Sv/h for Alex's. I showed the two screens to Olena. She shrugged. "Is more sensitive," she said, as if to imply that radiation readings were a matter of opinion, like squeamishness. She was drawing a diagram in the sand to show how the Duga-1 radar, costing seven times as much as a nuclear power station, had never worked. In the usual course of events, she explained gleefully, it would have been taken down for scrap. But because of the contamination, it must stand here—as a monument to Soviet magical thinking—till it topples over.

Another paradox: while the Exclusion Zone is an agent of destruction, it's also an agent of conservation, the Soviet Pompeii. Everything that remains here is just as it was in 1986: posters, mosaics, statues, buildings from the Soviet era that will soon exist nowhere else in Ukraine. Few images of Lenin remain. There's one on Mykhailivska Street, Zhytomyr, in the unorthodox form of a statue of Ilarion Ohienko, the priest who translated the Bible into Ukrainian. He has Lenin's head because it was the only head obtainable at the time. But the rest are here, protected from the program of "De-Communization" now afoot, whereby Ukrainian Nationalists are dismantling the public art and monuments of the old regime. Some enlightened people, thinking outside the political frame, have been sprinting ahead of the iconoclasts to record Soviet-era mosaics before they vanish. They are published in a wonderful book, *De-Communized: Ukrainian Soviet Mosaics*, by the photographer Yevgen Nikiforov, and some are very beautiful, such as the swirling blue-and-lilac mosaic—mined with hidden Christian motifs, says Olena—on the walls of the cinema in Prypiat town, the nuclear workers' town that we visited after lunch.

Lunch was probably the most time-warpish experience of the day. We ate it in what had been the nuclear workers' canteen: a handsome first-floor space painted white and duck-egg blue and glazed on three sides with wide light-collecting windows. Here, pugnacious-looking women in plastic shower-caps banged out an authentically historical reenactment of Soviet-era food. The slice of cheese was orange and unlike any dairy product I have encountered, somewhere between a bath sponge and a section of stomach lining. There were pegs for clothes, a wall of radiation monitors, and a motorized conveyor belt that was supposed to bear our discarded trays into the kitchens, but which broke down halfway through lunch.

Still, the people who originally ate here were among the most fortunate in the Soviet Union, because they lived in Prypiat. Prypiat town was conceived as a Soviet paradise and built in 1970, within walking distance of reactor number 4. Unexpectedly, there are places in Prypiat—mossy corners and damp paving fragments—with much higher radiation than directly outside the decommissioned reactor, where we alighted to admire its newly completed metal "sarcophagus," a radiation prophylactic that will keep it safe for a hundred years. Around the reactor, everything is clean and shaved of radiation-trapping plantlife, whereas in Prypiat the tall residential blocks are barely visible through the trees, the soccer

field—which was due for its inaugural match on May 1, 1986—is a virgin forest, and the only paths are the goat tracks trampled into the undergrowth by tourists' feet. Look up, said Olena. What seemed a tangle of whippy twigs in the branches above turned out to be a lamppost, adorned with a calligraphic wrought-iron star finial. We were in the town's main street. Olena walked ahead of us with a book of laminated photographs showing the broad, swept, car-less avenues with central reservations bedded out with red geraniums, the culture center, swimming pool, hotel with skyline restaurant, the supermarket where the shelves had, for once, been stocked with foodstuffs. In one of the documentaries I watched, an ex-Prypiat resident reminisced: "We had ketchup. It wasn't like a town, it was like a fairy-tale."

It's still like a fairy-tale. Once a wonderland, it's now a sleeping beauty's castle guarded by invisible thorns of radiation, as well as a true tale to frighten our children at night. And now, thanks to Ukrainian independence and a culture of investigative inquiry, a new wave of myth is gathering, in the form of a global television series which has its own version of events: goodies and baddies, and actions with the linear, rational consequences that television demands. At the time of our visit, only two episodes of HBO's hugely successful *Chernobyl* have been aired, but already the experience is bending to its pressures. A couple of tourists asked where such-and-such a character worked, or lived. They expected the guides to know.

In the meantime, we ended the day poised between terror and wonder at what we'd seen today. As we were leaving, the bus pulled up next to a statue dedicated to the emergency workers at the disaster. We were weary, not paying attention, thinking of our supper. We'd walked twelve kilometers. Suddenly, somebody pointed and everyone rushed towards the windows to look at something near the bus's wheels. It was a hedgehog, snuffling along in the middle of the road, oblivious to an oncoming army vehicle which, we could all see, was about to run it down. At the last minute the driver spotted the animal and braked hard, inches to its rear. Then, at stately pace, with the hedgehog trotting in front like a regimental mascot, the military vehicle processed down the road. Everybody clapped.

Picking up with Kipling
by Jesse Hecht

In November 1882, Rudyard Kipling, about a month short of his seventeenth birthday and newly returned to India, the land of his birth, from England, where, following Anglo-Indian practice, his parents had placed him at age five for his education, became sub-editor of the *Civil and Military Gazette* in Lahore, capital of the Punjab province of British-ruled India. The *CMG* was the one daily newspaper in the Punjab. Kipling and the paper's editor constituted the entire editorial staff. Over time, Kipling, in addition to his editorial tasks, began reporting on local news and official events. The editor also permitted him to place a few of his own poems and stories in the paper; a new editor welcomed many more.

The *CMG* offices where Kipling worked attracted a wide cross-section of visitors. Kipling also spent at least one month of the year at Simla, a village in the foothills of the Himalayas, to which the British Viceroy and the government moved for about half the year in order to escape the heat of Calcutta. In and around Lahore (where he lived with his parents and sister and belonged to the Punjab Club) and at Simla, Kipling, as a journalist, got to know members of the different branches of the British civil administration ("Civilians") and their wives; British Army soldiers and officers; government officials, including the Viceroy and the occupants of other high offices; and native Indians belonging to the different religious and tribal groups and castes of India. These became subjects of his fiction.

In November 1887, the owners of the *CMG* transferred Kipling to the newspaper they owned in Allahabad, the *Pioneer*, one of the leading papers in India. Kipling worked as a special correspondent and was made the editor of a weekly supplement called *The Week's News*, in which he filled a page of each issue with his fiction.

Kipling's first collection of stories, *Plain Tales from the Hills*, most of which had previously appeared in the *CMG*, was published in Calcutta in January 1888. He was just twenty-two. Soon after, in 1888 and 1889, six shorter collections, called the *Indian Railway Library*, were issued.

Kipling's early stories offered vivid, sharply observed glimpses of Indian life as lived by the various sorts of British and native Indian inhabitants with whom Kipling had become familiar. A characteristic of those stories which has been noted by many, beginning with the critic Andrew Lang in an early English review of *Plain Tales from the Hills* in 1889, and continuing up to and including present-day commentators, is their "knowingness": the young Kipling's confident assertions—often witty, sometimes sarcastic, sometimes cynical, sometimes supported by descriptive detail or mock statistics—disclosing to his readers how the world, and in particular that of Anglo-India, really worked:

> when a man does good work out of all proportion to his pay, in seven cases out of nine there is a woman at the back of the virtue.
>
> The two exceptions must have suffered from sunstroke.
>
> ("His Chance in Life")

That element, though criticized by some, has contributed to the stories' enduring appeal.

His stories and poems made Kipling famous among Anglo-Indians and, in March 1889, he left India for London. During Kipling's time as a journalist in India—his "Seven Years' Hard," as he later called them—he had been extraordinarily productive as a writer, in addition to performing his editorial duties. In the introduction to *The Cause of Humanity and Other Stories: Uncollected Prose Fictions* by Rudyard Kipling, the pre-eminent Kipling scholar Thomas Pinney, the volume's editor, tells us he has counted 144 published stories, articles, and poems in 1888 alone: "some of them substantial and all of them showing some originality. This was in addition to his regular, anonymous journalism . . . and a long series of 'Letters from Simla.'"[1]

A significant number of Kipling's fictional works were never reprinted in any of the published volumes that he authorized (which is why Pinney labels those works "uncollected"). Pinney, whose herculean achievements include the editing of the six volumes of *The Letters of Rudyard Kipling* and the three volumes of *The Cambridge Edition of the Poems of Rudyard Kipling*, has now assembled and edited Kipling's uncollected prose fiction. His introduction and notes to each work are informative and interesting. The volume is a great, unexpected gift to all Kipling fans.

Most of the eighty-six previously uncollected items in this volume were among the very many Kipling wrote for the two newspapers he worked for in India: fifty-one were published in the *CMG* and seventeen in the *Pioneer*. They display a wide diversity of forms and writing styles. Some of them lack the sheer readability of the stories that were included in *Plain Tales from the Hills* and Kipling's other early collections, but they offer much by way of compensation. In the memoir he wrote in his last year, *Something of Myself*, Kipling said of his time as a young journalist in India, "Thus, then, I made my own experiments in the weights, colours, perfumes, and attributes of words in relation to other words." The Indian stories and sketches in this volume are examples of such experiments, attempts by the young Kipling to stretch and display his remarkable gifts.

The first piece in the collection, written when Kipling was only eighteen, is a *Robinson Crusoe* parody entitled, "*The Tragedy of Crusoe, C.S.*," a journal (written in the style of the one kept by Defoe's Crusoe) of a British judge of high rank in the Indian Civil Service, who arrives back at his "island" (his station), while his wife remains in the cooler hill country for another month or two. Kipling's Crusoe, for the first time since his marriage, must cope, on his own, with the demands of everyday life, the most difficult of which is dealing with his native servant (his "man Friday"). Pinney describes this story, Kipling's earliest prose fiction published in the *CMG*, as "a perfectly assured performance, just the sort of literary mimicry that [Kipling] loved to practice for the rest of his writing life."

What is also surprising is how funny the story remains:

> Home, exceeding sore and disposed to be very wrath with all about me. I was made none the sweeter when my man Friday told me that there was no whisky in the house. Says I, "How then did Friday manage to get so beastly drunk?"

Political satire makes up a substantial part of this collection. Kipling developed a number of devices for these pieces. He set several of them in a particular year in the future, in order to project a then-current development forward, to what he depicted would be its ultimate conclusion. He also wrote several satirical monologues in what Pinney describes as "Frenchified English." Pinney points out that in his *Souvenirs of France* (which was published in 1933), Kipling explained that he had conceived these latter sketches as "parodies of Victor Hugo's more extravagant prose" and that they were written in response to criticisms of England by the French press. Kipling further noted:

> The peace of Europe, however, was not seriously endangered by these exercises; my illus-

1 *The Cause of Humanity and Other Stories: Uncollected Prose Fictions*, by Rudyard Kipling, edited by Thomas Pinney; Cambridge University Press, 439 pages, $24.95.

trious contemporaries must have known that newspapers have to be filled daily.

Kipling brought both these devices together in "'Les Miserables.' A Tale of 1998" (appearing in the *CMG* in 1886), a satirical commentary on the then-ongoing fall in the exchange rate of the rupee. The Victor Hugo–like narrator, speaking from 1998, recounts the decline and ultimate worthlessness of the rupee and also what he sees as the related, advancing dissipation of the British in India ("les miserables" of this mock Hugo), until they finally vanish into the native population.

> Ces Anglais who have now disappeared. . . .
>
> I have with my proper eyes seen them abolished—assimilated—blotted-out—these Consuls and Pro-Consuls so arrogant. Listen to my tale.
>
> The Roupé was a coin abnormal—monstrous.
>
> It wavered.
>
> Have you ever seen a franc waver? A Napoleon? No, ten thousand times.
>
> The English are a nation of drunkards. All drunkards waver. The Roupé caught the contagion. *Voila* the explication. . . .
>
> They spent it. Mon Dieu, how they spent it! They scattered it. They disbursed it! They shed it. They spread it abroad like mud.
>
> It was superb. It was also wise. The Roupé had no value outside that Empire of Pro-Consuls. . . .
>
> The Roupé was now fourpence. With some British fractions.
>
> It was then hard to find an Englishman of the type Saxon. . . .
>
> The English race in India was lost.
>
> At the same time the Roupé disappeared.
>
> A coincidence merely?
>
> *Mille tonneres*, No!
>
> You have underestimated the vengeance of the Gaul, and the power of the Parisian Bourse.
>
> It was the *revanche* of Plassey, of Blenheim, of Crecy, of Agincourt:
>
> Of Waterloo!

The conclusion—Kipling's French narrator from the future attributing the fall of the rupee and of the British in India to the power of the Paris stock exchange: vengeance at last for French military defeats of the past—is a mockery of the French. But beneath the comic surface, Kipling, through the overblown depictions of Ango-Indian decline offered by his narrator, is imagining a moral outcome of a prolonged period of ever-decreasing currency value: by encouraging spendthrift habits and a *carpe diem* outlook, a continuing fall in the value of the rupee is accompanied by a progressive weakening of character among the British, ultimately ending in their disappearance from India.

Not, obviously, a usual newspaper report on a currency's exchange rate, the piece is one of many examples of how Kipling the young journalist could use virtually any contemporary subject as an occasion to exercise his imagination, his formal inventiveness, his wit, his moral insight, and his powers of language.

Kipling developed a variety of other forms for his satirical work: odd, but humorous, accounts of meetings among the newspapers of India and among India's provinces and presidencies, speaking to each other like people; caricatures of the ruling officials, including the Viceroy Lord Dufferin, "the Serene Obscurity" (his imperturbable response to any adversity: "How interesting!"), and of the then-recently formed Indian National Congress, which Kipling labeled the "Interminable Muddle" because, while it proclaimed its devotion to the government, Kipling recognized, before the government itself clearly did, that the Congress was in fact subverting British rule ("'We love you with a love that threatens to destroy our reason, but at the same time we desire nothing more than your complete reorganization, subversion and effacement—always by genteel measures'"); and, among much else, a parody handbook, in "Q and A" form, of the Civil Service, mocking its blinkered view of the Indian scene:

> *Q.*— What is the function of the Army?
> *A.*— To give tennis parties and at Homes, to lend the Regimental Band when so required, and to go to Levées in full dress.

Beyond his political satire, Kipling's fiction in this volume ranges widely in form, style, point of view, tone, and subject: a review of a play

production in the form of a playlet (four people converse about the play as they order drinks); monologues depicting madness and addiction; a grim vignette of a New Year's day visit from an imp who relentlessly reminds a man of the improvident steps which have left him hopelessly in debt; a comic story of three friends who form an alliance to fake acts of telepathy in order to help each win the young woman of his choice. These are only a few examples.

Those who have enjoyed Kipling's India stories will be happy to find similar ones here (if not all as good): stories of British soldiers, young men playing pranks, sometimes cruel, on each other, drinking and getting into fights over the Temperance Movement; of hard-working civil servants whose efforts go unappreciated; of members of the Club.

There is much more, but one first-person sketch worthy of particular attention is "The Confession of an Impostor (By the Man Himself)." It appears to contain, in slightly disguised form, some uncharacteristically personal revelations by Kipling of how he saw himself and of his doubts about his prospects at the time of his earliest success as a writer of fiction and verse. The narrator seems at first to be a soldier; the imagery he uses is military. But there is an absence of specific military incident and the reader slowly realizes that the military images are metaphorical. In fact, although it is often a mistake to identify the thoughts of a story's narrator entirely with those of the author (and particularly in the case of this author), Kipling here seems, in good part at least, to be speaking of himself (the parenthetical subtitle of this "confession" may be a clue):

> . . . I am accounted a rising man. There are those who consider me successful.

At the time this sketch was published in August 1887, the stories which made up Kipling's "Plain Tales from the Hills" series had already appeared in the *CMG*, although not yet in book form; his first book of poetry, *Departmental Ditties*, had been published about a year previously; and Kipling had become well-known among Anglo-Indians.

> It was ordained that I should fight the battle of life early. A gap in the ranks offered itself; and I was thrust into it almost before I knew what had happened. The last words of counsel from those who had ordered my days were: "Pick up as you go along!"
>
> . . . I declare to you that sentence is the only education I have thoroughly taken into my system. My *métier* was "to pick up as I went along" and a vast lumberage of scrap-ends of knowledge, disconnected facts—all useless, unpacked and unavailable—are witnesses to the zeal with which I followed the advice of my elders . . .

"Picking up as you go along," on one level, describes Kipling's method of self-education: "thrust into" the responsibilities of newspaper editor as a youth, in a country he had not lived in since the age of five, he acquired the knowledge he needed to succeed as editor and journalist, to find his way through Anglo-Indian and native society, and to begin to make a name for himself as a poet and writer of fiction.

In a broader sense, though, by designating "pick up as I went along" as the *métier* of his narrator (and apparently of Kipling himself), the young Kipling is here recognizing his own extraordinarily acute powers of observation and of retaining what he has observed or otherwise picked up. These gifts have contributed greatly to his early prominence as a writer. At the same time, he suffers distress over the limitations of a knowledge acquired by such means:

> My curtailed shift of knowledge, piece it out as I will, is for ever threatening to disclose the abject nakedness of my ignorance. I have patched it in a hundred places, but the patches show, the patches show, and my abiding fear is lest my well-clad comrades should notice the deficiency.

Kipling's "shift of knowledge" had been "curtailed" in part by his parents' lack of money to send him to Oxford or Cambridge; he had had no university education. His "impostor" narrator fears that the better-educated among whom he lives and works (his "well-clad comrades") will discover the limited nature of his randomly acquired knowledge of "disconnected facts."

> I am picking up as I go along, you know. I have to be very careful, very alert, and painfully active, at a time when men are decently forgetting the less valuable portions of their teaching. I do not know what to collect and what to cast aside any more than the caddis-worm that weights its shell with the indiscriminate small-drift of the stream's bed. "It may come in useful one of these days," and therefore "I must pick up as I go along." Does a soldier lace his boots, or begin to get into his knapsack when the first dropping shots from the front open?

In the above passage, Kipling gives us a striking example of his own "picking up as he goes along" and of the use he makes of some of the random facts he has so acquired: he has somewhere seen, or learned of, the caddis-worm and its unusual behavior (possibly from its use as fishing-bait), and, in writing this sketch, he employs that odd item of knowledge in a vivid, fitting simile. He also gives us an example (the precise reaction of a soldier when shot at) of the kind of observable fact he seeks to "pick up," either directly or at second hand, because "[i]t may come in useful one of these days" in a future story.

The "horror" of his life, he goes on to say, is that men envy him, but he believes that those he has surpassed ("defeated by trickery and foul thrusts") are "better men" than he is: "They know at least some one thing accurately; while I must 'pick up as I go along.'" Kipling, beginning to succeed as a writer of stories, seems to note the paradox of such a calling, one in which, as demonstrated by this very piece, fiction (a "lie") is his means of expressing certain truths:

> I cannot even lie thoroughly, for much of this is true; and I cannot wholly speak the truth, for much of this is a lie.

Thus, though "much of this is a lie," Kipling tells us also that "much of this is true"—and the part which is true appears to reflect Kipling himself at this time.

The narrator says he would be "happy and, perhaps, permanently successful" if he "would do *one* single thing with the certainty of assured knowledge." He believes that all his "imperfect knowledge" and "fragmentary accomplishments" have for now placed him "a little way—not far it is true, but still a little way—beyond the regular ranks—the solid files of the men who know, the men who have been taught, grounded and educated."

> I could not be altogether honest if I tried—the strain of pretence of equality has destroyed honesty in me. It is probable that I should arrive at a compromise. And then, the descent will begin. A man who "picks up" must be always "going along." If he halts, some one may see and understand what a pitiful thing he is.

This can be read as a revelation by the twenty-two-year-old Kipling of his fears and self-doubt at the time he was first becoming known as a story writer and poet. Personal disclosures of this sort would be rare for Kipling in the future (the fact that this sketch, like most of what Kipling wrote for the *CMG*, was written anonymously, may have diminished any reluctance on his part to make what seem to be such personal admissions). Kipling here seems to reveal his feeling that he is a pretender, that he is not the equal of the educated civil servants, professionals, and high governmental officials and military men (the "men who have been taught, grounded and educated") among whom he moved, whom he wrote about, and who were at that time among the first to read and admire his literary work.

Of perhaps even greater interest, this "Confession of an Impostor" suggests that what would later be recognized as the confident "knowingness" of his early stories was felt by Kipling to be an imposture, a deception, a cover for the limited extent of his knowledge, a knowledge consisting of haphazardly collected facts and observations, lacking any overarching "certainty of assured knowledge." Kipling foresees that his imposture will soon be exposed, and its exposure will bring an end to his budding career:

> In my own case, the end—which is Discovery—is not far off. I cannot "pick up" and "go along" at the same time. The pace is too good, and there are better men behind—calm-eyed, confident men, who have not daily and hourly to hide their

> ignorance from their equals. Presently they will close up on me, open to let me through, and then go forward, while I toil behind defeated and discredited.
>
> Later on it is possible that some one of the host, looking back will say, "By Jove! there was nothing in the fellow after all."

But, conceiving himself a fraud, despairing at his inevitable unmasking, the thought of the narrator, at the end of this monologue, suddenly takes an abrupt turn: he no longer fears for his future; if his underlying ignorance is revealed and his early success comes to an end, he is confident that his method of making his way through life will provide him the means to carry on and do something else:

> But I have gone too fast. The end is not to-day, nor to-morrow, and to all appearance I stand now a just and upright worker. The event of my fall will not shake empires or reach your ears. I will only be sent to the rear as useless.
>
> And after? What can I do to earn my bread? Happy thought! "Pick up as I go along."

"Pick up as I go along"—the young Kipling's description of the way he educated himself, including his acquisition of the detailed, recondite items of knowledge which frequently appeared and would continue to appear in his stories—has, in the closing lines of this sketch, also become for Kipling a motto of resilience, resourcefulness, independence: virtues he finds sustaining at this moment of his life and which, in his work, he will celebrate in the years ahead.

Once Kipling left India, there were many fewer "uncollected" stories. The standout among them is "The Cause of Humanity," the title story of this volume. Evidence cited by Pinney indicates that Kipling was working on it in June 1914. The available text was apparently not fully proofread, as it contains some errors and repetitions.

The story's narrator is a "professional liver," as he tells us several times, whose talk is filled with biblical references. He and a friend, whose lead he follows, are a couple of sometime swindlers who set out upon a startling moneymaking venture, but who are shown over the course of the story to have a basic sense of justice and, when they come face-to-face with the victims of war and massacre, to be capable of joining others in acts of decency and human solidarity. In order not to ruin the unfolding of the unusual plot for those who may read it, I will only say further that the story is absorbing and poignant, and, like Kipling's great stories of the First World War and its aftermath, "Mary Postgate" and "The Gardener," it will leave readers with much to ponder and interpret.

"The Cause of Humanity" was never published. Pinney plausibly suggests that the outbreak of the war in August 1914 and the mass killing that followed were likely the reasons Kipling withheld the story (which involves human corpses). Whether there were other reasons Kipling did not thereafter publish it or include it in the story collections he issued in 1926 and 1932—for example, were there elements of the vision presented by the story to which Kipling no longer subscribed?—is something about which readers can only speculate. What may fairly be said, though, is that the story's sympathetic treatment of Jews and of their having fought back fiercely against murderous attackers runs counter to what have been held to have been Kipling's attitudes in the latter part of his life.

In *The Reader Over Your Shoulder*, published in 1943, Robert Graves and Alan Hodge wrote, of Kipling's time,

> The favourite debating theme—"Will Kipling *live*?"—was based on a doubt whether anyone whose writing had been formed by journalistic practice could possibly be "great," rather than on a doubt of Kipling's integrity as an observer and a moralist.

Kipling was a journalist who was a literary genius. As this collection illustrates, his practice of journalism in India as a young man, by opening a wide range of human experience to his intense powers of scrutiny and by giving him the freedom to perfect his craft in any literary form he chose to explore, helped enable him to become one of the great writers of the English language, a writer whose work lives still.

New poems
by Morri Creech

The sentence

He sat at the desk across from his reflection
watching him where it hung above the mantel

and studied the hand there writing what he wrote,
something about the ocean in midsummer

when he was a child, the glint, the flecks of spume
tossed up where breakers thundered on the rocks;

the truth was a sentence they composed together
for no one else but the quiet of the house:

the tide he dreamt and the one he could remember,
subject and verb and the sun-touched swells they made

of the past itself now blended with invention,
his left hand moving the right hand in the mirror

and time a distance in the room between them
spread out there like a childhood shore where waves

broke on the sand and retreated to the green sea.

Witness

Your uncles leave you waiting by the shoulder
while they hunt deer in the woods in winter snow.
You've paced the blacktop's edge an hour or so.
The sun's just halfway up. It's getting colder.

Their orange jackets flash between the pines.
Beagles are on the scent to flush the buck
out toward the highway past the pickup truck
where the men will shoot it on the yellow lines.

The morning sky snags in your memory—
stars that glint like mica flecks on the blue
background a quarter moon is showing through,
above the route from Cross to Elloree.

You hear wheels in the distance and you think,
what if a deer comes bounding toward the road?
Just then the car appears like time has slowed:
a Pontiac Firebird slipping on the brink

of the iced bridge that spans Jim Cumbee's creek,
its chainless tires chewing the roadside gravel.
A tree snaps like a judge slamming a gavel
and you can see the skid marks where they streak

maybe ten feet away from where you stand,
the tire tracks aiming toward the distant trees
and the car flipped over, leaking antifreeze.
Out of the windshield juts a woman's hand.

You scramble closer to the wreck and see
she's still as starlight. Pinned there. She can't move.
Somewhere a gear is clicking in its groove.
The radio plays Tom Petty's "Refugee."

You listen for her breath, but it gets slower.
The way the glass-chips in the snow are lit
seems beautiful, a fact you don't admit.
It's dark inside. You can't tell if you know her.

And that's when it capers into the road. The deer.
It stands there a minute, startled. Then it runs
before the men come shouting with their guns.
Just how long you stand watching isn't clear.

Years from now when you recall this morning,
it won't be a blur of metal you think of first,
how the Firebird veered off the road, then burst
into the scrim of pine trees without warning,

not the cold, or what song the radio had on—
it won't even be the dead girl they pulled out
of a strew of glass. No. You'll think about
the deer. How it glanced up at you. And was gone.

Letter from Aberystwyth

Decline & fall in a Welsh town

by Anthony Daniels

Aberystwyth, a seaside resort and the seat of the National Library of Wales, could be a kind of metonym for the whole of Great Britain. Once a place of some grandeur and elegance (subsisting, of course, in the midst of severe poverty), it is now given over almost entirely to decay and slovenliness. Every physical addition since the First World War, and even more since the Second, has been ruination and hideousness. The University, whose original magnificent Victorian building stands unoccupied except by detritus that can be glimpsed through its Gothic windows unwashed for decades, is a World Heritage site of incompetent British modernist architecture of such ugliness that one is left clutching one's eyes in despair. Splendid Victorian terraces have been ravaged, and their harmony ruined, by cheap additions to extract a few more square feet of habitation from the land area that they cover. The students, who in term time make up a third of the town's population, no doubt care deeply about the fate of the planet and the future of the environment, but live in squalor, turn everywhere they inhabit into a slum, and wade happily through the litter—principally the wrappings and containers of their refreshments rather than lecture notes—that they drop.

As for the non-student population, its most notable, or noticeable, characteristic is self-abuse. Tattoos and facial ironmongery are much in evidence, as is obesity; and down the promenade waddle slatternly mothers pushing their infants in wheeled contrivances, the insemination of the mothers having been so miraculous, given their size, that it makes the Virgin Birth seem mundane by comparison. Everyone, even the elderly, dresses as if he has risen late on a Sunday morning after a hard night and early hours in the bar, and put on the first crumpled clothes that came to hand and required no effort to don. Self-esteem has completely obliterated self-respect as a desideratum.

A little scene in one of the side streets—the buildings decayed but inhabited—caught for me the spirit of the town, or at least one aspect of the town. A seagull was tearing with its beak a thin black plastic bag of household rubbish that had been put out to await collection in front of a door, scattering the rubbish until it found something eatable by itself. It was making a terrible mess, this bird, but no one stopped to shoo it away; and what was remarkable about the bird was its self-assurance, like that of the fare-dodgers on the Métro in Paris, as if it were only doing what it had an unalienable ornithological right to do. Certainly it exhibited no fear of passers-by, its boldness presumably the fruit of its experience. And though there are municipal notices round the town telling people not to feed the seagulls, the method of rubbish collection encourages the very thing that the notices forbid. This is modern British (not just Welsh) public administration; and every inhabitant of these islands knows that, however high the local taxes, household waste will never again be disposed of efficiently. Neither the will nor the competence to do so is there.

How terrible a picture, then, of degeneration! And yet I am very fond of Aberystwyth. It is surrounded by beautiful countryside; you can see the green hills from its streets. Cardigan Bay is of a beauty beyond the ruination even of British architects and town planners. The sea has changing colors of its own, not vivid or vulgar like those of the tropics, but more like the palette of painters such as Hammershøi or Morandi, that is to say, ever-changing gray-blues, gray-greens, or just plain gray, with cream for the foam of wavelets.

Aberystwyth has a small and charming museum whose frontage is like a shop in a shopping street, but which is actually a rather splendid old theater adapted as the county museum. It is, as is customary in such places, a miscellany of Roman coins, stuffed birds, military uniforms, ancient kitchen utensils, pottery of various epochs, geological specimens, local landscape paintings of small artistic merit (but nonetheless interesting), and so forth; but special were the pictures of Welsh preachers, including that of Christmas Evans (1766–1838), so called because he was born on Christmas Day, deeply impoverished and illiterate until the age of seventeen, and blinded in one eye by his band of sinning, erstwhile friends who beat him severely because they were furious at his conversion from drink and lechery to puritanical virtue (his eyelids being then sewn together). Evans toured the countryside preaching hellfire and damnation, which the Welsh—until recent years—always loved. Here, for example, is the opening of one of his most famous sermons, with the encouraging title of "The World as a Graveyard":

> Methinks I find myself standing upon the summit of one of the highest of the everlasting hills, permitted from thence to take a survey of the whole earth; and all before me I see a wide and far-spread burial-ground, a graveyard, over which he scattered the countless multitudes of the wretched and perishing children of Adam! The ground is full of hollows, the yawning caverns of death; and over the whole scene broods a thick cloud of darkness: no light from above shines upon it, there is no ray of sun or moon, there is no beam, even of a little candle, seen through all its borders. It is walled all around, but it has gates, large and massive, ten thousand times stronger than all the gates of brass forged among men; they are one and all safely locked, the hand of Divine Law has locked them; and so firmly secured are the strong bolts, that all the created powers even of the heavenly world, were they to labour to all eternity, could not drive so much as one of them back. How hopeless is the wretchedness to which the race is doomed! into what irrecoverable depths of ruin has sin plunged the people who sit there in darkness, and in the shadow of death, while there, by the brazen gates, stands the inflexible guard, brandishing the flaming sword of undeviating Law!

This, indeed, is the very image of modern Aberystwyth as given in an amusing series of books, best read while you're there, by Malcolm Pryce. They are (needless to say) without the theological afflatus of Christmas Evans, and have such titles as *Aberystwyth Mon Amour*, *Last Tango in Aberystwyth*, and *Don't Cry for Me, Aberystwyth*, a story in which a private eye, a Welsh Philip Marlowe, investigates the seamy side of the town, there seeming to be no other apart from the sea-view boarding houses that had once been grand, or grand-ish, hotels:

> In the old days, as with all hotels with pretensions to grandeur, the door had been opened by a man dressed as a cavalry officer from the Napoleonic wars. But he had long since gone and today I had to push the heavy brass and glass door open myself. Inside the lounge, little had changed. . . . And the same cast of characters: . . . in the bay window sat members of that travelling band of spinsters and widows who spent their lives wandering from hotel to hotel. . . . Shrivelled old women who appeared at the same time each year with the predictability of migrating salmon and who insisted on the same room and ordered the same food. And every day at dawn they crept downstairs to place their knitting on the vacant armchairs signifying possession for the day like the flag on Iwo Jima.

Quite so: through a bow window of one of the boarding houses next to mine on successive evenings I watched an old lady in a fluffy woollen dressing gown consume her dinner with a glass of wine, concentrating on what she was doing with a frightening intensity.

The museum had a special exhibition when I visited—on sheep. Sheep, of course, are very important in Wales, much of the land being suited to nothing else, there being more sheep than humans in the Principality. There were etchings of sheep by various artists, including Henry Moore, and a video of a woman artist who decided that she wanted a sheep's-eye view of the world, such that she strapped a sheepskin to her back and cameras to various several parts of her anatomy, and crawled on all fours over the moors where sheep might usually safely graze. The film of her crawling over a babbling brook and through the heather made one ask, "Is this serious?" One never knows with contemporary artistic endeavor. To judge by the commentary, it *was* serious; at any rate, it was funny.

The public was asked to pin on a board their comments on the question of *What Sheep Mean to Me*. "Woolly locusts." "The main livelihood of my patients." "Lewis says stop eating sheep but I won't." This, of course, raises the important question as to whether it is better to have been born and eaten, than never to have been born at all. As for the exhibition itself, someone demanded, "What about the cows?," and another said, "This is exactly what I wanted to see, an exhibition about sheep"—a masterfully ambiguous statement, if I may say so.

But of course it was the people of Aberystwyth whom I most appreciated. The owner of my boarding house stood in the parking space outside it to prevent anyone else from taking it before I could back into it. Everyone was equally helpful and friendly, ready to put themselves out for a complete stranger. There was something comfortable and almost comforting about the town's lack of pretension, the lack of ambition, as if the people were content with life as it was and had decided to take no thought for the morrow.

Of course, I wouldn't pretend that it was a town of saintly Samaritans—no town is. Miss Marple said that there was a great deal of wickedness in an English village, as indeed there is everywhere. We went, my wife and I, to a Moroccan restaurant. Actually it was Algerian, but as the owner, an Algerian, pointed out, no one in Aberystwyth has heard of Algeria. It is very instructive to talk to someone such as he, for then you begin to realize how many remarkable people there are in the world. How does one go from being a teacher of French and Arabic in a secondary school in Algeria to being the owner and chef of a restaurant in Aberystwyth? He had been in Wales for forty years, and on the wall of his restaurant were the flags of Algeria and Wales, by strange coincidence of the same coloration. He loved his adopted country, which speaks well of it.

But he had a small problem with which he asked our help once we had finished our meal (the tagine was as good as I had eaten anywhere). There was a wicked person in the town who regularly posted bad reviews of his restaurant on TripAdvisor and managed to insinuate them to the top of the list so that they were the first any tourist looking for a restaurant would see. As the tourist season was about to begin, this was very important to him. He thought he knew who it was—a competitor, who put someone, or some people, up to denigrating his establishment. We were happy to oblige, of course, by posting a very favorable review on TripAdvisor for we genuinely liked him and his restaurant; and then I thought that there was, perhaps, more social realism in the novels of Malcolm Pryce than I had supposed. Rivalries are intense in human goldfish bowls such as Aberystwyth.

We met quite a few foreigners who had settled in the town, and they all spoke warmly of it and of its people. My short sojourn there (not my first) confirmed for me the truth of Pope's brilliant summary of the human condition:

> Created half to rise and half to fall;
> Great Lord of all things, yet a prey to all;
> Sole judge of Truth, in endless Error hurled:
> The glory, jest and riddle of the world.

Reflections

Simon buys for less

by Marco Grassi

On a warm spring day in 2007, hundreds of people from the business, academic, and art worlds filled the auditorium of the Norton Simon Museum in Pasadena. They were there, summoned from near and far, to pay homage to the memory of the man whose name was, and remains, on that institution's door. The occasion marked what would have been Norton Simon's hundredth birthday. It's interesting to speculate how the centenarian would have reacted, had he been on stage (he died in 1993). Chances are that all the participants would have been taken to task by the notorious contrarian whom everyone in attendance had known. He would have, no doubt, relentlessly challenged, questioned, denied, or justified the bountiful outpouring of accounts of his extraordinary career. Many of these recollections were warmly admiring, almost hagiographic, others quite disparaging—but all, for better or worse, helped to reveal a man of singular temperament and character.

The symposium, as the event was described, was arranged in separate "chapters." During the morning session, a number of business associates and executives of Norton Simon, Inc., one of the nation's first conglomerate corporations, recalled interesting episodes from their participation in building an empire that eventually comprised Hunt Foods, Canada Dry, Avis, and Republic Steel. We learned that, though these later Simon holdings represented huge capital assets, they were by no means the fruits of a self-made man's undertaking. Simon's father, Myer, had been a successful wholesaler of agricultural products in northern California whose firm, Simon Sells for Less, served as the springboard for the son's career. It's amusing to consider that "Simon *Buys* for Less" might well have described even better Norton's approach to buying anything, especially art. Art was, in fact, the focus of the afternoon's proceedings. It was also the reason I was pleased to have been called on stage with such a prestigious group of dealers, scholars, and museum professionals; all of us had experienced, and occasionally suffered from, the intense, unrelenting pressure of Simon's fierce, probing intelligence.

By the mid-1950s, Norton Simon had already achieved a significant level of business success and personal wealth. At that point, he had probably never set foot in a museum nor cracked the cover of an art book. In fact, he later admitted that he viewed the "art world" from a decidedly philistine perspective: it was nothing more than a haven for phonies, queers, and fraudsters. Despite this strongly held prejudice, Simon was now a very rich man, and owning art was part of the script. He and his first wife began to line the walls of their Hancock Park home with paintings. In the process, Simon—a notoriously quick study—began to understand how the art business worked and how its imperatives related to the academic and museum worlds. Art had *real* value; it was a *real* business. He soon became acquainted with the principal dealers and auction house functionaries in New York and London, expanding his own notoriety as a collector beyond California. Might the time have come to go for the brightest of gilt-edged names—Rembrandt? It was an irresistible

temptation and the moment proved auspicious because, by 1965, the distinguished collection of Sir Herbert Cook was being dispersed by his son, Sir Francis. The star lot in the Christie's sale that March was the captivating *Portrait of a Boy* (1655–60), thought at the time to be a likeness of the artist's son, Titus. Simon was in the room and, from a semi-unknown, was instantly transformed into a celebrity. Counting on remaining stealthily anonymous, he had previously instructed the auction house in writing:

> When Mr. Simon is sitting, he is bidding. If he bids openly, he is also bidding. When he stands up, he has stopped bidding. When he sits down again, he is not bidding until he raises his finger. Having raised his finger, he is bidding again until he stands up again.

This tricky ploy may have been just too much to absorb for Christie's chairman, Peter Chance, a very old school gentleman-auctioneer. He missed the signal and knocked down the picture to the Marlborough Gallery for £700,000, whereupon Simon leapt out of his seat and loudly demanded that the bidding be reopened, an unheard-of request. Not surprisingly, Simon won the day, and the painting (for a £70,000 premium). It was his to keep, and the art world took notice. Simon was now off and running, becoming in due course the world's most acquisitive collector. It was a distinction that would remain unchallenged for the next two decades. What Simon accomplished during those twenty years is truly astonishing. In quick succession, the range of his interests expanded exponentially to include Impressionist and Post-Impressionist painting, Degas sculpture, Italian Renaissance and pre-Renaissance painting, and Indian and Far Eastern sculpture, not to mention all manner of graphic art.

The saga began with an early, modest step: a visit Simon paid to the legendary Duveen Gallery in 1962. During the first decades of the last century, Sir Joseph Duveen (later, Lord Duveen of Millbank) had been the purveyor of the finest of fine arts to the likes of Frick, Mellon, Widener, and an endless roster of other, lesser nabobs. Although Duveen had died in 1939, the business, formally, still existed, no longer in its original Fifth Avenue *palazzo* but in Duveen's private residence, a no-less-grand townhouse on East Seventy-ninth Street. Simon was welcomed into this rather melancholy grandeur by Edward Fowles, to whom Duveen had bequeathed the premises and its contents. Fowles had been the gallery's factotum for decades and was charged with liquidating what was left of the storied firm's holdings. Simon, sensing an opportunity, began nibbling at Duveen's remaining stock, little by little becoming so assiduous in his purchases that the elderly Fowles finally suggested that Simon "buy the store." No quicker said than done: the canny financier almost instantly recouped his costs by flipping the real estate to Nick Acquavella, the über-dealer William's father; the townhouse still serves as home to the eponymous gallery. The splendid Duveen library was sold to Williams College, a move that Simon later came to regret bitterly when he established his own museum. These transactions left Simon holding a motley assortment of works with distinguished provenance but of uncertain attribution and often in questionable physical condition.

Sorting things out for Simon's art properties was a young man called Darryl Isley. A bright, hyperenergetic recruit from one of the Simon tomato-canning enterprises in Fullerton, Isley soon teamed up with Sarah Campbell, another Hunt Foods graduate. Neither was a fine arts professional; both were instead chosen for their clear-eyed efficiency, honesty, and what turned out to be unshakable loyalty. Isley functioned as Simon's roving eyes and ears. His cheerful, unaffected manner soon earned him the trust and even friendship of the art market's *machers* as he skillfully and diplomatically navigated the rough waters that Simon inevitably left in his wake.

It was thanks to Isley that my first contact with Simon occurred. Since 1961, I had conducted a paintings conservation practice in Europe, dividing time between a private studio in Florence and Lugano, Switzerland, where I was serving as a visiting conservator to the storied "Villa Favorita" collection of Baron H. H. Thyssen-Bornemisza. In early 1970, the Italian political climate promised only chaos, what

with the Red Brigades and the Communist Party dominating the news. It was not exactly an ideal environment for a freelance professional catering to the "ruling class." As a result, I decided to devote my "Florence time" to pursuing work in New York, doing so from the dining room of a rented apartment on upper Fifth Avenue. This is where the ever-enterprising Darryl found me not long after my arrival. Untested as I was on these shores, Simon was wise to consign only bits and pieces of his "Duveen remainder stock," some of which had serious, even fatal, condition problems. Restoring these was a sure way of adding value, ever a compelling motivation for Simon. What could be rehabilitated, together with items previously collected, became a kind of "museum without walls." Sarah Campbell would diligently arrange loans to cultural institutions across the country, thereby garnering recognition and prestige for the works as well as their owner.

When my abilities must have been deemed sufficiently tested, I received a commission of great moment: the restoration of a stupendous altarpiece by Giovanni di Paolo, the Sienese Early Renaissance "expressionist." It was a painting that held unusual significance for me. The monumental panel had belonged to my grandfather Luigi, a prominent Florentine art dealer, until his death in 1937. He had sold the imposing *Angels Surrounding the Virgin and Child* (*Branchini Madonna*) (1427) to Robert von Hirsch, a Swiss connoisseur whose collection ranged from twelfth-century Limoges enamels, to Rubens oil sketches, to Cézanne watercolors. The 1978 Sotheby's sale that followed his death is still remembered for the excitement it generated and the many record prices achieved. Simon's purchase of the panel was one of those records.

Direct contact with Simon became continued and intense as soon as the Giovanni di Paolo arrived on my easel. I joined that large and expanding constellation of professionals and scholars whose brains were relentlessly picked—any time, anywhere. Simon's thirst for information seemed insatiable. Even calls in the middle of the night were not unusual. As flattered as I was to be sought out by the world's leading collector, I soon realized that whatever insights I volunteered would immediately be compared and weighed against those offered by others. Simon had a way of collating the gathered information and then "distilling a resulting answer" that generally turned out to be correct. Value—monetary value—was, of course, of capital importance to Simon, and his approach to acquisitions was brutal and sometimes even sordid. Works of art were requested on approval in Pasadena, whereupon the seller would be subjected to an endless process of attrition, delays, and coercion. I remember accompanying Simon to examine a nearly eight-foot-high painting by Francesco Guardi, the celebrated Venetian eighteenth-century view painter; it was a remarkably impressive and colorful picture. There was, however, a problem: the totally anomalous subject was based on the *Gerusalemme Liberata* by Torquato Tasso—hence, no water, no gondolas, no billowing crinoline skirts . . . in short, a tough sell. The painting was one of a handful of works remaining with Kate Schaeffer, the widow of a distinguished Viennese dealer who had emigrated to New York before the last war. I remember Kate as a charming, gentle, and cultured lady with impeccable "old world" manners. By this time (1976) she was quite elderly, living alone in a large and dusty Park Avenue apartment, clearly looking to close things down. Simon was quick to realize not only the distinction of the Guardi but also the vulnerability of its owner. Sending the painting to California on approval was the beginning of an agonizing and protracted negotiation, punctuated by repeated calls to me by Mrs. Schaeffer imploring my help. It seemed that the lady's distress lasted for months, surely every bit as long as Simon could prolong the process and the pain.

It is for such tawdry episodes, and many others like it, that Norton Simon has left a legacy of personal conduct that is universally deplored (though one which was not *too* loudly emphasized during the memorial symposium). In my mind, despite the obvious devilry, the man did possess a unique merit: his forays in the art world were manifestly never prompted by considerations of status, social or otherwise. Simon, unlike all his predecessors, hardly gave a thought to "class." For him, art was neither a required

ornament of civilized life nor a means of social advancement. *Au fond*, tycoons like Frick, Widener, even Mellon, lived and collected according to a model epitomized by the English grandee; they were all make-believe Dukes of Sutherland. Simon, in his double-knit leisure suit and rough manners, shunned all affectation and pretense.

There is an episode that I still vividly recall with a twinge of discomfort. In the fall of 1973 Simon and his second wife, the actress Jennifer Jones, were traveling in Italy and stopped to view an important exhibition of Lombard Baroque art in Milan. Aware of their presence there—only an hour from Lugano—I immediately informed my "boss," Baron Thyssen. The two had long competed as collectors but had never met. "Heini" wasted no time in arranging a dinner at the splendid Villa Favorita, even sending his gigantic Mercedes limousine to fetch his guests. As they arrived, I proudly felt at the very epicenter of the art world. After dinner, we proceeded to the adjoining series of galleries where almost two hundred paintings were hung in stately array. Alas, my euphoria soon evaporated as I realized in what radically different realms the two collectors lived. Simon's was emphatically a *now* world: he insisted on knowing the cost of this or that item; would its value *now* be less or more than when purchased?; if there were two or more works by the same master, why not sell one *now*?; wouldn't restoration extract greater value?—all questions to which Heini could hardly respond and about which he became progressively more irritated. He had, after all, inherited a number of those pictures and long forgotten the prices of the rest. The evening was *not* a success.

Needless to say, I was bitterly disappointed, and, not surprisingly, the two collectors never crossed paths again. Fortunately, I enjoyed the privilege of the friendship and trust of both until their last days. In 1990, my wife, Cristina, and I visited California on a weekend "museum trip." By Monday, when we were scheduled to fly back to New York, we had still not been to the Norton Simon Museum in Pasadena. Naturally, it was closed; undeterred, we pleaded with the staff member at the door, hoping for a favor for such long-distance travelers. At one point, she asked for our name and told us to hold a moment while she made a call. Within minutes, a large van-like car pulled up, from which Simon was carefully lifted in his wheelchair. The debilitating illness afflicting him had progressed to the point that he could no longer move. It was shocking to see a man of such vigor so diminished, but also astounding to realize how laser-sharp his intellect and memory still were. The three of us wandered slowly through the empty halls admiring the wealth of masterworks that had been gathered there in barely more than two decades of furious acquisitions. Favored works received special attention with Simon commenting, questioning, comparing. As he had done at the Villa Favorita, Simon remembered every price and debated every value. Particular reverence was paid to what was without doubt his favorite painting: Zurbarán's *Still Life with Lemons* (1633). Not only had it been one of the most expensive acquisitions, it consistently sold more postcards than any other at the front desk, a statistic that Simon followed closely, and one he never tired of repeating.

Theater

The problem with "Mockingbird"

by Kyle Smith

Written for the stage by Aaron Sorkin, *To Kill a Mockingbird* (at the Shubert Theatre) opened before Christmas, yet continues to be the sensation of the Rialto. On several occasions it has sold more than $2 million worth of tickets in a single week. There are only so many seats in a theater, so arriving at that gargantuan number requires charging $500 for the best seats, $275 for good ones. Finding a same-week ticket for as little as $200 is almost impossible. Rarely, if ever, in Broadway history has a non-musical created such a sustained frenzy.

Harper Lee's *To Kill a Mockingbird* (1960) is not just a classic but perhaps *the* classic text for the cohort that provides the biggest pool of potential Broadway ticket buyers: the affluent, well-meaning American liberals who define themselves above all other qualities as brave and righteous scourges of racism. Liberals name their children Atticus and Scout. (Well, maybe not Atticus anymore, but I'll get to that.) On the night I attended, theatergoers were taking selfies of themselves with the set in the background, eager to show the world they bore witness to this play. Yet the Bible, Torah, and Koran of American liberalism is, at its core, illiberal. Whether told as a novel, movie, or play, the story stands for the actual opposite of what it purports to stand for. Why don't liberals notice, or care? Because liberals don't actually believe in liberalism. What they believe is that their side is good, and they adore having their self-image projected back at them. The dramatic and thematic flaws of the work are obvious to a rational, adult eye, but *To Kill a Mockingbird* is written at a child's level, and childhood is when people tend first to encounter it. The book is therefore double-ring-fenced against clear-eyed analysis: it's about racism, and it's about childhood, and who are you to point out its failures, Mr. Critic, if not some kind of kid-hating racist?

There was a carnival atmosphere at the Shubert Theatre. Outside, a man with a small pushcart was selling buttons and other tchotchkes off a kiosk labeled "The Anti-Trump Bandwagon." Inside the theater, the souvenir stand sold T-shirts labeled "Consent is sexy" and "Patriarchy is a bitch." There was also a hooded sweatshirt for sale, labeled in large lettering "TRAYVON." Trayvon Martin, you will recall, tackled a man who had done him no harm whatsoever and repeatedly pounded his head into the pavement. He was shot in the chest for his attack. The man who killed him, George Zimmerman, was told by police that they had security-camera footage of the whole encounter. Zimmerman's response? "Thank God." Police knew Zimmerman's story was true immediately, yet prosecutors bowed to a howling mob of celebrities, pundits, and politicians and charged Zimmerman with murder. He was wrongfully put to trial, was in fact the victim of a gross injustice, because of his race. You would think the souvenir stand at a play about a race-based miscarriage of justice would be selling shirts emblazoned with the word "ZIMMERMAN." But that would only confuse the left-wingers paying to see this play. They are here to have their tribalism affirmed. The

average ticket-buyer for *To Kill a Mockingbird* would have been delighted to join the mob calling for a completely unjustified trial for Zimmerman, then, after his acquittal, to join the mob that formed to demand Zimmerman unjustly be retried in a federal court on the same charge, albeit with the wording on the indictment changed slightly from "murdering Trayvon Martin by shooting him in the chest" to "violating Trayvon Martin's civil rights by shooting him in the chest." We can be thankful that the Justice Department, unlike the mob, saw no reason to disregard the double-jeopardy clause of the Fifth Amendment. It implicitly defended the importance of procedural correctness, unlike *To Kill a Mockingbird*.

To Kill a Mockingbird draws a diverse audience—young white people, middle-aged white people, and elderly white people. Why were there almost zero black people in attendance in a play about a miscarriage of justice carried out against a black man in 1934 Alabama? Later I will hazard a guess. Bob Ewell (Frederick Weller), the angry and violent racist who pushes his teen daughter, Mayella (Erin Wilhelmi), to make an obviously false charge of rape and assault against the black handyman Tom Robinson (Gbenga Akinnagbe), refers to blacks as animals—but so does the criminal defense attorney Atticus Finch (played with a refreshing minimum of showboating by Jeff Daniels). Mockingbirds don't do anything but sing their hearts out for us; that's why it's a sin to kill a mockingbird. Innocent, dumb, incapable of doing genuine evil: that is how we are meant to think of Tom Robinson, and by extension of black folk. Harper Lee's racists and anti-racists alike agree that blacks are inferior to whites; they disagree merely on whether they are more like wild animals or cute pets.

Sorkin has been praised for updating the story, but he really hasn't. The major difference is that he beefs up the character of Calpurnia (LaTanya Richardson Jackson), the black woman who has served as the family housekeeper going back generations. Sorkin has Calpurnia steer Atticus away from his view that no one, even a Klansman like Bob Ewell, is irredeemable. It seems unlikely that a black woman in Calpurnia's position would speak her mind so freely in 1934, but what is important to Sorkin is to capture a very 2019 emotional imperative on the left—the idea that it's crucial not merely to oppose bad things but also to make a show of anger about them, to denounce whole systems rather than just misbehaving individuals. Sorkin, who in his recent collaboration with Daniels, HBO's series *The Newsroom* (2012–14), offered a running fantasy of how news programs could have covered real events in a more nakedly partisan-progressive way, has nudged *To Kill a Mockingbird* away from Atticus's Southern gentility and a bit in the direction of woke columnists. In the bargain, it allows him to have a black character who does something other than suffer; Calpurnia is another stock figure, though, the wise black person bestowing enlightenment on whites.

Sorkin's source remains what it always was: a young-adult novel, with all of the oversimplification that goes with it. Sorkin does nothing to make the work more mature, more complicated for sophisticated adults. There are three kinds of people in Sorkin's play: white racists, white anti-racists, and kindly, innocent blacks. Reducing race relations to this schema was more forgivable in 1960, when the book was published, than it is today, but then again, for white progressives, it's still 1960. Priding themselves on their ability to weigh all the nuance and complexity in, say, human sexuality or the market economy, they adhere to a resolutely childlike vision of racial matters. Hence that TRAYVON hoodie: even as the disappointing facts dribbled out, the Left simply slotted the story of Martin's demise into this pre-existing story of racist white trash (Zimmerman), white saviors (the mob clamoring for Zimmerman's arrest), and innocent blacks in the middle. Martin, being black, could not possibly have done anything wrong. He was unarmed except for his Skittles, we were told. As if an unarmed person is incapable of committing assault. A photo of him looking like a cherub circulated widely, as if no young black male could be a criminal. Zimmerman was assigned the role of white racist because he had reported to the

police a young black male, and because he had kept a wary eye on Martin. That it was perfectly understandable for a neighborhood watchman to watch the neighborhood could not be conceded by the woke mob. None of the white liberals who demanded Zimmerman be tried, then demanded he be convicted, then demanded he be re-tried, would waive the right to call the police upon sighting a suspicious stranger who happens to be a young black male. That it was racist for Zimmerman to call the police was an important fiction they told themselves (and screamed in public), a way to reassure themselves that they were so pure of heart that they would never, ever suspect an unknown young black male of anything.

Trite formulas may work fine as political slogans, but they don't take you very far in drama. Atticus Finch would be a much more convincing hero if he were more like Lyndon Johnson—a man who did much to advance civil rights but who was also a racist who habitually referred to black Americans with the nastiest racial slurs. *To Kill a Mockingbird*'s characters are merely billboards for racism and anti-racism positioned around the two wonderful blacks—noble, helpful, suffering Tom and wise, soulful Calpurnia. Far from being important tutelage on the price of racism in America, *To Kill a Mockingbird* is mere flattery for white progressives seeking reassurance about their moral stature in the universe—at the top of the order, stalwart opponents of the white trash but also above the blacks, who are not their equals but fragile, tender mockingbirds who require white protection. *To Kill a Mockingbird* is a story of white liberal self-congratulation. That may be why blacks aren't especially interested.

A more exacting drama would work in twists and doubts: if Tom were not entirely innocent, or if there were some ambiguity about whether he had carried out the attack, the courtroom drama might be gripping. But Tom lost the use of his left arm in a cotton gin accident many years ago and couldn't have choked Mayella with both hands nor hit her with his left fist. Somehow the citizens of the town where Tom is well known, and even the family for which Tom has repeatedly done chores, are unaware that his left arm is useless. He's been doing work for everybody for years with one arm and nobody noticed? Preposterous. A witness who takes the stand in Tom's defense about the arm injury is cross-examined about the defendant's character and drinking habits to impugn his credibility, as though any of that would matter: in a burg like Maycomb, where everyone knows his neighbors, everyone would already know about poor Tom's arm. Failing that, the mangled arm could simply be displayed to the jury. As a trial drama, *To Kill a Mockingbird* wouldn't pass muster in the writer's room of the most routine television courtroom saga.

Bob Ewell, the despicable bigot who beats up his daughter for behaving flirtatiously toward Tom, and who leads a Klan lynching party to attempt to break into the prison where Tom is being held, would be a more interesting character if he had some shred of psychological motivation for his ill will toward blacks—say, if he had been brutalized by a black man. The children in the play would have more dramatic weight if they, as products of their time, were infected with racism instead of being adorable little bonbons of childhood sweetness. (Think back to your earliest days: are kids really so sweet?) But any such adjustments that might make *To Kill a Mockingbird* a more effective drama would make it less like a banner of white liberal self-love, less like the narrative equivalent of a TRAYVON hoodie. When it emerged in Lee's long-delayed follow-up to *To Kill a Mockingbird*, *Go Set a Watchman* (2015)—which turned out to have been written before the sanctified novel that secured Lee's immortality but is set twenty years later—that Atticus, as late as his seventies, was actually a white supremacist, Lee's fans were aghast and hurt. Never mind that Atticus was closely based on Lee's own father, Amasa Coleman Lee, who was indeed a segregationist until nearly the end of his life. (Finch was her mother's maiden name.) How dare Lee let messy reality intrude into a children's fable about a plaster saint! How dare she introduce thorny and vexatious debate about race into their garden of race innocence! Atticus's fifty-five-year reign as the paragon of white liberal virtue was abruptly ended. As

Randall Kennedy, a black academic, wrote in *The New York Times*, "*Go Set a Watchman* demands that its readers abandon the immature sentimentality ingrained by middle school lessons about the nobility of the white savior." To cling to immature sentimentality, though, is exactly what white progressives want. Adam Gopnik, writing in *The New Yorker*, seemed offended that *Go Set a Watchman* even exists, harrumphing that it "has not a single prefatory sentence to explain its pedigree or its history or the strange circumstance that seems to have brought it to print after all this time." The novel is now undergoing approximately the same fate as *The Godfather, Part III*: fans of its predecessor are simply choosing to pretend it never appeared. Hip Brooklyn parents are not going to be naming their boys Atticus in the future, though.

Few if any of *Mockingbird*'s progressive fans seem to have noted that, in its final act, it contradicts itself. The core of liberalism means granting your worst enemy the same rights, the same due process, that you would grant your brother. The worst enemy here is Bob Ewell, the violent death (possibly justified) of whom at the hands of Boo Radley goes uninvestigated because everyone involved—including, after some grumbling, Atticus Finch—agrees to participate in a lie and a cover-up about the circumstances of the racist's demise. It ought to fall to the legal process to decide whether Boo Radley is justified in killing Ewell, who is menacing the Finch children when Radley fells him with a knife. Instead, the sheriff announces he will preempt all inquiry by declaring that Ewell somehow killed himself, by falling on his own knife. A novel about the injustice of lynch mobs and race bias concludes, then, by arguing that sometimes legal procedure must be discarded in order to achieve some kind of rough justice. Ewell did great wrong to Tom Robinson, therefore he has forfeited his rights. He got what was coming to him for being a bad guy. Yet this is the same kind of tribal thinking that drives lynch mobs: forget due process, we know this guy is bad. *To Kill a Mockingbird*'s driving passion is not justice for all but an eye for an eye: "Let the dead bury their dead," the sheriff says. In other words, let's not get too hung up on whether murder was done here, it all evens out. That the reclusive, possibly mentally handicapped Boo Radley is, like Tom Robinson, described as an innocent "mockingbird" who enjoys special protection because of his intrinsically guileless nature, and cannot be judged by his actions like any other person, says much about the progressive mindset: animals, black people, and retarded people are all cast into the same basket. They're all helpless, all in need of crusading white liberals to look out for them.

The phrase "blind spot" is the new cliché among progressive pundits who wish to call someone a racist without actually using the word, which even they must notice has a tendency to pollute the air, to render further civilized discourse unlikely. *To Kill a Mockingbird* represents the blindness of progressivism. It has for more than fifty years been right there in plain sight as a totem of the patronizing, condescending, dehumanizing mindset of white liberals when it comes to race. Liberals don't see its dramatic flaws and don't see that its final message is damning rather than reassuring. They don't care, because what they want is a soothing balm and reassurance for their anguish about race. At the end of the performance, as I politely waited for the standing ovation to end, I noticed that many of the women around me were crying. It would never have occurred to me that such a transparent case of pandering could elicit such an emotional reaction, but then again I was left equally unstirred by the supposedly inspirational speeches of Barack Obama. People actually believed Obama was going to fundamentally transform the United States of America, to lift us to a higher level? We would become a better people by ticking the box next to his name? *To Kill a Mockingbird* was well ahead of the game. It proved that when you flatter white liberals with the idea that they're holy race saviors, you can get them to believe nearly anything.

Art

Renoir at the Clark

by Karen Wilkin

Some years ago, as I approached the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, a parade of third or fourth graders led by an adult male came between the entrance and me. They lined up facing Huntington Avenue, and held up badly lettered, inelegantly worded signs denouncing Pierre-Auguste Renoir—I remember "Renoir Sucks," among other equally literate phrases—and demanding that all works by the artist be immediately taken off exhibition. I had heard about this bizarre one-man cross-country campaign, which attracted some baffled media attention at the time. Faced with the underage demonstrators in Boston that day, I wondered if the kids co-opted for the event knew anything about Renoir's art or had ever seen any of it, and I considered, unkindly, whether the instigator of the protest was a failed artist.

Yet, loopy as the anti-Renoir effort was, it wasn't wholly unexpected. Renoir (1841–1919) seems to be the one artist associated with Impressionism who isn't beyond criticism. Quite the contrary, it's rather fashionable to disparage him. I've heard his work deprecated as "saccharine," his subject matter deplored as "those fat ladies." Feminists fault him for presenting the female body for delectation and for visually suggesting the pleasure of a caress. Of course, his attitude towards women, by most reports, fell spectacularly short of present-day standards. His answer to a journalist who asked how he managed to paint with hands crippled by arthritis—"I paint with my prick"—doesn't help.

But Henri Matisse admired Renoir's pictures enormously, so much so that on moving to the South of France, near Renoir's home in Cagnes-sur-Mer, he began a close friendship with the septuagenarian artist, painted on his property, and showed him his work. (Renoir didn't much like the younger man's efforts but said that, since Matisse could use black without its looking like a hole in the canvas, he was a "real painter.") Pierre Bonnard was a fan, as was Pablo Picasso, who owned several important Renoirs. Georges Braque had a reproduction of a Renoir nude on his studio wall. The art historian Julius Meier-Graefe, an avid supporter of Modernism, esteemed Renoir as much or more than he did Paul Cézanne. Such dedicated collectors as Albert Barnes and Sterling Clark acquired Renoir in depth, while Duncan Phillips, when he sought a key work to lure visitors to his new museum of modern art, paid an extravagant price for Renoir's delicious image of young people enjoying themselves on a summer afternoon, *The Luncheon of the Boating Party* (1880–81). And before someone points out that these enthusiasts are all male, it's worth noting that Berthe Morisot was a supporter, too.

Over the last few years, two informative, thoughtfully selected exhibitions—one dedicated to Renoir's life-size vertical figure paintings organized by the Frick Collection, the other a survey of his late work organized by the Philadelphia Museum of Art—helped to clarify perceptions of this most problematic of Impressionists. The Frick show brought to

life Renoir's aspiration to combine Impressionism's interest in light and the life of the times with his own passion for the legacy of the Old Masters, a quest underscored by the presence, not far away, of the Frick's paintings by Veronese, Velázquez, and Bronzino, among others. The Philadelphia show suggested what Matisse, Picasso, Bonnard, and Meier-Graefe might have found so admirable by emphasizing Renoir's extraordinarily inventive color and his bold, varied paint handling in the last decade or so of his life.

Now, to commemorate the centennial of his death, "Renoir: The Body, The Senses," a collaboration between the Clark Art Institute, Williamstown, Massachusetts, and the Kimbell Art Museum, Fort Worth, Texas, offers a fresh and stimulating view of the painter.[1] By concentrating on a single subject—the human figure (usually the nude human figure)—the exhibition's curators, Esther Bell, Chief Curator at the Clark, and George T. M. Shackelford, Deputy Director of the Kimbell, make clear the evolution of Renoir's approach from his student years to the year of his death, telling the story with some stunningly impressive loans from public and private collections in North and South America, Europe, and Asia, including significant works from both organizing museums. The wide-ranging exhibition situates Renoir among the artists he admired and strove to emulate, compares him to his peers and contemporaries, and samples those whom he influenced. We are shown the artist whole and in sharp focus, over his entire career, and along the way we are also alerted to his originality and independence of mind. And there's a handsome catalogue with illuminating essays by the curators and several other Renoir scholars.

Renoir was formally trained at the rigorous, traditional École des Beaux-Arts, as well as at the studio of the neoclassicist Charles Gleyre, where he met and befriended Claude Monet, Frédéric Bazille, and Alfred Sisley. But his real aesthetic education was at the Louvre. His family lived nearby, and he began to frequent the galleries early on, filling notebooks with drawings of the collections as a very young teenager apprenticed to a firm of porcelain decorators. Renoir recalled that the lucid forms of Greek and Roman sculpture attracted him first, but he soon discovered the Venetian painters of the Renaissance and Peter Paul Rubens and was impressed by their virtuoso paint handling and intense color. At the Clark, we first meet Renoir in the museum's own self-portrait, painted when he was in his early thirties, but the installation immediately moves backward in time and shifts our attention to formal considerations rather than biography. We are confronted by first-hand evidence of the type of work that shaped the young artist, including a fluid Rubens oil sketch of the Three Graces. We see the twenty-ish Renoir's response in his copy of a vast Rubens from the cycle commissioned by Marie de Medici, a small canvas packed with busy nudes, with lively reds and blues. Nearby, we encounter some of the youthful painter's ambitious, full-length, realist nudes, contextualized by signature works from established artists of his own time, painters whom he admired and pitted himself against: Jean-Baptiste-Camille Corot's suave reclining nymph, Eugène Delacroix's broadly sketched *Andromeda* (1852, Museum of Fine Arts, Houston), and Gustave Courbet's earthy seated bathers. Together, they help clarify the origins of Renoir's early nudes, although the story also includes the influence of the classical past. His suggestive *Boy with a Cat* (1868, Musée d'Orsay, Paris), a pearly skinned adolescent peering over his shoulder, is like a vertical version of the well-known sculpture of a sleeping Hermaphroditus; the voluptuous, sturdy young woman in *Bather with a Griffon* (1870, Museu de Arte de São Paulo) is posed like a celebrated Venus by Praxiteles. But the boy is clearly a modern, naked teenager who snuggles a tabby cat, not a semi-mythological creature from antiquity, and the standing bather, with her little dog, is just as evidently a woman of her times, clutching the

1 "Renoir: The Body, The Senses" opened at the Clark Institute on June 8 and remains on view through September 22, 2019. The exhibition will also be seen at the Kimbell Art Museum, Fort Worth (October 27, 2019–January 26, 2020).

garments she has just removed, watched by her clothed friend who reclines behind her. Courbet's brash realism and his varied paint handling inform both pictures, while in *Bather with a Griffon*, his controversial image of two half-clad young women reclining on a riverbank, is more present than the classical Venus invoked by the pose.

Renoir sought official recognition with these early paintings, which he submitted to the Salon. (*Bather with a Griffon* was, in fact, accepted at the Salon of 1870, but derided.) He would continue to send works to the famously conservative official exhibit, even after he was participating regularly in the "alternative" shows organized by his friends the "New Painters," later known as the Impressionists. It has even been suggested that Renoir's affiliation with these daring progressives was provoked less by common attitudes than by the successive rejections of the large canvases he submitted to the establishment exhibition. When he finally had works accepted fairly consistently by the Salon, from the late 1870s to the mid-1880s, he no longer showed with the Impressionists, claiming that participation in the official exhibit was more beneficial to his career.

Yet "Renoir: The Body, The Senses" makes it clear that he was aesthetically allied with the Impressionists through his fascination with the way light plays on the skin of young women and dissolves the world around them. A series of half-length nude and semi-clothed figures explores the effect of sunlight on flesh in a variety of ways, the most extreme being *Study. Torso of a Young Woman in the Sunlight* (1875–76, Musée d'Orsay, Paris), in which ribbony, flickering strokes of dark and light green, suggesting tall grasses and foliage, threaten to merge with the light-dappled form of the full-breasted, dark-haired sitter. (Hostile critics, when the painting was first exhibited, interpreted the play of light and shadow, perversely, as decay; others admired it.)

But the notable differences between Renoir and his most adventurous contemporaries are also made evident. Witness the pairing of Renoir's crowds of agile bathers teasing each other with a crab and Edgar Degas' sober groups of reclining nudes, for example, all executed in pastel between about 1895 and 1900. Degas' sprawled, androgynous, monumental figures are seen from unexpected viewpoints, daringly cropped, and seemingly fused with the ambiguous expanse of repeated strokes. Renoir's cavorting girls are unequivocally feminine and playful; naturalistically depicted in terms of form, but with heightened color, they move easily in their landscape setting. Renoir's keen, possibly lascivious appreciation of the physicality of his subjects and their place in the world is very different from Degas' dispassionate transformation of his models into near-abstractions pressed against the boundaries of the support. Still another attitude is represented by two small paintings of bathers by Renoir's friend Paul Cézanne, one formerly owned and treasured by Matisse, the other the equivocal *Battle of Love* (*ca*. 1880, National Gallery, Washington, D.C.), once in Renoir's own collection, both constructions in which the visual weight and significance of the planes of figures and setting seem almost interchangeable. Degas and Cézanne saw their work, however radical, as seamlessly connected to the long history of art, but these groupings emphasize Renoir's somewhat different attitude toward the past: his allegiance to traditional ways of suggesting form, a residue, perhaps of his early interest in classical sculpture.

An illuminating section dedicated to "decorative" works expands on this idea by examining Renoir's relationship to the legacy of French Rococo painting. An appetite for works designed purely for visual delight had been stimulated by the mid-nineteenth-century publication of the Goncourt brothers' paean to eighteenth-century French art, along with the Louvre's acquisition of François Boucher's *Diana Leaving Her Bath* (1742), a pair of creamy nudes and a flurry of drapery, described, when it entered the Louvre, as "silken and silvery" and, happily, included in Williamstown. Renoir recalled that the Boucher was among the first paintings to capture his attention and one that he continued to admire. "Decorative," in this context, is not pejorative, but refers to images not obviously connected to the life of the times or to coherent locations. Renoir's

Little Blue Nude (*ca*. 1878–79, Albright-Knox Art Gallery, Buffalo, NY), with her crossed leg and blue and white drapery, against a loosely stroked, indeterminate landscape, seems haunted by Boucher's image of the goddess, absent the mythology. Prompted by Boucher and Renoir's enthusiasm for him, we begin to think freshly about the exhibition's wealth of dreamy, seated bathers beside the sea, all firm, luminous flesh, bold breasts, and cascading hair. The Clark's own *Blonde Bather* (1881), for example, her only attachment to modernity a wedding ring, starts to become a surrogate goddess, not just a sensual portrait of the painter's young future wife.

Renoir's late work is splendidly represented by canvases of seated and reclining figures painted after 1900. His version of modernity is evident in the way ample bodies, made luminous by layers of transparent color, set off by more roughly stroked backgrounds, are made to relate to the geometry of the canvas without losing their identities as unequivocal emblems of female-ness. Witness the heroic proportions of *Seated Bather* (1914, Art Institute of Chicago). We read her subtly stroked, massive limbs almost as independent elements, compelled to pay more attention to the way she is constructed and fitted into the rectangle of the canvas than to any implication of desire or to the suggestion of landscape and the distant sister bathers behind her.

Renoir's range of touches and his command of color dominate many of the late paintings, so much so that subject matter is almost subsumed by pure painting. We are first engaged by the swirl of greens and golds around the pale flesh and scribbly white drapery of *Bather Seated in a Landscape, Called Eurydice* (1902–04, Musée Picasso Paris), only later taking in her hefty arms and legs and her substantial haunches. Similarly, emphatic stabs and swipes of the brush and gorgeously orchestrated broken color—evocative of patterned cloth, flowers, and landscape—demand as much of our attention as the clothed protagonists of *The Concert* (1918–19, Art Gallery of Ontario, Toronto) and the pair of floating, pillowy, reclining nudes in *The Bathers* (1918–19, Musée d'Orsay, Paris). The exhibition's late works also include an ample (no pun intended) selection of Renoir's large sculptures of generously proportioned nudes, made with the assistance of the Catalan sculptor Richard Guino. The painter is said to have turned to sculpture late in life because of his crippled hands, although he obviously continued to paint vigorously until his death, as the last works at the Clark attest; a well-known film clip, not on view in Williamstown, shows him working with brushes tied to his hands.

"Renoir: The Body, The Senses" ends with works by artists who either esteemed him, knew him, and/or collected his work, including Matisse, Picasso, Bonnard, Fernand Léger, and Suzanne Valadon. They add seasoning to the show and can even make us try to see Renoir through the eyes of his admiring colleagues. But the heart of the exhibition, alone worth the visit whatever your position on the artist's attitude towards women, is a gallery filled with magnificent life-sized red, black, and white chalk drawings, *ca*. 1884–87, part of a series of about twenty made in preparation for the three main figures in *The Great Bathers* (1884–87, Philadelphia Museum of Art). (The painting itself is regrettably absent because it cannot travel.) These lavish images are supplemented by similarly generous chalk drawings related to other paintings, cumulatively overthrowing the popular belief that all Impressionist painting was done spontaneously, on the spot, without premeditation. These rarely (if ever) exhibited works reveal Renoir's thinking as he adjusted poses, raising or lowering an arm, subtly altering the angle of a head, or turning a figure slightly in space. We watch as he suggests pale flesh with urgent strokes of red chalk around untouched paper and as he searches for eloquent contours with superimposed inquiring lines. Berthe Morisot apparently saw a group of Renoir's large preparatory drawings in his studio and thought it would be exciting to exhibit them. She was right.

Verrocchio: the master's master

by James Hankins

This year is the five-hundredth anniversary of Leonardo da Vinci's death, and the museum world has not been slow to celebrate the career of this most remarkable—and marketable—of Renaissance artists. Of the many exhibitions being held this year, the two most significant were forecast to be shows in London and Paris presenting sizeable tranches of, respectively, Leonardo's surviving drawings and his paintings. In London, the Royal Collection Trust has placed in Buckingham Palace the Queen's matchless collection of Leonardo's drawings (May 24 through October 13, 2019), while the Louvre will host the most comprehensive viewing of his paintings—fourteen of fewer than twenty surviving works—ever brought together in a single place (October 24, 2019 through February 24, 2020). Crowd-control measures—the Louvre received more than ten million visitors last year, up to fifty thousand per day—are already in place.

Discerning art lovers wishing to understand Leonardo "in the process of growth" (the mode of understanding recommended by Aristotle) would have been better advised to take in a recently concluded exhibition at the Palazzo Strozzi in Florence, the core of which is to travel to Washington, D.C., this month.[1]

For the last dozen or so years, the Fondazione Palazzo Strozzi has been organizing what are, from a scholarly and connoisseurial point of view, the finest art shows in Italy. The Fondazione was formed in 2006 with the aim of sidestepping the roadblocks of bureaucracy and politics that so often surround the great national collections. Its formula was invented by an outsider to Italian museology: James Bradburne, the brilliant British-Canadian impresario who was its first director. Bradburne was determined to avoid the curse of the blockbuster exhibition: busloads of tourists with no serious interest in art, driven by the dark engines of *turismo di massa* to spend an average of six seconds inspecting works of art they have been led to believe are significant. Florence has enough of that already, and serious lovers of art have long been demoralized by conditions in her largest museums, the Uffizi and the Pitti Palace, which at certain times of year resemble more the central train station of Milan at rush hour than places of communion with the work of great artists. Bradburne focused instead on providing the intelligent museum-going public with idea-driven exhibitions designed by accomplished scholars and experts. Visiting one of the Palazzo's exhibitions is like listening to a brilliant series of lectures by some leading authority, illustrated by the actual objects. The Fondazione's exhibitions range across the history of art from antiquity to the present day. It has championed the works of neglected young Italian artists and introduced modern Chinese art to European audiences; it has explored the genesis of stylistic change, the interaction of art-

1 "Verrocchio: Master of Leonardo" was on view at the Firenze Palazzo Strozzi, Florence, from March 9 through July 14, 2019. An abbreviated version of the exhibition, titled "Verrocchio: Sculptor and Painter of Renaissance Florence," will open at the National Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C., on September 15, 2019, and remain on view through January 12, 2020.

ists and great collectors, the nexus of art and philosophy, the use of techniques like trompe l'oeil in different epochs; and it has provided richly contextual presentations of too-little-known artistic movements. In all its activities, the Fondazione has remained delightfully free of the tedious political messaging so common these days in Anglosphere museums.

With the Leonardo quincentenary looming, the Fondazione's directors—with typical enterprise—located an Archimedean point from which it could leverage the institution's advantages and avoid the desperate scrum among museums for Leonardo exhibits. It decided to focus on the man who, more than anyone else, formed Leonardo as an artist: his teacher, Andrea del Verrocchio (1435–88). This turned out to be an inspired move. First of all, and rather amazingly, there has never been a monographic exhibition devoted to this leading artist of Lorenzo de'Medici's Florence. Second, Verrocchio scholarship turned out to be ripe for a major reassessment, and the Fondazione found two brilliant scholars, Francesco Caglioti and Andrea De Marchi, experts respectively on his sculpture and painting, to lead an international team of curators and designers. The exhibition catalogue is brim-full of new discoveries and insights into this great master, hitherto known primarily for his sculpture in bronze. Finally, research for the exhibition has established with near certainty Leonardo's authorship of a terracotta *Madonna and Child*, bringing the number of his securely attributed sculptures from zero to one.

An introductory label greeted viewers as they entered the exhibition with what seemed like an inflated claim: "No one shaped Florentine art in the age of Lorenzo the Magnificent more than Verrocchio." One might be inclined, as I was, to dismiss this claim as promotional puffery, muttering under one's breath, "Really? Botticelli? The Pollaiuolo brothers? Ghirlandaio? Filippino Lippi? Cosimo Rosselli? Andrea della Robbia?" Yet by the end of the exhibition one saw that the claim is precisely calibrated and fully credible.

Verrocchio turns out to be a kind of paradox: a well-known artist who is also unknown. His major works in bronze are familiar to every student of the Florentine Renaissance: *David* (*ca*. 1468–70) and the *Incredulity of Saint Thomas* (*ca*. 1467–83) in the Bargello; *Winged Boy with Dolphin* (*ca*. 1470–75) in the Palazzo Vecchio; the *Beheading of John the Baptist* (1478–80) in the museum of the Duomo; the tombs of Piero, Giovanni, and Cosimo de'Medici in the Church of San Lorenzo. The exhibition supplemented the well-known by providing insight into two aspects of the artist which remain far more obscure. First, it gave the viewer an appreciation for Verrocchio's achievements in media other than bronze sculpture: drawing on paper, fresco, panel painting in tempera, and sculpture in marble, terracotta, and wood. Second, it demonstrated how central his art and his teaching were to the Age of Lorenzo de'Medici. Passing through the various rooms, we learned how Verrocchio strove to embody the artistic ideals of his time, how he filtered, refined, and redirected impulses from previous generations, passing them on to pupils, collaborators, and followers, while also challenging rivals for artistic supremacy. We glimpsed an artistic world of intense competition but also generous and admiring collaboration. The result, as Francesco Caglioti writes, was "a new era of Florentine art in the 1460s," an era devoted to perfecting nature by developing an experimental science of representation, guided by "the most noble ideals of beauty." Against Giorgio Vasari's implausible idea of Leonardo as a genius taught chiefly by nature, one comes to realize that his supreme skills were the fruit of many generations engaged in the passionate pursuit of common civilizational ideals.

Verrocchio's relationship with earlier and later generations proved to be the exhibition's organizing principle. The first two rooms investigated his ties to the great masters in sculpture of the early Florentine Renaissance: his teacher, Desiderio da Settignano, and Donatello, the greatest Western sculptor before Michelangelo (Verrocchio occupied his studio near the Duomo after the great man's death). We were then introduced to Verrocchio the painter and his school in the large third room containing a series of Madonnas with the baby Jesus. There the supreme work was the *Madonna of Volterra* (*ca*. 1476–8), on loan from the National Gallery of London, where Verrocchio's idea of beauty as "a vision of extreme elegance and refinement"

is made manifest. According to De Marchi, this was possibly the finest painting of the 1470s, a work that drew younger artists into his orbit. The other works in the room allowed one to see the painting's impact on contemporaries such as his collaborator Francesco di Simone Ferrucci, younger rivals such as Botticelli, and pupils such as Leonardo, Perugino, and Lorenzo di Credi. The rest of the exhibition similarly showed how Verrocchio, his apprentices, and his collaborators addressed a variety of projects in different media. The era's shared experience of finding ever more innovative and naturalistic ways of retelling the old stories of the Bible, the saints, and Greco-Roman antiquity, one realizes, must have been thrilling.

The exhibition culminated in the ninth room, where the visitor was brought into the exciting project of attributing a new work to Leonardo. It is well known from the biographical tradition and from Leonardo's own words and the drawings in his notebooks that making sculptural models in *plastica*—soft media such as wax and clay as opposed to marble carving—was one of his regular ways of thinking through problems of *disegno*. He tells us himself that he liked to make models of horses, old men's heads, human body parts, and *Nostre Donne e Cristi fanciulli intieri* (complete models of the Madonna and Child). Scholars and collectors have searched for examples of Leonardo's sculpture for centuries. A number of works have been attributed to him with varying degrees of plausibility, and several embarrassing fakes—like the wax *Flora* in the Bode Museum of Berlin, the work of a British forger—have been exposed. Before the exhibition there were only three serious candidates: a small terracotta relief of an angel in the Louvre (an attribution rejected by the Strozzi curators); a terracotta of *Saint Jerome Reading* held by the Victoria & Albert Museum in London (an attribution made by Eduardo Villata in 2011 but not yet widely accepted); and the *Madonna and Child* (*ca*. 1472) included in the Strozzi exhibition. This terracotta, also held by the fortunate Victoria & Albert, had already been tentatively attributed to Leonardo by a number of scholars and connoisseurs before World War II, but thanks to the vast authority of Sir John Pope-Hennessy the sculpture traveled in the post-war period under the name of Antonio Rossellino. Francesco Caglioti first reproposed the attribution to Leonardo in 2005, but it is only thanks to the expertise assembled for this exhibition, in particular that contributed by the Met's Carmen Bambach, the greatest living authority on Leonardo's drawings, that the work can now be securely attributed to Leonardo.

One key datum in the attribution is a set of drapery studies by Leonardo echoed precisely in the drapery of the terracotta Madonna. Among the true marvels of the exhibition, these drapery studies from the late 1470s and early '80s show how Leonardo's gifts as a draftsman were beyond any doubt on a plane higher than any artist of the Quattrocento had ever achieved or could achieve. Set next to other drapery studies of the period by Filippo Lippi and Verrocchio, they leapt off the wall thanks to their astonishing verisimilitude. Yet as Bambach points out in several of her curatorial contributions, the famous *sfumato* technique, first described *circa* 1490–92 in one of Leonardo's notebooks, was already being explored by Verrocchio and his school in the 1470s. Leonardo was exceptional in his technical virtuosity, but in this respect he was not a true innovator.

The *Madonna and Child* itself, on the other hand, expresses a remarkably original *concetto*. One of the values Verrocchio and his school sought to enact in their retelling of classical and sacred stories was a deeper sense of the humanity of the actors, sometimes verging on the sentimental. The Blessed Virgin holds baby Jesus's hand up so that he can wave to or bless the viewer; baby Jesus lunges for a breast, or plays with a bird, or reaches, all unknowing, for the little cross held up to him by his older cousin, John the Baptist. Leonardo's variation on this theme presents the Mother and Child in a truly intimate moment. The Madonna, with a mischievous smile on her face, puts her left hand under her baby's cloak and gently grazes his thigh with the thumb and index finger of her right. Baby Jesus is seen bursting out in a laugh while his little toes wriggle uncontrollably. One small hand tries to check his mother's fingers. She's *tickling* him. There could be no more humanizing presentation of the Madonna

and Child than that. The viewer is turned from a worshipper into a visiting family member, sharing the pleasures of motherhood. The pose is utterly original, unexampled to my knowledge in any other of the many thousands of representations of the Blessed Virgin. If other artists knew about Leonardo's concept, they didn't imitate it: they may have feared being thought disrespectful. Leonardo, clearly, did not.

The humanizing of the divine was also the central theme of the final section of the exhibition, mounted in the Bargello, Florence's sculpture museum, with the collaboration of the Bargello's curatorial team. Here the main item was Verrocchio's complex bronze group, the *Incredulity of Saint Thomas* (*ca*. 1467–83), cast originally to occupy the niche in Orsanmichele maintained by Florence's mercantile court, the Tribunale della Mercanzia. The subject is about establishing trust through the presentation of evidence, a theme appropriate to the Tribunal's activity. The *Incredulity* is one of Verrocchio's two greatest works in bronze (the other being the equestrian statue of the *condottiere* Bartolomeo Colleoni in Venice, finished after his death by other hands). Much of the installation made a convincing case for the work's influence on the Cinquecento's representation of Christ. Verrocchio humanized Christ by presenting him as a noble man who has suffered, not least from the doubts and betrayals of his own disciples, calmly offering forgiveness with one hand and exposing the wounds in his side to Thomas with the other. His face is in solemn repose, born of contemplative experience. The difficulty of capturing nobility of soul was emphasized by the skilled but repulsively vapid imitation in the same room by Pietro Torrigiano, an artist best known for breaking Michelangelo's nose in a fist fight. But what was truly astonishing, at least to this viewer, was the figure of Doubting Thomas. The face of Thomas as presented by Verrocchio is glimpsed in the moment when the arrogance of disbelief is being changed helplessly into trust by the reality of the Risen Christ. The changing facial expression is echoed by his body, which rotates towards Christ, one leg crooked as though in the act of falling to his knees. The subject of Doubting Thomas has been a common one in Christian iconography for over a millennium, but Verrocchio's interpretation of it has never been surpassed, not even by the powerful theatrics of Caravaggio's famous painting.

What the *Incredulity of Saint Thomas* shows, among other things, is that Leonardo's famous preoccupation with rendering "the inner motions of the soul" did not begin with Leonardo: Verrocchio was already pressing towards that goal in the 1480s. The point was underlined in the exhibition by the juxtaposition of Verrocchio's tempera painting on paper of Saint Jerome from the late 1460s with Leonardo's *Saint Donatus of Arezzo* (*ca*. 1475–76), a painting in tempera on canvas. Leonardo's painting is the more precisely finished of the two, but it is doubtful whether he is more successful in portraying the subject's interior life. In fact, one begins to question whether Leonardo's obsession with verisimilitude is not achieved at the cost of human insight; whether technical mastery itself implies a certain coldness, an abdication of the artist's interior sight, his human judgment.

The Strozzi exhibition aimed to illustrate the emergence of Leonardo's art from its Florentine context, but inevitably it prompted a kind of *paragone* between Verrocchio and his greatest pupil and collaborator. Despite the vast difference in their modern fame, it is not clear, at least to this viewer, that the comparison is all in Leonardo's favor. On a technical level Leonardo was without peer; there can really be no question that, measured by the canon of verisimilitude, he was the greatest draftsman and painter of all time. His finished drawings and paintings have wonderful presence, even monumentality, but there is necessarily a loss of refinement, elegance, and warmth. A comparison between Verrocchio's representations of Christ and Leonardo's $450 million *Salvator Mundi* (which I have seen only in photographs) is hardly fair, given the latter's condition and continuing doubts about the extent of Leonardo's contribution to the work. But there can be no doubt that Leonardo's cosmic savior, holding the starry sphere containing all worlds in his left hand while making a slight, emotionless gesture of blessing with his right, is hardly human; his human form is merely the avatar of his divinity. Though typologically

similar to Verrocchio's Christ, he is no longer part of a human story; his expression is fey and uncanny; his eyes communicate infinite sight but no sympathy. For all the technical brilliance of Leonardo's painting, the humanity that may be found in Verrocchio's Christ has disappeared. The visitors to this exhibition may decide for themselves whether Leonardo or his master Verrocchio was practicing the nobler and more beautiful art.

Exhibition notes

"Herbert Ferber: Form into Space"
The Philadelphia Museum of Art.
July 2, 2019–January 5, 2020

Such is the attention-grabbing nature of big exhibitions that it's easy to overlook—or, worse, dismiss on the basis of size alone—smaller shows featuring only one or two dozen works. But these, too, play an important role in our understanding of art, their modest compass and tighter focus sometimes offering the opportunity of a deeper understanding of the subject than would a more broad-gauge approach. A case in point is "Herbert Ferber: Form into Space" at the Philadelphia Museum of Art.

Ferber (1906–91) belonged to the generation of Abstract Expressionists who came to prominence in the 1940s and 1950s. In part because of the towering achievements of another member of that group, David Smith, Ferber's accomplishments, and those of other sculptors of the period, have largely been forgotten. There hasn't been a major show of this work since the Whitney's "The Third Dimension: Sculpture of the New York School" in the mid-1980s, and it's been even longer since we've seen a full-blown Ferber retrospective. This show reminds us of what an important sculptor he was, and it argues strongly for the need for another extended presentation of his work.

Organized by Timothy Rub, the museum's director, the exhibition comprises about twenty sculptures and works on paper and includes two important recent acquisitions, *Roofed Sculpture with 'S' Curve II* (1954) and *Homage to Piranesi II* (1962). It focuses on a fifteen-year period during which Ferber abandoned the figurative idiom for abstraction, gave up carving and modeling for constructed sculpture, and distilled such diverse influences as the early work of Giacometti, Surrealism generally, and Abstract Expressionism's mythic content and emphasis on painterly gesture into a distinctive personal language of form that would set American sculpture on a radically new path, that of the installation.

Indeed, one reason this show is such an important event is that it reminds us of Ferber's generative role in that démarche, a role now largely forgotten. Others, such as Louise Nevelson and Louise Bourgeois, had been thinking along similar lines at the time, but neither one created anything as dynamic or engaging on so many simultaneous sensory levels as did Ferber.

In 1951, Ferber was commissioned to create a sculpture for the façade of the B'nai Israel Synagogue in Millburn, New Jersey. The result was *Burning Bush*, a twelve-foot-by-eight-foot relief whose cursive linear forms simultaneously evoke the branches of a tree and the shifting silhouettes and rhythms of a fire. Executing it required Ferber to be physically inside the sculpture, surrounded and enveloped by its forms, and he later said that this experience got him thinking about the possibilities of working at architectural scale so the viewer would be as much a part of the work as the forms themselves. The first manifestation of this pursuit was *Sculpture as Environment*, an installation created for and shown at the Whitney Museum in 1961, and thus arguably the first "site-specific work" (in the modernist sense) ever made.

The Philadelphia show includes a maquette for this project, a white box about a foot tall, eighteen inches wide, and nine deep, open on one side to reveal an interior filled with pod-like forms that swirl between "ceiling" and "floor," as well as equally large, attenuated spikes arranged vertically and horizontally to form a loose, organizing armature. What endows this model with its drama is the presence of a tiny figure, no more than an inch tall, that drives home the project's sense of supermonumental

scale and sculptural ambition. (The maquette also suggests that Ferber could have found a satisfying sideline as a theatrical set designer, much as Isamu Noguchi did in his work for Martha Graham beginning in the 1930s.)

For this reason, anyone interested enough in Ferber to see the show owes themselves a visit to the Zimmerli Art Museum at Rutgers University, roughly equidistant from Manhattan and Philadelphia. There, *Environment for Sculpture* (as it is now known) has been installed since 1966.

At twelve by eighteen by twenty-four feet, the gallery space is smaller than that suggested by the maquette, yet the impact of the work is every bit as powerful as Ferber's preliminary effort suggested it could be. Four black, semi-organic linear forms snake, curve, swirl, undulate, and hover in and through the space, coming down from the ceiling and out from the walls to make their way in, through, and across the room. Upon entering, the viewer is immediately—and, even today, despite the fact that this idea is no longer "new," almost shockingly—caught up in the sculptural event as both witness and participant as he moves around and through it. The experience is not just physical but perceptual. Forms suddenly shoot into view from the periphery, or from somewhere overhead and behind. This makes *Environment for Sculpture* both sculptural and pictorial, an extension into three dimensions of Abstract Expressionist painting, which sought to absorb the viewer fully with canvases large enough to fill their peripheral vision.

Environment for Sculpture underscores the extent to which Ferber was primarily—preeminently—a sculptor of line. This might sound like a contradiction, or even an impossibility, since line, lacking dimension and being most commonly the province of drawing and painting, would seem to be incompatible with the sculptural impulse, concerned as it is with mass, volume, and the displacement of space. Line has had a role in modernist sculpture, of course, in the "drawing in space" of Picasso and Gonzalez. But Ferber's ambition was of a different order. He made line alone the sufficient condition of sculptural expression, endowing it with an energy and a range of reference and association unique in sculpture up to that time. And rather than displacing space, Ferber aims, with line, to activate it. Line simultaneously occupies, creates, and energizes space.

The exhibition lucidly tracks this evolving concern. One of the earliest pieces in the show, *Sphere* (1949), consists, as its title indicates, of a sphere atop a tall rod composed of a network of smaller welded rods—line conceived in the traditional constructivist sense as structure. A little earlier, however, Ferber's interest in line had made itself felt in *Hazardous Encounter II* (1947), a Surrealist-derived image of violence and sexuality very much in keeping with the advanced art of the time, its dominant element a long, spiky form with additional spike- or thorn-like forms running down its entire length. Yet its essential character is linear—it is an interlocking group of slender, bone-line forms that read as much in silhouette as in three dimensions. In the 1950s, in works such as *Roofed Sculpture with 'S' Curve II* (1954)—very much a precursor to the maquette for *Sculpture as Environment*—the curves and spikes alternate, the former reflecting Ferber's admiration for Chinese calligraphy, the latter suggesting the influence of Giacometti, notably his *Cage* (1931). (An outlier in this period is the magnificent, five-foot-tall *Sun Wheel*, 1956, on loan from the Whitney. Within a tall, rectangular cage we make out a starfish form, a helical one representing the sun, accompanied by myriad vegetal and other forms. It strikes one as a cross between Charles Burchfield's visionary images of nature and an amped-up version of Joan Mirò's *Constellations*, all passed through a Surrealist prism and rendered in three dimensions.)

Shorn of the references to nature and sexual violence seen in his previous work, *Environment for Sculpture* gives us the next phase: line-as-energy, pure form possessed of an expansive, free-floating lyricism combining the grace of Chinese calligraphy with the gestural impetus of Abstract Expressionism. Ferber develops the potential of the sculptural line still further in his *Homage to Piranesi* series, of which *Homage to Piranesi II* (1962) is included here. Within a tall, rectangular cage (again suggesting Giacometti's influence), a half dozen or so copper forms leap, dance, and swirl with such energy that they

spill beyond the confines of the cage. Here we have moved beyond line-as-energy, the forms now standing for something more: the traces of physical motion—of a dance movement, say, or of gymnasts arcing fluidly through space. As much as *Environment for Sculpture*, this series would seem to be an outgrowth of Ferber's long-ago insight about the link between the physical form of the art object and the physical experience of the sculptor.

Historical circumstances rather than any want of talent are what account for Ferber's move into the shadows following his death. Although at the end of his career he was making relatively large, floor-bound sculptures that spread horizontally, he was in many respects an outlier, an artist more at home with tabletop sculptures such as those of the *Homage to Piranesi* series than the monumental forms of a Henry Moore or the totemic presences of a David Smith. And he never followed through on the promise of *Environment for Sculpture*, ceding that to a younger generation of artists like Robert Grosvenor. Finally, there was the arrival of Pop Art in the early 1960s. When the definition of sculpture shifts from modernist abstraction to ironic riffs on consumer culture—a stack of simulated Brillo boxes or a pile of soft French fries—a voice like Ferber's cannot possibly make itself heard. A pity, because, as this show makes clear, after Smith, Ferber was the most talented and important American sculptor of the Abstract Expressionist generation.

—Eric Gibson

"Hyman Bloom: Matters of Life and Death"
The Museum of Fine Arts, Boston.
July 13, 2019–February 23, 2020

The Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, is righting a longstanding wrong. A movement that altered the course of modern art took place under its nose. Hyman Bloom, among a group of artists that came to be known as the Boston Expressionists—or, more simply, the Boston School—was exerting wide influence. Jackson Pollock and Willem de Kooning related to Bloom's student Bernard Chaet that they regarded his teacher as the first American Abstract Expressionist, having seen his work in the "Americans 1942" exhibition at the Museum of Modern Art.

But by the 1950s, the museum had adopted what Chaet called "a hands-off policy towards modern art." The germane blue bloods were disposed toward Impressionism and disdainful of a school of moderns whose names read like the congregational roll of a *shul*. In 1959 the MFA did exhibit Bloom's work alongside that of John Singleton Copley, Washington Allston, and Maurice Prendergast. They never devoted another show to him again, until now. "Hyman Bloom: Matters of Life and Death" laudably attempts to rectify the neglect.

Something else needs putting right, this time regarding Hilton Kramer, the founding editor of this magazine. Kramer did not hurl low blows. But writing about Bloom's painting *The Synagogue* (*ca*. 1940) for *Commentary* in 1955, he landed one on the south edge of the belt line:

> To the "foreign" eye, which brings no associations to it, it must be as absorbing as a kosher dinner—a matter of taste. But for the observer who has associations with this imagery from childhood onwards, Bloom's Jewish paintings stimulate the same surprise and dismay one feels on finding *gefilte* fish at a fashionable cocktail party.

I can't concur with Kramer's jaundice, but I suspect that those paintings seemed a lot more literal in 1955 than they do in 2019. Nowadays art can hardly be literal enough for some people. Charts abound, as do documentaries, and we're seeing a resurgence of the most banal sort of figuration in support of the most banal sort of politics. In comparison, Bloom's work looks like poetry itself.

Bloom's generation of Jews worked feverishly to assimilate in a cultural landscape dotted with land mines of anti-Semitism. It helps explain why the artist, painting corpses, limbs, and viscera in the 1940s and '50s, refused associations of his work with the Holocaust. One wanted to escape a pigeonholing. Henry Adams, a professor of art history at Case Western, writing in this year's *Modern Mystic: The Art of Hyman Bloom*, invites us to contrast Bloom's seclusion with the

Barnumesque self-promotion of figures like Jeff Koons. Another telling comparison would set Bloom's strivings for universalism next to the efforts of any number of contemporary artists who want nothing better than to represent their identity, conceived racially, sexually, or otherwise, in a spirit of doubt that universalism exists.

"Matters of Life and Death" focuses on those aforementioned paintings of the dead and dismembered, though, as its title suggests, it includes images from the world of the living as well. (The show has its own excellent catalogue. *Modern Mystic* is another effort, and the two represent a sudden and welcome explosion of Bloom scholarship.) Indeed, the artist sensed the realms of life and death as continuous. In Bloom's paintings, death reveals the true form of the body, and biological processes of decay, however repulsive, result in life for other beings. Life, in turn, takes place against an existential background that calls ceaselessly for endings and transformations. Bloom's spirituality started in the Levant and moved eastward, taking good advantage of the burgeoning interest in Asian religion in America (and, in one episode, the early availability of LSD at Harvard).

Thus life and death interpenetrate in *The Bride* from 1941. When I first viewed it, I thought that something had gone wrong with my glasses. The flowers adorning the titular woman's dress seemed to hover in front of the painting in places. Bloom lifted the technique from Rembrandt, situating impasto next to glazes. But a distinctly modern, do-or-die search for true form via the use and abuse of painting materials underpins the project. The linens upon which she lies consist of complicated passages formed by scraping. Her celebratory dress cocoons her from a background of cruelly abraded darkness.

Bloom, as a teenager, could draw astonishing approximations of William Rimmer (*Man Breaking Bonds on a Wheel*, *ca*. 1929) and Reginald Marsh (*Boxer at Rest*, 1930). Somehow he detected this almost immediately as a trap. By his twenties he was working against the excesses of his own talent. *Skeleton* (1936) recalls the agonized distortions and crusty textures of Soutine, with the form laid into a long sepulcher of a horizontal.

It happened often that the technical ability won the struggle. Bloom drew so well that he had trouble maintaining Expressionism. The MFA has installed his series of human cadavers and animal carcasses from the 1950s in a single dark, grisly room. Passages in some of these look, weirdly, like they came out of the brush of the contemporary realist Vincent Desiderio. (This impression, of Bloom's work recalling a subsequent development in art, came up over and over again. You could insert *A Leg*, 1945, into a show of '70s-era Philip Guston, and few would detect the intrusion.) Large-scale sanguine drawings such as *Female Cadaver* (1954), a picture of, more or less, Bernini's *Blessed Ludovica Albertoni* (1671–74) opened from sternum to pubic bone, stun with their draftsmanship. But the results don't persuade me like the works in which Bloom, pursuing Roualt or Soutine, tones down the specificity in favor of effect.

Fortunately, the show features many examples in which effect predominates. Bloom painted a series of synagogue chandeliers. One of these, *Chandelier No. 2* (1945), sparkles like a pile of costume jewelry contained by the squirming arabesques of the interior from which it hangs. There is also one of his Christmas trees from 1944, all but unrecognizable as such in its turmoil of color, painted as the chandeliers' *treyf* analogue. (Kramer praised the latter series: "relieved here of circumstantial details and stagey effects, they become occasions for his purest painting.")

More important than those old anxieties about content and form, though, these works evince an acute seriousness of a kind that has almost no contemporary equivalents. That sounds exaggerated, I realize. Certainly, many artists are working in serious (or at least dogged) ways and on serious (or at least urgent) topics. Just as certainly, there is room, lots of it, for play in art. But the kind of excavation of the soul that we see in Bloom has become a rarity and an exception in a world given over to mere display. Treasures, though perhaps not worldly reward, await any artist who would again take up the work.

—Franklin Einspruch

Venice's last judgment

by James Panero

The Venice Biennale, that strange pageant of contemporary fashions, offers the opportunity, if not the necessity, to explore the real art of La Serenissima. At the furthest extreme from the latest forms on display in the Biennale's Giardini are the ancient mosaics of the Church of Santa Maria Assunta, on the distant lagoon island of Torcello. I brought my family to Torcello's desolate piazza on what proved to be the hottest morning of a hot Italian summer. Torcello is an hour by vaporetto water bus from the Fondamente Nove, on the northern edge of Venice's *sestiere* of Cannaregio. We cut the time in half by water taxi and sped past the islands of Murano, Burano, and Mazzorbo before idling up to Torcello's Ponte del Diavolo, where the narrow canal becomes too shallow for navigation.

Since we arrived early, we had to wait for the church lady to unlock the doors of the basilica. We fed the languid fish schooling by the abandoned quay of a nearby channel. Then we huddled in what shade we could find on this barren deposit of alluvial silt. Torcello's tiny Locanda Cipriani, the fabled retreat where Hemingway wrote *Across the River and into the Trees*, was closed for the day, so the negronis would have to wait. At one point, we begged someone inside the island's archaeological museum for some shelter from the sun. *Mi dispiace*, he said, closing the shutters on us. Our water supply started running low, as did my party's patience. In the Italian custom, the attendant for Torcello's lavish municipal bathroom had overslept and missed his ferry, and no one else had the key.

The privations no doubt made the sight of Santa Maria Assunta, once we were let inside, all the more thrilling. On its western wall, the golden vision of its "Last Judgment," which received a full cleaning and restoration in February, is as profound as any art in Venice. With six vertical registers, the mosaic is filled with an awe-inspiring amount of visual information: scenes of the crucifixion, anastasis (resurrection), deesis (Christ with Mary and John the Baptist), and psychostasis (the weighing of souls) all rest on vignettes of heaven and hell divided in the lowest registers.

The decorative splendor of this mosaic barely holds its dynamic forces together. In the upper registers, an expressive Christ pulls the souls of the Old Testament up from limbo to heaven by their wrists. Below, a snaking line of judicial plumbing leads down to increasingly explicit visions of hell. Two demons try to tip the scales of Saint Michael with their pitchforks while pouring out sins from bottles and bags. Meanwhile the damned are subdivided among the lustful, gluttonous, wrathful, envious, avaricious, and slothful, where they endure fiery and icy torments, when not being eaten by worms.

Today Torcello is an overlooked shoal in the northern lagoon, but at one time the island nurtured the first seeds of what became the great Republic of Venice. Torcello flowered as the original center of activity in the Veneto,

before its channels silted up and its inhabitants relocated to the nearby islands of Burano, Murano, and the high ground of the Rialto. A millennium ago, at its apex, there were some ten thousand inhabitants on Torcello. Today, only about a dozen remain. Torcello's "Last Judgment" therefore offers genuine revelation. The end times here have already come.

There was a period when Torcello was the crucible of Venice's unexpected beginnings. In the final days of the Western Roman Empire, barbarian hordes descended on the old Roman towns still clinging to the shores of the northern Adriatic. As Attila the Hun surrounded the town of Altinum in 452, its residents fled to the sandbars of the nearby lagoon. These Roman holdouts and refugees from the other Veneti towns became lagoon dwellers, *incolae lacunae*, just three miles south of Altinum on the shifting delta sands of the River Sile.

Today the view from Torcello's campanile does not look all that different from what those settlers first saw fifteen hundred years ago. In *The Stones of Venice*, John Ruskin called the sight "one of the most notable scenes in this wide world of ours. As far as the eye can reach, a waste of wild sea moor, of a lurid ashen gray; . . . lifeless, the color of sackcloth, with corrupted sea-water soaking through the roots of its acrid weeds, and gleaming hither and thither through its snaky channels."

The Venetian lagoon has always been an alien landscape, but its separation from the mainland provided essential protection from Italy's drawn-out period of Germanic incursions and the collapse of the Byzantine Empire. In their exodus, the settlers built houses on pilings of hardwood driven into the mud flats. All of Venice was built this way. It is said that the baroque church of Santa Maria della Salute, the towering domed memorial to the devastating plague of 1630 by the Punta della Dogana, rests on a million wooden piles. The Venetians also organized their new community along Roman republican lines. Rather than be ruled by an emperor or king, they elected their leader—*dux* in Latin, duke in English, *doge* in Italian. In this way the Veneti of the lagoon formed their mighty maritime republic that endured for over a thousand years. In the Republic's final days, before its destruction by Napoleon, the Venetians even counseled the architects of the United States on the secrets of their Republic's endurance.

The foundation stone of the Torcello basilica was laid in 639, a year after the town's bishop had a vision that his flock should abandon what remained of Altinum. As Torcello rose in importance, its basilica became a prominent cathedral. The nearby channel, now little more than a shoaled-up estuary that harbors those languid fish, was once Torcello's bustling Grand Canal. The relics of Saint Heliodorus, the Altinum bishop who accompanied Saint Jerome and was martyred in 390, were carried off from his Roman town and laid to rest beneath the basilica's altar. His golden reliquary can still be seen there today. Since the Torcello basilica predates the construction of even the first cathedral of San Marco in Venice by some two centuries, one legend maintains that the body of Saint Mark was first interred here, perhaps in the crypt's Roman sarcophagus, after two Venetian merchants alighted with the Evangelist's remains from Alexandria, Egypt, which was then under the dominion of the Abbasid Caliphate.

About the time of the height of Torcello's predominance in 1100, the interior of the basilica received its cycle of golden mosaics, which includes a sorrow-filled image of the Virgin and Child in the main apse above a swirling, tessellated marble floor. Byzantine in form, the selection of a Last Judgment scene for the opposite towering western wall, through which congregants once entered and exited, is said to have been a particularly Venetian touch.

Torcello reveals Venice in its true provisional strangeness, where art gives vision to immanence and relics buoy the faithful to the final days. The great works of Venice have always conveyed these contingent qualities—as a world between worlds. Rather than gaze up to some idealized beyond, the art of Venice looks out to proximate, felt, rough-and-tumble revelation.

Art has always played a central role in connecting the Venetian experience to the cosmic story. The particular hardships endured by the

disease-prone city can be seen through its adoration of the "plague saints": San Rocco, in whose *scuola* and church, in the *sestiere* of San Polo, Tintoretto painted one of the world's greatest cycles of Christian image-making; and San Sebastiano, in whose church, on the site of a medieval hospice in the *sestiere* of Dorsoduro, Veronese painted some of his own masterpieces. For the Scuola Grande di San Marco, which now serves as the entrance to Venice's hospital, in the *sestiere* of Castello, Tintoretto painted his breakthrough *Miracle of the Slave* (1548), along with his famous depictions of how the body of Mark came to Venice (and its miraculous rediscovery after the Evangelist was, for a time, temporarily misplaced).

Art holds a particular power over the city, just as the city conveys a particular power to art. Undoubtedly this is the reason why many contemporary artists come to congest Venice's art-filled walls: to claim the city's revelations, even if what they themselves purport to reveal may be facile and false. Of course, the science-fiction didacticism of the group show in this year's Biennale, full of blinking lights and spinning whirligigs, speaks little to the art of Venice's resonant past. In our secular age, so enraptured with the present moment, how could it? Yet sometimes connections can still be made: in the United States Pavilion, the sculptures of Martin Puryear, which draw together the classicism of many sculptural traditions, are fraught with memory; an exhibition on "The Nature of Arp" at the Peggy Guggenheim Collection speaks to the aquatic forms of the lagoon; "Pittura/Panorama: Paintings by Helen Frankenthaler, 1952–1992," at the Palazzo Grimani, returns the great modernist to Venice some fifty years after she dazzled in the United States Pavilion with her aqueous compositions; and at Ca' Pesaro, "Arshile Gorky, 1904–1948" reveals the tragic vision of the American abstractionist who lost his family in the Armenian genocide.

Through plague and pestilence, rising sea waters and sinking salt marshes, in Venice the end has never seemed all that far off. Today the flood that troubles Venetians most is the tourists pouring out of *grandi navi*, the massive cruise ships that wreak havoc on the Giudecca Canal and may soon be banned, not the city's frequent inundations of *acqua alta*, which locals take in watery stride. Last November, when I was previously in Venice for the Tintoretto exhibitions at the Palazzo Ducale and Accademia museums, the high-water siren sounded at daybreak. The *sirene allertamento acqua alta* now broadcast from twenty-two points across the historical center and islands of Venice. From my window overlooking the Accademia, I listened as the signal broke the morning spell from the alarm atop San Trovaso. As my water taxi motored up the Grand Canal, the flood waters compounded with the morning rain and washed over the *calli* around the Ponte di Rialto.

Thirty-five years ago Venice installed its first flood alarm on the campanile of San Marco. A new alarm developed by the Centro Previsioni e Segnalazioni Maree now uses a wireless network and digital signals of various tones to indicate the height of the rising tide. Venetians also sign up for emergency notices by text message, giving them a few extra minutes to slide in the low metal barriers at the bottom of their doorways to hold back the headwaters. In the months of fall, as the *sirocco* southern wind, the full moon, and other hydrological effects converge on the Adriatic to push water into the lagoon, many Venetians now simply leave the barriers in place.

The waters of the lagoon have always offered protection and destruction in equal measure. With its canals framing an architecture of exquisite lace, the city's liquid light gives evanescent form to the miraculous story of survival that began, and ended, on humble Torcello. "Without making this excursion you can hardly pretend to know Venice," Henry James said of his own visit to that island. "It is impossible to imagine a more penetrating case of unheeded collapse. Torcello was the mother-city of Venice, and she lies there now, a mere mouldering vestige, like a group of weather-bleached parental bones left impiously unburied."

Music

New York chronicle

by Jay Nordlinger

The Lincoln Center Festival was a prominent summer festival here in the city. It started in 1996 and ended in 2017. The Mostly Mozart Festival has been around, in some form, since 1966. With the folding of the Lincoln Center Festival, Mostly Mozart expanded in duration and scope. I will provide a little sampler of the 2019 offerings.

Mostly Mozart presented an opera that is *all* Mozart—*The Magic Flute*. The venue was the David H. Koch Theater, on the Lincoln Center campus. The place was packed the night I was there. Alice Tully Hall had been too, the previous Sunday afternoon. On that occasion, the Chamber Music Society of Lincoln Center presented—what else?—a chamber concert. There is a hunger for classical music in New York City, even on lazy summer days.

Of course, you could say that, in a city of eight and a half million, there's always a significant hunger, for anything.

The Magic Flute was conducted by Louis Langrée, who has been the music director of the Mostly Mozart Festival since 2003. He was preceded by Gerard Schwarz. Mostly Mozart has been very, very fortunate in its music directors.

More than once, I have said that Langrée is a better conductor than his orchestra. I further say that I would rather hear a first-rate conductor with a second-rate orchestra than a second-rate conductor with a first-rate orchestra. The conductor is the more important actor. Regardless, the Mostly Mozart Festival Orchestra has improved considerably in recent years.

Before the overture, I was a little anxious—because the fashion today is to race through the overture. By conductor after conductor, the overture is taken so fast, there is no enjoyment in it, and no Mozart. Langrée was not guilty of this error. His tempo was brisk but not nuts. The music was energetic, not manic. There was room for Mozartean grace. Furthermore, the overture was a commendable weight, if I may: not period-band light and certainly not swollen. You know the good, solid Mozart that Neville Marriner conducted? That's the kind of thing I'm talking about.

Throughout the opera, Langrée demonstrated intelligent phrasing. He maintained the composer's tensions. The orchestra showed it could articulate. It could not do everything, however. Act II begins with a little F-major hymn, as I think of it. Formally, it is the "March of the Priests," but it is still hymn-like, in my book, as perhaps a priestly march should be. The festival orchestra could not summon the warmth desirable for this music—but the orchestra was adequate, and more than, in the various sections of the opera. And it is a pleasure to hear Langrée conduct Mozart.

As for the cast, it was composed of unknowns. But when people say "unknowns," what do they mean? Usually that they themselves have never heard of them. Everyone is known to *someone*. In any case, it was a strong cast, and a youthful one, as befits this opera. If there was not a Wunderlich, Röschmann, or Prey in this bunch, neither was there a lemon.

The production came from the Komische Oper Berlin, and it was co-directed by Suzanne Andrade and Barrie Kosky. This is a smart, clever, enjoyable, imaginative production. It is filled

with videos, or animation. It is funny too, with some outright "lolz": people laughed out loud, all around me. The production takes its inspiration from the silent movies. For example, the characters do not engage in the spoken dialogue written for them; instead, the dialogue appears on a screen, as the characters mug and so on. Meanwhile, a fortepiano plays. (Specifically, the music is two of Mozart's fantasies, K. 397 and K. 475.)

Let me mention a particular character—Monostatos, the chief of the slaves. In some productions, he is portrayed in blackface, which is, of course, problematic. In this one, he is portrayed in whiteface.

The production is very, very busy—flitty. Is it distracting? That is in the eye of the beholder, I suppose. To my eye, and ear, the production distracted from the music. The music was a mere soundtrack to the show. I thought of MTV, from way back. On that network, the video was more important than the song. Earlier this year, Andrew Ferguson wrote an essay for *The Atlantic*, in praise of print newspapers over their websites. His print edition would "hold still," he said; the websites do not. They often go off like pinball machines. This production of *The Magic Flute* does not hold still. I sometimes looked away, so I could listen to the music.

Also, the production is very, very jokey—nothing is sacred. *The Magic Flute* is a jokey opera, no doubt, or at least one laced with humor. But there are also streaks of the sacred. The production does not really honor the sacred. When Sarastro began "In diesen heil'gen Hallen"—a fairly holy aria—I looked away.

I left midway through Act II. I admired the production, but, at the same time, it hurt my eyes, and I had had enough. I have no doubt this was a minority opinion.

When it comes to productions of *The Magic Flute*—I remember doing this when Julie Taymor's production bowed at the Metropolitan Opera in 2004—I always ask, "What would Mozart and Schikaneder think?" (The latter is Emanuel Schikaneder, the librettist of *The Magic Flute*.) I think they would be amazed, impressed, and delighted by the Komische Oper Berlin production. I also think they would say: *De trop* (or its German equivalent). Don't smother the music and words.

Before moving on to a concert, let me pay tribute to this masterpiece, *The Magic Flute*, by telling a story: I once asked Andrew Porter, the eminent music critic and scholar, a silly question: "What is your favorite opera?" He did not regard it as silly, fortunately. Almost before the words were out of my mouth, he said, "*The Magic Flute*."

The concert was an orchestra concert, conducted, not by Louis Langrée, but by Andrew Manze. The first line of his bio tells us that he "is widely celebrated as one of the most stimulating and inspirational conductors of his generation." This, ladies and gentlemen . . . is not true. The language of musicians' bios, cooked up by publicists, is absurd. Musicians themselves should rebel against it, for their own dignity. Regardless, Maestro Manze is a very good conductor. That should be enough.

His bio might tell us what town he is from or whom he studied with. It might at least tell us his nationality. Of course, this bio does none of that. They seldom do, musicians' bios. (Manze is English, by the way.)

Leading off the concert was Beethoven's Violin Concerto, in which the soloist was Vilde Frang, a young Norwegian. She is a touching, noble artist. I usually shun the word "artist" when speaking of musicians, because I regard it as frou-frou, pretentious. But to some, it applies.

Manze conducted the exposition in masterly fashion—like a conductor who should be widely celebrated as one of the most stimulating and inspirational . . . oh, never mind. The music was tight, masculine, incisive, uplifting, and thoroughly Beethoven-like. The soloist, incidentally, has to stand around for a long time before she plays. This can be awkward for her. A pianist can simply stare straight ahead, if he wants: as in Chopin's E-minor concerto, which has a long, long orchestral introduction. But what does a violinist, who faces the audience, more or less, do? Frang sometimes looked left and into the orchestra; and then the other way, into the orchestra. She passed the time. In any event, this is a peculiar issue of stage comportment.

When she finally entered, Frang played her Beethoven with sweetness, reverence, and love. Her playing was rather inward and small; she

did not make her violin try to do too much. The cadenza was almost like a private meditation. (Frang played Kreisler's.) In comedy, we speak of "timing," although we usually leave this word out of music. Frang has great timing—a sense of rhythm, of rubato, of wholeness, and flexibility within that wholeness.

Let me say, too, that the orchestra's entrances were unusually precise. This is to Andrew Manze's credit. And the principal bassoon, Marc Goldberg, made an outstanding—an outstandingly musical—contribution.

In the middle movement, Larghetto, Frang was melting and elastic, following Beethoven's contours wherever he went. Soon, she was singing like a coloratura soprano. Her trilling was exemplary. Even while she was Romantic, she did not allow the music to dissolve into soup. She bore in mind the pulse. Her purity and beauty were memorable. If Beethoven had been there, he might have said, "Is my Larghetto really as beautiful as all that?"

Under Manze's baton, even the orchestra's pizzicatos were together—which is practically asking too much.

Frang effected a nifty transition into the Rondo. She was puckish and alert. She took the Rondo faster than you normally hear it, making me check the tempo marking: Beethoven did not give one, apparently. Frang made me think that other players take the Rondo too slowly. She was not *too* fast, however. With the orchestra, she was suspenseful and exciting. She made some mistakes along the way—wrong notes—but these were plums in the pudding, and reminders that we were not listening to a studio recording. In a high register, she was glass-like. And Mr. Goldberg, the bassoonist, once more made a nice assist.

I have a complaint, a complaint I have made about performances of this concerto before: I believe that the final notes should be in tempo—and that a ritard violates the character of the music. Frang and Manze went in for a ritard, leaving me with a sour note.

Yet this was a heartening performance, as the audience agreed. They brought Vilde Frang back repeatedly, but she played no encore—not a Bach sarabande, not anything. This was classy, I thought. Concerto soloists are too promiscuous with encores, and Beethoven's piece needs no supplement. Indeed, it is one of his best pieces, which is saying something, considering the piano sonatas, the string quartets, the symphonies, the Missa solemnis, etc. If someone asked you, "What is Beethoven?" you could do worse than to show him the Violin Concerto.

After orchestra concerts, the Mostly Mozart Festival often presents a little nightcap, a recital, lasting about an hour, without intermission. These events are held in the Stanley H. Kaplan Penthouse, up in the sky, with city lights all around. The events fall under the category "A Little Night Music"—get it? (The name comes from a famous serenade by Mozart.) One of the recitalists was Michael Brown, an American pianist. He played three sets of variations—the first of which was by Mendelssohn, the *Variations sérieuses* in D minor, Op. 54.

Musical fashion is funny. Once, these "serious variations" were a staple. Everyone played them. Then they virtually disappeared from the stage. I was glad Brown revived them, but his concept of the piece is different from mine (as is his perfect right). He played the music rather more percussively than I would have liked—with more punch and less legato. But you could not fault him for vigor and dash.

Next came a piece written in 2013: *Folk Variations*. By whom? By Brown himself. And why the "Folk"? In a chat with the audience, the composer said that he had "Yankee Doodle" in mind—though we would not hear it, and he couldn't hear it either, for that matter. I did not fully understand the point. At any rate, the piece is so much doodling, noodling, and jamming, or so it seemed to me. The main thing, though, is that Brown rolls his own. That he composes. I appreciate this in a musician, especially in a pianist, I think. Hamelin, Hough, Tao, Brown—they roll their own, and good for them. Their forebears did the same, as they were expected to do.

Mr. Brown ended the printed program with a big piece, the "Eroica" Variations of Beethoven. This work, too, has all but fallen out of the repertoire. I myself associate it with Gilels. In playing it, Brown was fulfilling "thematic programming," in that the Mostly Mozart Festival Orchestra, a

couple of hours earlier, had played Beethoven's "Eroica" Symphony. Is it sinful to say that I like the piano variations as much as I do the symphony, if not (a little bit) more?

Brown played these variations with command. He showed a clear sense of structure, and he played with total confidence. Boldness. He was unhesitating in everything he did, as if there were no other way. This is a valuable quality in a musician. Brown struck me as a leader, as he played. I wonder whether he conducts, or will conduct, in addition to playing and composing.

The audience wanted an encore, and Brown gave them one, and then another. First, he returned to Mendelssohn for "Spinning Song." I associate this piece with Rachmaninoff—he made what I believe is my favorite recording of it. Brown could have used more fluidity, I think, but he brought off the piece nicely. He closed with some Fauré, the Nocturne No. 3. Rubinstein used to play it. De Larrocha played it, and many others. I hadn't heard it in ages. What a lovely, thoughtful send-off.

In David Geffen Hall, there was another orchestra concert, but this time the orchestra was not the MMFO but a guest, a foreigner—the BFO, i.e., the Budapest Festival Orchestra. It was founded in 1983 by Iván Fischer and Zoltán Kocsis, the late genius pianist. The Fischer family has two conductors, the other being Ádám, who is Iván's older brother. Fischer (Iván) conducted the New York concert—which began with Haydn, his Symphony No. 88 in G. This is one of the most popular of all Haydn symphonies (104), and deservedly so. It is like a summation of everything that is great about Haydn: his humor, nobility, creativity, humanity, and so on.

Let me say that I associate Haydn symphonies with Hungary in this way: a lot of us learned them—the 104—from the famous, pathbreaking recordings of the Philharmonia Hungarica, conducted by Antal Doráti.

In David Geffen Hall, Fischer and the BFO gave us a decent No. 88. Best, I think, was the rusticity in the Trio. Also, the Finale—Allegro con spirito—was nicely unhurried. Remember, "allegro" is a mood as much as it is a tempo (indicating happiness, as you know). Speaking of this last movement: people enjoy going to YouTube and seeing Leonard Bernstein conduct it—or rather, not conduct it: he lets the Vienna Philharmonic play, mainly on their own, enjoying what they do, while occasionally leading them with a nod or such.

Next onstage came Jeanine De Bique, a singer, a soprano, from Trinidad and Tobago. She was stunning in appearance, wearing a red strapless dress. The young woman—a singer—sitting next to me said, "That's the fun part of being a singer: you get to wear a ballgown to your concert." Miss De Bique sang three Handel arias, two from operas and one from an oratorio. She began with "Ritorna, o caro," from the opera *Rodelinda*. Her sound was slight but pleasing, and her rendering was tentative but sincere. It turned out she was just warming up. The next two arias called on her coloratura—her agility—and she came into her own, wowing the audience.

It is fitting that the man himself—Mozart—should have the last word in this chronicle, which has sampled a (mostly) Mozart festival. After intermission, Fischer and the BFO gave us the "Jupiter" Symphony, Mozart's last. I always point out—annoyingly, I suspect—that Mozart didn't intend for this symphony to be his last. It was merely his latest. But, if you're going to end on one, this is a very, very good one to end on.

The performance on this occasion was workmanlike, I would say—sometimes rising to a greater height, as it did in the entire second movement, which is marked Andante cantabile. This means a singing andante. And I have seldom heard this movement so lyrical, so songful. Throughout the symphony, a player in the woodwind section shone: she was Gabriella Pivon, and she played a magic flute, to borrow a phrase. She and the conductor, Maestro Fischer, are married (literally so, not just musically united).

Actually, give someone else, Dvořák, the last word. When it comes to encores, Fischer likes to have his orchestra sing, and he asked the ladies of the orchestra—as he put it in introductory remarks to the audience—to stand and sing an arrangement of one of Dvořák's *Moravian Duets*, as the rest of the orchestra accompanied them. I thought of Schwarzkopf and Seefried, on an EMI recording, from way back. What a pleasant, offbeat tradition Iván Fischer has established.

The media

Revolutionism redux

by James Bowman

"A Robin Red breast in a Cage/ Puts all Heaven in a Rage." So wrote William Blake during the revolutionary age that began in America and France in the late eighteenth century, thus identifying the revolutionary mind with which we have since become so familiar. It is a mind that not only focuses on random and arbitrary instances of what it sees as wrong with the world, but also presumes to speak in lieu of "Heaven" to anathematize such wrong. Blake's revolutionary—it's never clear how far he may be identified with the poet himself—is incapable of the thought that the "Robin Red breast" might not mind life in the cage quite so much as he imagines and could actually prefer it to an uncaged existence. Nor does the zealot care that there may be many worse injustices in the world needing attention and possible amelioration. He isn't really interested in amelioration so much as the destruction or elimination of those he regards as oppressors, the worthy objects of his, and Heaven's, "rage."

Admittedly, children in cages are potentially more rage-worthy than a robin redbreast, but the promiscuity of the Left's outrage under President Trump long antedates the children-in-cages *topos*—just as the cages themselves antedate this president—and encompasses so many lesser offenses against Heaven and nature that it appears to have become self-generating. Anything can be grist to the outrage mills. Mr. Trump's insulting tweets against those who have maligned him are every bit as rage-inducing as the caged children. Indeed, as my friend Byron York has pointed out, it was the tweets and not the caged robins of the southern border that inspired Rep. Al Green (D-Texas) to bring articles of impeachment against the President to the House floor—on the alleged grounds that such scurrilous tweeting has

> brought the high office of the President of the United States in contempt, ridicule, disgrace, and disrepute, has sown seeds of discord among the people of the United States, has demonstrated that he is unfit to be President, and has betrayed his trust as President of the United States to the manifest injury of the people of the United States, and has committed a high misdemeanor in office.

Since when is it a "high misdemeanor" (whatever that may be) to suggest to someone that, if she doesn't like this country, she should try living in another? That's an easy one. Since Mr. Trump was elected, it has been considered axiomatic among increasing numbers of Democrats, and even many Republicans, that "he is unfit to be president," so that *anything* he says or does that they find offensive or simply disagree with can be taken as a confirmation of that bedrock truth.

I do not think it too much to describe such a mindset as a kind of infectious insanity—perhaps a "holy madness," to appropriate the title of Adam Zamoyski's great book on the phenomenon as it emerged in Blake's revolutionary era. Now, as then, it is spreading through the Western world, and it is not limited to the

progressive reaction to Mr. Trump. In Britain, the advent of Boris Johnson as prime minister in July produced an outburst of what is being called there "Boris Derangement Syndrome"—a reminder that a similar mental disorder was diagnosed by the late Charles Krauthammer during the George W. Bush administration. All the same symptoms are now in evidence in Britain. As Allister Heath wrote in London's *Daily Telegraph*:

> [As] in America, our discourse has mutated into a holy war, with two rival theologies pitted against one another, convinced that the other side is not just wrong but also self-evidently morally inferior. It's a horrendous, civilization-imperilling regression. We no longer debate: we try to annihilate the other side, destroy our opponents, get them fired from their jobs. We don't really attempt to convince, either. Our gang can do no harm; theirs can do no right. We are moral; they are immoral. It's barbaric and it is profoundly illiberal. . . . The extreme reaction triggered by the possibility that Boris Johnson could become our next prime minister [as indeed he did on July 24] provides a perfect illustration of our descent into post-democratic nihilism.

In Britain, at least, you could read those words in a major metropolitan daily newspaper. In America, if you read them at all, it would have to be in a niche and politically *déclassé* publication like the one you hold in your hands, or in some obscure corner of the internet. What's left of our national media continues to march in lockstep with the anti-Trump narrative of the past three years, forever uncorrected, apparently, by the Mueller report's failure to find any inculpatory evidence. Like Representative Green or his House Democratic colleagues Jerrold Nadler and Richard Neal, who continue to ransack the public record and any private archives they can lay their hands on for the slightest plausible evidence of wrongdoing, they stand with the Queen of Hearts in demanding, "Sentence first—verdict afterwards." Indeed, they go Alice's Queen one better by deferring the evidence until afterwards as well.

Perhaps it is just so much of a taste as this of what has been called, in certain well-known times and places, "revolutionary justice" that has bred in the twenty-odd would-be Democratic challengers to Mr. Trump a quasi-revolutionary fervor, one that has rarely been seen in the hundred and fifty years of relative domestic tranquility since the Civil War. President Obama's promise that he would "fundamentally transform" the country that elected him seemed, even to most of his supporters at the time, like just another escalation of the rhetorical arms race that had grown out of Bush Derangement Syndrome. But the even more virulent reaction against Mr. Trump appears to have produced a demand in the media, and to an unknown degree beyond, for fundamental transformation in deed as well as in word.

In the Democratic Party's so-called "debates," which took place in June and July and otherwise produced almost nothing worthy of note, it was for the most part only the lowest-polling candidates who ventured to raise the question of whether the radicalism of their more popular rivals might be a little bit impractical, fiscally calamitous, or just out of touch with the electorate of the country at large—towards whom the most passionate of the radicals seemed to adopt Hillary Clinton's attitude of contempt. That no one with a chance of stepping into her shoes at next year's convention appears to have learned anything from her disdain of the Trump-supporting masses and classes may be good news for the President, but it is a bit of a head-scratcher for those who assume that even revolutionaries are likely to behave rationally (and therefore, usually, surreptitiously) in the pursuit of their political goals.

One interesting explanation for the revolutionary fever on the Left was proposed by Barton Swaim in *The Wall Street Journal*:

> That [Mr. Trump] wasn't Republicans' ideal candidate in 2016 is apparent by the large numbers of conservatives who couldn't support him even after his nomination. Some still don't. In the progressive imagination, though, Mr. Trump *is* conservatism: heartless, lacking all conviction, dismissive of nuance, interested only in self-advancement, arrogant. Progressives' emotional reasoning appears to be thus: Republicans got

> everything they wanted in 2016. We have a right to do the same. Whereas they achieved pure evil, we will achieve pure good. No more compromising with the other side. No more concessions to reality. Republicans hit their jackpot in 2016. We will hit ours in 2020. Something similar happened in 1972. Richard Nixon was never the embodiment of conservatism liberals thought he was. . . . Nonetheless for liberals, Nixon was the embodiment of the Republican ideal: ruthless, shifty, retrogressive, boorish, populist in the worst sense. There was some truth in that view of Nixon, just as there is some truth in the view of Mr. Trump held by progressives today. But Nixon was far more than the sum of his vices, and so is Mr. Trump. The Democrats' simpleminded view of Nixon, though, pushed them over the edge in 1972. The leftward lurch made no sense except as a psychological response to a nonexistent monster.

Mr. Swaim acknowledges that Mr. Trump is highly unlikely to duplicate the Nixon landslide against George McGovern, even if he's facing an avowed socialist like Bernie Sanders, but I wonder if he can be right in supposing that the Democratic caricature of Nixon as an evil monster was merely "simpleminded" and not a calculated product of media propaganda built on the assumption, which at least in 1972 proved not to be the case, that the electorate itself was simpleminded.

Understand: I would not repeat the media's own mistake by assuming that those I disagree with are "simpleminded." I would give them all the credit I can for intelligence, though it might in this case be more appropriately described as "cunning." And yet I have my doubts. For reasons first set out in my book *Media Madness* (Encounter, 2008), I think Watergate was as great a disaster for the media as it was for Nixon. It infected them with a degree of self-importance and self-righteousness that has come, in time, to amount almost to a collective madness—not madness in the clinical sense, perhaps, but a kind of *folie de grandeur* and pride of intellect which has permanently warped and distorted their outlook on life and politics.

In short, whatever may have been the case in 1972, the media in 2019 have come to believe their own propaganda—how could they not, when they have also come to believe that they have a monopoly on truth and reality? Decades of promoting a simpleminded view of the world have made them simpleminded, too. A great many people who would have known better in 1972 have by now adopted as their own the media's self-conceit as heroic and infallible discoverers of truths which all must acknowledge, or else be branded as fools, bigots, or even criminals, along with the hated president.

We see the same simplemindedness, as it might otherwise appear, in cases elsewhere in which the media, together with the academic and political progressives whose leadership they have taken on, have felt it their duty to become passionately engaged rather than dispassionately analytical. "Climate change," formerly known as "global warming," is nowhere nearly so well understood by "science" as the media routinely pretend it is in making their apodictically apocalyptic predictions of the environmental disasters it is all but inevitably to produce. And even if the phenomenon were so well understood, humanity's options for dealing with it are not limited to the drastic and economically ruinous proposals of the Left.

And yet those who point out such incongruities are labeled "climate deniers," whose offense against media decorum, some propose, should also be made an offense against the law. If you look up "climate change denial" on Wikipedia, you will find the term applied pejoratively to any expression of the slightest doubt about the academic and media consensus regarding climate change, or about the political and economic expedients that the "experts" routinely recommend to counter it. Whatever else it may be, such a dogmatic credo—one subject to powers of official enforcement, even if only by social and professional sanction—is *not* "science" as the term has been traditionally understood.

In the last couple of years, a similar credo has been advanced in the media about what they call "transgenderism"—the existence of

which is somewhat less well established than that of global warming. The notion depends on the prior existence of what has come to be called, even by skeptics and reactionaries, "gender" (a word borrowed from philology, which uses it to refer to certain languages' arbitrary identification of nouns and pronouns as masculine, feminine, or neuter) as something distinct from, but related to, sex, and usually describing an entirely subjective feeling had by members of one sex that they are or ought to be, wholly or in part, members of the other.

"Science" has once again obligingly stepped in to provide a pathological definition of such feelings as "gender dysphoria," which has, in turn, provided a new political advocacy with an excuse to transform the supposed syndrome from an illness to an aspiration—an aspiration to resign, as it were, from one's genetically determined sex to join the other—which only oppressive theocrats and science deniers would contradict or refuse to admit, even to quite small children. One might be tempted to say that such an idea is not just simpleminded but preposterous, if one did not fear being thereby classed by decent folks as joining the cruel oppressors of these poor victims of nature and society in denying them their hearts' desires.

We may begin to see that there is nothing so simpleminded that the power of propaganda in the hands of a cultural elite cannot transform it into undeniable fact—as undeniable as the widely believed facts (by a majority in one recent poll) that Mr. Trump is a racist and at least some kind of criminal. He has, the Left alleges, only escaped indictment because of a kind of superstition, to which Mr. Mueller supposedly deferred (even though he denies it), that sitting presidents may not be indicted. And even if all those who believe such things do not vote, I would not at this point undertake to say that a plurality of voters, perhaps even a majority, cannot be persuaded of them by this time next year, exactly as if they were true. I hope I am wrong. But in the last forty-eight years "media madness" has so thoroughly penetrated the general population, who are happy to imagine themselves as possessing thereby a golden ticket of admittance to the cognitive elite, that they may very well do the media's bidding in the sure conviction that they are thus demonstrating their intellectual superiority to the lumpen mass of simpleminded Trump voters.

There are signs that the latter, or at least a rag-tag collection of academics and journalists who don't hate them, are beginning to develop a revolutionary ideology of their own. In July I attended a conference in Washington convened to discuss something called "National Conservatism," which appears to be a euphemism for what both Mr. Trump and his detractors call "nationalism," though they mean quite different things by the term. The National Conservatives barely mentioned the President, either to praise or to condemn, but if you had to sum up their deliberations in two words you could do worse than "America First."

Mr. Zamoyski's book, mentioned earlier, reminds us that the revolutionary creed which preceded socialism was nationalism—not the nationalism of the Left's fever dreams (that he sees as having been confined to Germany), but the large-minded, humanistic nationalism associated with the names of Michelet in France, Mazzini in Italy, and numerous lesser lights in the small and often only ideal nations of the Habsburg and Romanov empires. If it takes one kind of holy madness to drive out another, dissenters from the identity politics of the socialist and liberationist Left may be driven to join the Trumpites under the banner of nationalism.

Books

Full-court press

by Andrew C. McCarthy

The process is broken. Of this, there can be no doubt, particularly now that we have the definitive account. In *Justice on Trial: The Kavanaugh Confirmation and the Future of the Supreme Court*, Mollie Hemingway and Carrie Severino have not merely documented the no-holds-barred brawl over Judge (now Justice) Brett Kavanaugh's nomination to the nation's highest court.[1] They have brought it to life, in all its studied chaos, outrage, anguish, and exhausting triumph.

The question is whether the process is irretrievably broken. On that one, I'm a deeply disheartened *yes*. That is because the collapse of the judicial confirmation process—which is to say, the Left's shocking weaponization of that process—is the inexorable fallout of a more basic corruption. It is the distortion of republican governance itself and, more specifically, of the judiciary's role in it. As the authors put it, "the Court's ever-bolder activism, which raised the political stakes of each appointment, made the confirmation process increasingly contentious."

The Kavanaugh debacle was guaranteed to happen because, as the high court became more super-legislator than judicial tribunal, as it morphed from the Framers' conception of an apolitical branch to the progressive vision of an uber-political powerhouse, battles over its composition have inexorably become gladiatorial combat, not senatorial advice-and-consent.

That has proved catastrophic for our governance, particularly when it comes to the willingness of decent, competent people to subject themselves and their loved ones to what would better be called the *defamation* process. Readers of *Justice on Trial* get the benefit of uniquely perceptive insight. Carrie Severino, a Harvard Law School graduate who clerked for Justice Clarence Thomas, runs the Judicial Crisis Network. It was established in 2005 precisely to provide a counterweight to the battalion of leftist groups that, beginning with their outcry over President Reagan's elevation of the conservative Justice William Rehnquist to chief justice (a dry run for the savaging of Robert Bork's subsequent nomination), converted what used to be the Senate's uneventful vetting of Supreme Court nominees—accomplished lawyers, clearly qualified to serve—into propaganda warfare. Severino teams her first-hand knowledge of the battlefield with Mollie Hemingway, a *Federalist* senior editor and Fox News commentator, renowned for her sharp eye for political trends and gift for relating them thematically. The result is a riveting and at-times blood-boiling story that engages the non-lawyer and lawyer alike.

As the authors relate, Brett Kavanaugh was as eminently qualified as any judicial nominee has ever been. A stellar student at Yale College and Yale Law School, he worked for a year as a law clerk for the justice he would ultimately succeed, Anthony Kennedy, after serving in other prestigious clerkships on the

1 *Justice on Trial: The Kavanaugh Confirmation and the Future of the Supreme Court*, by Mollie Hemingway & Carrie Severino; Regnery Publishing, 375 pages, $28.99.

federal appellate courts. He went on to join the estimable legal scholar Kenneth Starr's independent counsel investigation of Whitewater (which eventually became the Bill Clinton–Monica Lewinsky investigation, leading to the impeachment of the forty-second president). After a stint in a prestigious Washington law firm, Kavanaugh became President George W. Bush's White House staff secretary, a vital position responsible for the paper flow that enables an administration's daily governance.

Bush eventually appointed Kavanaugh to the D.C. Circuit Court of Appeals, often described as the nation's "second highest" court, where eventual Supreme Court justices are commonly groomed. In a dozen years, Kavanaugh wrote an impressive 307 opinions. He developed a reputation as an appellate judge whose work was routinely cited by the high court, and became the federal bench's most accomplished "feeder" of law clerks to the justices. Oh, and in his copious free time, he taught constitutional law at Harvard.

In other words, Kavanaugh's elevation to the Supreme Court should have been as uncontroversial as any in history. But it was bitterly controversial because of the fear that Kavanaugh would alter the "ideological balance" of the Court.

And there's the rub. A court should not have an ideological balance. It is not an elected legislature responsible for formulating policies that address the needs and desires of self-determining constituents. It is a judicial tribunal designed to be insulated from politics, to take as its only compass the law—as it is, not as the judges might wish it to be.

But that was then.

In many ways, it was the Court's willful forays into *kulturkampf* politics—imposing outcomes elected progressives could not achieve (and often dared not try)—that made Donald Trump president. As the authors recount, the sudden death of Justice Antonin Scalia, a conservative icon, made the power to choose his replacement a signal issue in the 2016 election—notwithstanding the media–Democrat fury over Republican Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell's refusal to give President Obama's nominee, D.C. Circuit Judge Merrick Garland, a hearing. (No need to fret over disturbing "ideological balance" when the tilt is left, you see.)

The vacancy was a three-fer for Trump: It highlighted the stakes of electing Hillary Clinton, who was certain to appoint a young progressive firebrand. It enabled Trump to rally skeptical conservatives, particularly by the masterstroke of issuing a list of top-flight potential nominees vetted by the influential Federalist Society. And it provided an opportunity to cultivate the aging Justice Anthony Kennedy, who was contemplating retirement. Within days of being inaugurated, the new president nominated Neil Gorsuch, a former Kennedy clerk (who worked alongside Kavanaugh in that role). When Gorsuch was confirmed with what, for today, was only moderate bruising (forty-five Democrats voting nay despite his top-notch qualifications), Kennedy could step down confident that Trump would name a worthy replacement—Kavanaugh.

Kennedy was the Court's "swing justice." Appointed by President Ronald Reagan after Democrats slanderously exploded Bork's nomination—the dark chapter from which *l'affaire* Kavanaugh is a horrifying but logical devolution—Kennedy became the classic Washington case: a right-of-center moderate who drifts left, a judicial imperialist who preserves progressive pieties (e.g., judge-made abortion rights) while "growing" into his own walks on the wild side.

Though hardly a fire-breathing right-winger, Kavanaugh was seen as admiring of his mentor, Kennedy, but more conservative, more adherent to originalism—the interpretive framework in which constitutional provisions and other laws are construed in accordance with their text and public meaning at the time of their adoption.

From a policy standpoint, then, Kavanaugh's nomination was seen as a threat to roll back progressive "advances." "Abortion will be illegal in twenty states in eighteen months," the always understated CNN legal analyst Jeffrey Toobin declaimed when Kennedy's retirement was announced.

The authors relate the fascinating account of Kavanaugh's selection, made an emotional rollercoaster for his impressive army of sup-

porters (many of them reverential former clerks, mostly women) by the quality of Trump's potential nominees list. Make no mistake: even this intramural Republican competition is a political scrum, complete with strategic leaking. Kavanaugh's bid for the nomination was every bit the political campaign, and the President's penchant for seeking a wide range of advice and multiple interviews with candidates produced highs and lows, in which the team was convinced the contest was lost right up until Trump unveiled Kavanaugh as the nominee.

Concurrently, the Left was so blindly opposed that the opening salvos against Kavanaugh were inadvertently blasted out by email with unfilled spaces where the nominee's name was to be filled in. It did not matter which candidate was named. It did not matter how stellar the nominee's credentials were. What mattered were the Manichean politics, us-versus-them, with "them"—Kavanaugh—in the role of Satan incarnate. It had nothing to do with jurisprudence. It was, to the contrary, right out of the hardball playbook of the radical "community organizer" Saul Alinsky: "Pick the target, freeze it, personalize it, and polarize it."

Kavanaugh is too much the jurisprudent to be fought on the ground that is supposed to matter, his legal acumen. So the Left tried to kill his nomination by perverting the process, as well as overloading it in a variation of the infamous Cloward–Piven strategy—in which the Left's Jacobins storm the Senate, intimidating members and making proceedings physically difficult to convene.

Most notorious of the Judiciary Committee Democrats' fraudulent tactics was the ranking member Dianne Feinstein's concealment of a claim by Christine Blasey Ford, a loopy California psychology professor and anti-Trump partisan. Dr. Ford maintained that when they were in high school, Kavanaugh had attempted to rape her while he and a friend, both drunk, held her captive in a bedroom at a party in suburban Maryland. Ford could not say when the assault happened, what house it happened in, how she had gotten there, or how she got home when she purportedly escaped Kavanaugh's clutches. Moreover, none of the witnesses she named confirmed the incident—an incident she had gone decades without tying to Kavanaugh and had inconsistently described when first speaking of it in therapy.

Uncorroborated accusations against high-profile nominees are not uncommon, and the Judiciary Committee has a process for handling them confidentially to avoid slandering the nominee or unduly embarrassing the complainant. With Kavanaugh, however, the process was intentionally flouted to publicize the incredible, salacious allegations at the height of the #MeToo moment. Meantime, a Yale classmate claimed to believe Kavanaugh might have exposed himself to her at a drunken party—but no witnesses corroborated her story, and she acknowledged she had been imbibing heavily. And the anti-Trump lawyer Michael Avenatti (who has since been indicted on both coasts for unrelated acts of fraud) announced that he had a client who implicated Kavanaugh in spiking punch bowls in order to facilitate gang rapes. Ford was summoned for testimony in a carnival-like hearing; and, as sexual-assault claims cratered, the Left pivoted to a narrative that the nominee was a hopeless sot.

The account is Kafkaesque, the drama capped by Kavanaugh's spirited defense of his honor and the steady statesmanship of Senator Susan Collins. Tuning out the Left's threats against her, the Maine Republican moderate, upon scrutinizing Kavanaugh's record and his accuser's spurious allegations, delivers a meticulous speech—and most critically, her desperately needed vote—to save the nomination.

The day is won, but not the struggle. As Hemingway and Severino trenchantly contend, the fatal flaw is the politicization of the judiciary's role in American life. That makes each nomination a fight to the death, more brazen in the Age of Trump. The Left has become more unapologetically belligerent, and the media more openly aligned with Democrats. Justice Brett Kavanaugh was just the most immediate target. The overarching objective is an *in terrorem* effect that renders conservatives unwilling to subject themselves to the libelous rigors of confirmation. The goal is nothing less than submission.

Man for the monarchy

A. N. Wilson
Prince Albert:
The Man Who Saved the Monarchy.
Harper, 448 pages, $35

reviewed by Simon Heffer

It is unfortunate, though indicative of the English sense of humor, that today in the country of which he was Prince Consort the name of Prince Albert of Saxe-Coburg and Gotha, husband to Queen Victoria and ancestor of a large slice of European royalties, should be most associated with a cosmetic piercing of the penis. It was a part of the princely anatomy of considerable importance—Albert fathered nine children, hence his formidable dynastic effect—but it is not dwelled upon in A. N. Wilson's thorough, well-written, and insightful biography, *Prince Albert*. This is the more reliable story of Albert: participant in an arranged marriage that turned into a passionate love-match, embodiment of the Victorian determination for self-improvement, a man thwarted by the limitations of the role of husband to the Queen Regnant and whose death at the age of forty-two was not merely a histrionics-inducing tragedy for his widow, but a severe loss for his adopted country.

Wilson's book is subtitled "The Man Who Saved the Monarchy," and perhaps he can be forgiven the exaggeration. The house of Hanover (into which Queen Victoria was born, and which changed its name to Saxe-Coburg and Gotha on her marriage to Albert in 1840) certainly had a rocky passage in the first decades of the nineteenth century. George III was mad, though not perhaps to the extent that dramatic portrayals of him have liked to suggest. His son the Prince Regent, from 1820 King George IV, was an idle, ignorant, petulant bon vivant who nonetheless managed a ten-year reign without undue incident, despite caddish treatment of his wife and behavior little better than that towards the British people. His reign was also a time of poverty, hardship, and repression, and to say he sympathized with the plight of the people would be a downright lie.

His younger brother the Duke of Clarence, who in 1830 succeeded him as King William IV, was by comparison harmless, though he had contracted an illegal marriage, and, like too many of his brothers in a similar situation, had fathered numerous children whose illegitimacy barred them from the line of succession. King William—known because of his service in the Royal Navy as "the Sailor King"—had none of the selfishness and disdain exhibited by his elder brother and to an extent restored the reputation of the monarchy even before Albert first turned up at Dover. Then, as Wilson rightly says, it was the eventual compliance of Albert and his young wife with the ideas of her second prime minister, Sir Robert Peel, about the monarchy's being an institution above politics rather than one that took sides, that really put it on an even keel. Albert was of course complicit in that decision, but it was without question a matter of evolution provoked by the nature of politics at the time, as well as the realization that a young and not especially well-educated girl (Victoria was just eighteen when she succeeded her uncle) could not, and should not in a supposedly constitutional monarchy, be allowed to make political decisions of great magnitude. As Wilson points out, the monarchy had been heading in a more consensual direction since 1689 (though one might say that the roots of that lie in the English civil wars of the 1640s), and what happened as Peel asserted his constitutional authority as the Queen's minister in 1841–42 was a very significant part in this evolution.

Wilson's book deals honestly and in depth with Albert's character and with the great events of his life. Wilson is particularly good on the Prince's youth in Coburg and Bonn before he married the Queen, and on the regimented and intense education that Albert enjoyed and greatly benefited from (it was certainly superior to any he would have acquired at an English public school, or at Oxford or Cambridge, at the time). The education did not merely confirm Albert as being very much in that Ger-

man cultural tradition summed up by Schiller in his observation (much beloved of Carlyle) that *ernst ist das Leben*, it ensured he brought a profound seriousness to the pinnacle of British life, from which it had been conspicuously absent since the days of Oliver Cromwell. That, by far, would be the greatest contribution Albert made to his adopted country.

Early on he marked himself out as a connoisseur of art, and the detail with which Wilson describes this aspect of the Prince's expertise is among the most original and interesting parts of the book. As a result, Peel, with whom Albert enjoyed conversations about the *Nibelungenlied*, invited him to chair the Royal Commission tasked with deciding upon the decoration of the Houses of Parliament, then being rebuilt after the devastating fire of 1834. Later in the 1840s, Albert was deployed to oversee the design of more humane and sanitary accommodation for the urban working classes, which in its turn provoked a philanthropic movement to remove slums and put up basic but clean, well-aired, and well-lit apartment blocks in their place. None of this prevented Albert from being unpopular with some sections of society—he was too often depicted in parts of the press as being a German interloper whose main purpose in Britain was to impose Teutonic ways on a people not used to being regimented or told what to do—but it has left him with a considerable legacy that fairer-minded historians, such as Wilson, can positively evaluate.

The apex of that legacy, and of Albert's achievement, is the Great Exhibition of 1851, where Britain showed off its manufacturing prowess to the world and allowed its rivals to come and promote their goods. In the five years since the repeal of the Corn Laws in 1846, international trade had picked up in Britain, the end of tariffs on imported cereals inspiring similar reforms on other goods. As a net exporter, Britain benefited appreciably from this reform, and the Exhibition was its statement of this success. Albert chaired the commission that brought about the event, helped by capable and ambitious men such as Henry Cole (who, among many other accomplishments, invented the Christmas card). When it was over, Albert's influence moved into another phase: the profits were used to help buy land on the then-semi-rural estate in South Kensington that he determined should be devoted to the development of the arts and sciences in Great Britain. It today houses the Natural History, Science, and Victoria & Albert Museums, Imperial College, the Royal Colleges of Music and of Organists, and the Royal Albert Hall—opposite which is Albert's own florid, gilded, Gothic memorial, a reminder that he did not live to see how his ideas became reality.

There are other threads to the narrative of Albert's life, such as the intense frustration that he felt at having no constitutional power, among the reasons why he was encouraged to devote his considerable energy and talent to other projects through which he could fulfill his destiny as a leader. He took over as best he could during his wife's nine confinements and the debilitating spells of post-natal depression that followed them, but that Germanophobic, or xenophobic, element of the public that resented his supposed interference was always alert to his activities. He appeared in the gallery on the day that Peel—whom, after a difficult start, Albert and the Queen came to adulate—made his great speech advocating the repeal of the Corn Laws, and this caused outrage among his critics. His impact as a husband and father was immense, with the royal houses of Europe soon filled with his descendants, who he hoped would extend sweetness and light across the Continent. This did not always come about, as Kaiser Wilhelm II—his first grandchild—demonstrated.

Rightly, Wilson can only begin to recount the hysterical grief his widow felt after Albert's relatively sudden death just before Christmas 1861. It, perhaps more than anything, spurred the Victorian cult of death and its elaborate mourning rituals to new heights of self-indulgence and exhibitionism. Albert died, Wilson suggests, of stomach cancer (a diagnosis in which he is probably right), just over a fortnight after an ill-fated visit to Cambridge to rebuke his twenty-year-old son Bertie, the future Edward VII, for carnal activities with a woman of ill-repute. Father and son went for

a walk in the cold and the rain while the paternal lecture was delivered and Albert promptly caught a chill, which Victoria believed killed him. The delinquent son therefore received much of the blame, which did little to divert him from a long and exhausting career in precisely the line against which his father had warned him. Bertie was a throwback to his Hanoverian great-uncles; if he absorbed any of Albert's seriousness and profundity, he went to extraordinary lengths to conceal it.

Wilson is a superb writer; not least because of his facility as a novelist, he has composed a highly readable account of the Prince Consort's life. The conclusions he comes to are, for the most part, reasonable. Inevitably, though, this book contains much material with which readers who know this period will be familiar, and indeed Wilson himself has dealt with much of the context already in his earlier work *The Victorians* (2002). That so much of this book is a history of the politics and events of the twenty-one years in which Albert and Victoria were married is, in its way, testimony to just how marginal Albert's influence was in his wife's country. His was a life, however, worth recording, and worth understanding for what effects it undeniably had. In that, Wilson has done a first-rate job.

Gray's taxonomy

John Gray
Seven Types of Atheism.
Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 176 pages, $25

reviewed by Andrew Stuttaford

The British philosopher John Gray has been on the Left, and he has been on the Right. More recently, he has settled into the role of a brilliant, provocative, and contrarian curmudgeon, known for an aphoristic style rare in a discipline where opacity is often confused with erudition.

Naturally then in *Seven Types of Atheism*, Gray, an atheist, trains his heaviest fire, not on God (a target more filled with holes than poor Saint Sebastian), but on those atheisms that "repel" him, not least new atheism ("contains little that is novel or interesting"). Above all though, Gray is concerned with the atheist thinking and ideologies intended to fill the gap that a banished God has left behind.

And it is *a* God who haunts this particular feast. The bleak binary of monotheism ("a local cult") preoccupies Gray and stalks the atheisms he describes, atheisms based on an absence of belief in a "creator-god," a definition borrowed from classical times (it can also be found elsewhere). But this is an atheism that leaves open a door through which gods, ghosts, goblins, and the rest of the supernatural menagerie can pour, ancestral spirits of more sophisticated theologies to come: the road to Notre-Dame lies, if only circuitously, through the druids' groves.

That door can never be bolted: superstition's endurance over the millennia—and the only slightly less ancient compulsion to organize it into a system of belief and of ritual—suggests that this impulse is innate, built in to fulfill a need for structure and meaning. After all, confronted by the abyss, even Nietzsche chickened out. "Religion," writes Gray, "may involve the creation of illusions. But there is nothing in science that says illusion may not be useful, even indispensable, in life. The human mind is programmed for survival, not for truth." In theory, evolution arguably dispensed with God. In practice, it (almost certainly) invented Him.

The divine may be fantasy, but the order and the sense of meaning it enables are real. The desire to preserve a structure while denying the nature of its foundations is how Gray explains—and convincingly so—the evolution of nominally secular thinking since the Enlightenment: "Contemporary atheism is a flight from a godless world"; "Secular thought is mostly composed of repressed religion."

Unable to deal honestly with what the lack of a deity could mean for the stability of their psyches and—absent a source of (in Gray's phrase) "ultimate justice"—their societies, many atheists have, Gray maintains, replaced a belief "in divine providence" with a faith "in the progress of humanity." This is not a faith that Gray, a philosopher known neither for his optimism nor for his fondness for our species,

shares. It owes little, he contends, to reality and a lot to the "Christian myth of history as a redemptive drama."

This leads, in due course, to Gray's enjoyably acerbic analysis of how "repressed religion" re-emerged in political form: "If you want to understand modern politics, you must set aside the idea that secular and religious movements are opposites." He backs up this claim with an examination of the millenarianism of, among other scourges, Bolsheviks, Nazis, and Jacobins (perhaps revealingly, Gray, who leans distinctly Green himself, omits certain strands of environmentalism from this miserable list). Shifting his focus onto a less bloody creed, he regards today's increasingly assertive "evangelical liberalism" as a religious phenomenon too. The problem has not necessarily been what the Enlightenment knocked down, but what, in some—or even many—cases, it tried to put in its place, including "salvation through politics."

That millenarianism and totalitarianism go hand and hand is hardly news. Gray cites Bertrand Russell's conclusion, made shortly after visiting revolutionary Russia, that "Bolshevism . . . is to be reckoned as a religion." It is no surprise that Gray doffs his cap to Norman Cohn, the author of *The Pursuit of the Millennium* (1957), a masterly mid-century dissection of a plague that will last for as long—probably forever—as people are inspired by the dream of a judgment day that is just about to dawn.

Notwithstanding how compelling Gray may be (very) on the topic of millenarian politics, his critique of "evangelical liberalism" may interest readers even more. Still innovative, albeit an argument that Gray has been making elsewhere for some time, it is, in turn, an extension of Gray's challenge to some of the more complacent assumptions made about the Enlightenment, an assault on orthodoxy worth reading even, or especially, by those who dissent from all or (as would I) part of it. Gray's distaste for the *philosophes* and their kin does, however, occasionally lead him down some curious paths. It was a jolt to see someone with such scant enthusiasm for monotheism arguing that the concept of toleration is more a product of "Jewish and Christian monotheism" than of the Enlightenment. I suspect that it owes little to the latter, less to Christianity, and a lot to historical accident, scientific advance, and growing prosperity. As not infrequently in this book, Gray stretches too far, but in a way that forces those who disagree to think hard about why, which is no bad thing.

Gray does make, whether by chance or highly intelligent design, a convincing case that former monotheists might be better with the God they knew. As the once-splendid example of the Church of England shows, it may be wiser to defang God than to defenestrate Him. The choice between a domesticated deity and the more openly appalling of the political religions conceived to take His place ought to be straightforward for those (other than the sinisterly ambitious) who have hung onto their senses.

Unfortunately, even milder secular liberal ideologies have the capacity to evolve in a poisonous direction. That may owe more (or not, given his satisfactorily misanthropic tendencies) than Gray may credit to human nature—we are not a libertarian bunch—than to the legacy of religious thinking. Nevertheless, it is hard to find fault with the connection Gray draws between Christianity and the liberal conceit (somewhat battered, I would have thought, in an age of multiculturalist dogma) that "moral" values are universal, and the insistence that "only ignorance" prevents their acceptance. This missionary position adopts a specifically secular contortion when combined with the idea that "ethics can be a science," an even more direct route to illiberal liberalism. What Gray refers to as the "frenzy of righteousness" in universities may be a glimpse of what is to come.

This book attempts a taxonomy of seven (sometimes overlapping) varieties of atheist: those disdained new atheists, adherents of secular humanism ("a sacred relic"), atheists with a "strange faith" in science (or pseudoscience), followers of political religions, God-haters (de Sade!), and the two tribes to which Gray is most drawn. There are those who have made the cleanest break with God and are "happy to live with a godless world," and there are

"mystical atheists," still beguiled by the search for "meaning" and in whom, I presume, the "God gene" still lurks.

Anyone (such, full disclosure, as myself) who is unbothered about "meaning" in any grand sense of that word, who finds theology a bore, and who believes that the mysteries of the universe are simply destinations and a level of science currently beyond our reach will discover that *Seven Types of Atheism* is not without its longueurs. This was neither a shock nor a disappointment: such attitudes can present difficulties when reading a book written in a spirit of philosophical inquiry.

But even Gray's excursions into denser philosophical exposition are more than compensated for by the humor, skill, and originality (for instance, *Atlas Shrugged* as a "reinvention of Christian apocalyptic myth") with which he runs through an occasionally bewildering spectrum of beliefs—atheism is nothing if not protean. Gray sums up those atheist sects that have attracted his attention deftly and memorably: "The Epicureans were content in the tranquil retreat of their secluded gardens. 'Humanity' could do what it pleased. It was no concern of theirs."

Atheism's prophets and preachers are described, when opportunity arises, with brio: Nietzsche was "an implacable enemy of Christianity" but an "incurably Christian thinker. Like the Christians he despised, he regarded the human animal as a species in need of redemption." Auguste Comte, meanwhile, the developer of a bizarre nineteenth-century religion of humanity, was "in some ways . . . more intelligent than the secular thinkers who followed him. He was also semi-deranged." Yet, as Gray comments (in the course, a touch unfairly, of his discussion of Ayn Rand), "the maddest ideas are quite often the most influential." Comte's cult, maintains Gray, formed the "template for secular humanism." Russia's cosmists, meanwhile, were ultramontane materialists who believed that the dead could be brought back to life. They help explain Lenin's long wait in his tomb and Sputnik storming the heavens.

Lest atheists feel picked upon, Gray offers plenty of reminders that not only unbelievers believe in the absurd. He discusses, for example, the sixteenth-century millenarians of Anabaptist Münster (precursors of both Bolshevism and ISIS) and the rather more genteel Pierre Teilhard de Chardin, a once-fashionable Jesuit intellectual who thought that the "universe was evolving towards an 'Omega Point' of maximal consciousness."

Oh.

The borders of the possible

Ursula Buchan
Beyond the Thirty-Nine Steps:
A Life of John Buchan.
Bloomsbury Publishing, 512 pages, $28

reviewed by Sunil Iyengar

In his dedication for *The Thirty-Nine Steps* (1915), John Buchan acknowledged that in his thriller the "incidents defy the probabilities, and march just inside the borders of the possible." (Writing three decades later, Raymond Chandler called this "a pretty good formula" for the genre itself.) All borders were wiped clean with Hitchcock's 1935 hit film version, which Buchan, ever magnanimous, hailed as better than the original. Graham Greene, by contrast, faulted the director's "inadequate sense of reality" in adapting the novel. "How inexcusably he spoilt *The 39 Steps*," he complained.

Back in 1915, however, Buchan could argue that "the wildest fictions are so much less improbable than the facts" of wartime Europe. By the time a sequel appeared, the following year, he was frankly unapologetic. In his dedication for *that* book, the superior *Greenmantle*, Buchan wrote: "Let no man call its events improbable. The war has driven that word from our vocabulary, and melodrama has become the prosiest realism."

We need not take Buchan at his word. If the plot of either novel were as feasible as the unfolding drama of World War I, then contemporary readers would not have found escape in Richard Hannay's flight across the Scottish moors or his trek to Constantinople via German-occupied Europe. As one officer wrote Buchan of *The Thirty-Nine Steps*: "One

wants something to engross the attention without tiring the mind. The story is greatly appreciated in the midst of mud and rain and shells." As for *Greenmantle*, Tsar Nicholas II and his doomed family relished the book while under house arrest in the Urals.

In Ursula Buchan's leisurely biography of her grandfather, *Beyond the Thirty-Nine Steps*, she records both instances of gratitude. Although "JB" (as she calls her subject) said it was "an odd fate for me to cheer the prison of the Tsar," he nonetheless viewed *Greenmantle* as "part of his war work," she notes. For much of the war, he toiled in propaganda, rising to the position of Director of Information in 1917, eventually under Lord Beaverbrook. Ursula Buchan—we'll call her "UB"—sketches a crowded milieu:

> JB readily acknowledged that he faced nothing like the dangers and hardships of the trenches, but he was, nevertheless, under great pressure throughout the summer of 1917. [He also nursed a duodenal ulcer, which he transferred to his fictional character John S. Blenkiron.] Like almost everyone else, he had to deal with the continual news of the death or wounding of friends. [Earlier that year, he had lost his younger brother Alastair and his friend and business partner Tommy Nelson, both casualties at Arras.] He had to meet the prodigious demands of *Nelson's History* [his multi-volume history of WWI]. His mother expected a daily letter and he had to make the time to read the manuscript of [his sister] Anna's novel, *The Setons*, which was published that November and enjoyed substantial commercial success. On top of this, he was still dealing with the minutiae of [his erstwhile employer, the publisher] Nelson's business.

Buchan, though worldly and methodical, reveled in numinous prospects. Even as a child reared on Calvinist traditions, Buchan admired "the Platonists of the early seventeenth century [who] combined a passion for the unseen and the eternal with a delight in the seen and temporal," as he recalled in his autobiography, *Memory Hold-the-Door* (1940), which appeared posthumously. (UB notes the "curious hyphenation" of the title, which comes from Robert Louis Stevenson's poem "Our Lady of the Sorrows." In the United States, the book was published as *Pilgrim's Way*.) Roaming the Scottish Borders, he "came to identify abstractions with special localities," he wrote. "When I began to read philosophy the processes of the Hegelian dialectic were associated with a homely Galloway heath, and the Socratic arguments with the upper Thames between Godstone and Eynsham."

By that time, Buchan had attended the University of Glasgow and then Oxford. He chose Brasenose College for its association with Walter Pater, who had been a fellow there until his death a few months earlier. While at Oxford, Buchan won the Newdigate Prize for Poetry, published two novels, read manuscripts for the publisher John Lane, and ran short stories in outlets such as *The Yellow Book*, renowned as a *fin-de-siècle* haven for aestheticism. A few decades on, John Betjeman had some fun with Buchan's link to the magazine. In his poem "The Arrest of Oscar Wilde at the Cadogan Hotel," Betjeman has Wilde address Robbie Ross:

> "So you've brought me the latest *Yellow Book*:
> And Buchan has got in it now:
> Approval of what is approved of
> Is as false as a well-kept vow."

Later, of course, Buchan would earn all the public "approval" and respectability he might have wished, ending life as Lord Tweedsmuir and the Governor General of Canada. (It's fascinating to learn, meanwhile, that Buchan once had an unsatisfactory boss in Sir Edward Carson, who had defended the Marquess of Queensbury in the criminal libel case that destroyed Wilde.)

In navigating a political and literary career, UB suggests, Buchan was every bit as resourceful as one of his adventurer-heroes. He had to be. Dispatched to South Africa during the Second Boer War as a colonial administrator, he joined Lord Milner's entourage—Milner's "Kindergarten," as it was derisively called. He rode herd on a variety of demanding projects for one so young and inexperienced. But he drew flak for overconfident purchases on be-

half of the Crown, including some ill-advised land grabs. "He had little of the caricature carefulness of the Scot with money, or public money at least," UB wryly notes.

The experience toughened him, but it softened him too. As Buchan later explained: "I had regarded the Dominions patronizingly as distant settlements of our people who were making a creditable effort under difficulties to carry on the British traditions. Now I realized that Britain had at least as much to learn from them as they had from Britain." He also concluded: "The task of leadership is not to put greatness into humanity but to elicit it—for the greatness is already there."

What sort of politician was Buchan? Clement Atlee called him "a romantic Tory, who thought Toryism was better than it was." Buchan himself identified with Henry Adams's description of a "conservative Christian anarchist," one unafraid to question dogmas of any kind. "There were eternal truths, I decided, but not very many, and even these required frequent spring-cleanings," he wrote in *Memory Hold-the-Door*. (I rejoiced to see him quoted by UB as saying, "Humor is the best weapon with which to fight pedantry and vainglory and false rhetoric. . . . Laughter is the chief gift of civilization.") Still, in a fraught political climate, as we know, equability seldom carries the day. Buchan's "propensity for speaking kindly of everyone meant that he was open to the charge of insincerity and even, occasionally, toadyism," UB observes. He also had to fend off the accusation that he was "a Scotsman on the make."

Everyone knows the job interview trick: when asked to list your weaknesses, spout such drivel as "I work too hard" or "I can't stop learning" or "I don't like to quit." In her introduction, when UB assures us she will be unguarded in discussing the flaws of her famous relative, I expected some banal insights of this nature. And, in truth, there aren't a lot of vices on show: a little vanity, an exaggerated view of the importance of royal titles, a naïve loyalty to friends and family members, and not much else.

A common slur, however, is that Buchan was an anti-Semite. (The case rests on the remarks of a few fictional characters, notably Scudder in *The Thirty-Nine Steps*.) UB counters with the startling claim that "if anything, JB was a philo-Semite." Thankfully, she has more to offer than just a list of Jewish friends; she documents many instances of solidarity he expressed with Jews in the early 1930s, when Europe was going mad. She describes his book *A Prince of Captivity* (1933) as an anti-Nazi novel, and cites a passage from his final biography, *Augustus* (1937), in which Buchan disparages "the current talk of racial purity." Most striking of all, she reproduces a laconic entry in the Nazi-published *Who's Who in Britain* (1938): "Tweedsmuir, Lord: Pro-Jewish activity."

Another feat of hers is to persuade us that Buchan's political and diplomatic contributions led to lasting benefits. Under Buchan, for example, British propaganda during World War I was praised even by the Germans—no slouches in that department—and it was widely credited with saving public morale. In Parliament, he attacked censorship of the media and proposed the establishment of the British Film Institute. In the run-up to World War II, he befriended FDR and helped Britain gain the U.S. support it so desperately needed while the States were still neutral. He also saw that Canada would provide the training-ground for 130,000 Royal Air Force pilots and aircrew during World War II. Given these accomplishments, if anything defies credibility, it's not Buchan's plotlines but his prodigious literary output.

Spiritual matters

Kathleen Duffy
Teilhard's Struggle:
Embracing the Work of Evolution.
Orbis Books, 176 pages, $20

reviewed by Diane Scharper

Pierre Teilhard de Chardin (1881–1955) was a world-renowned paleontologist. He played a major role in the finding and interpretation of Peking Man, received the Mendel Medal for his scientific accomplishments, and pub-

lished numerous scientific treatises. During his lifetime, he was also recognized as one of the world's foremost geologists.

And he was also a Jesuit priest, poet, and visionary whose philosophical work was banned from publication by the Catholic Church mostly because he disputed the literal interpretation of Genesis, proposing instead a poetic mix of religion and evolutionary science.

In *Teilhard's Struggle*, Sister Kathleen Duffy argues that Teilhard's views were often expressed metaphorically. Had they been published in his lifetime, they would have been clarified, revised, and accepted in some form by now.

As Duffy explains, Teilhard was someone in whom the vocations of science and religion fit well together and were nourished early on. His father, an amateur naturalist, encouraged his son's interest in nature. As a boy, Teilhard collected rocks from Auvergne in France, where the family lived. Teilhard's mother inspired her son with an awareness of the sacred. That sense was heightened when at age twelve he went to a Catholic boarding school, Notre Dame De Mongre, and was exposed to Thomas à Kempis's classic *Imitation of Christ*. At the time, the school was the leading institution for the teaching of science, which was ideal for the budding scientist and priest.

In 1899, Teilhard entered the Society of Jesus and studied philosophy, geology, and atomic physics. Here he read Jean-Baptiste Lamarck on evolution and Henri Bergson's book *Creative Evolution*, which declared that evolution was an expanding "Tide of Life." Duffy suggests that Bergson gave Teilhard the notion of an ever-evolving universe where matter and spirit were joined. While he was a Jesuit scholastic, but before he was ordained in 1911, he taught science at a Jesuit secondary school in Cairo, where he found three new species which were subsequently named after him.

Teilhard served as a stretcher-bearer in World War I. He could have taken a safer job as a chaplain but, wanting to care for the wounded, he opted for the more dangerous position. The experience, Duffy says, furthered Teilhard's sense of love for humanity—even enemy soldiers. Noticing the unity that existed among the men of his group, he theorized that all life was destined to come together in a perfected wholeness.

After the war ended, Teilhard continued his studies in paleontology and earned a doctorate in the geology of the Eocene Period. He worked in the desert, studied fossils in Egypt, China, and Africa, helped to build museums housing those fossils, and wrote papers about his scientific findings.

A professor of physics, Duffy is the author of two previous books about the controversial Jesuit scientist. She quotes liberally from scholars as well as from the Jesuit's own copious letters and essays and arranges her book in a thematic rather than chronological order, with each chapter devoted to one aspect of Teilhard's life or career. Some repetitions occur, but that's a quibble.

Suggesting the direction of her text, Duffy opens *Teilhard's Struggle* by reflecting on the Jesuit's writing style in his essay "The Spiritual Power of Matter." Written like a prose poem, it exquisitely combines elements of prayer and poetry:

> By means of all created things, without exception, the divine assails us, penetrates us, and moulds us. We imagined it as distant and inaccessible, whereas, in fact, we live steeped in its burning layers. *In eo vivimus*. [In him, we live.]

Duffy describes how Teilhard's interest in science and religion led him to believe that evolution was a process in which matter and spirit worked together as "two aspects of a single reality." Teilhard began to promulgate original theories concerning human evolution. He would also suggest the possibility of a noosphere (a layer of thought enveloping the earth), which some say was the forerunner of the internet.

Gathering ideas from several Pauline epistles and the Gospel of John, Teilhard proposed that matter and spirit grow more perfect over time as they head toward an Omega Point. As Teilhard wrote, "Every process of material growth in the universe is ultimately directed

towards spirit, and every process of spiritual growth towards Christ."

Teilhard's mystical writing reads like poetry, and often it is. The passages from "Hymn to Matter" with which Duffy begins each chapter are suffused with figures of speech, as in this popular statement: "Blessed be you, universal matter, . . . who by overflowing and dissolving/ our narrow standards of measurement/ reveal to us the dimensions of God."

Much of *Teilhard's Struggle* focuses on his efforts to help the Church broaden its perspective and see the connectedness between religion and science. Working as a paleontologist, Teilhard knew that humans evolved from large groups of people over thousands of years. They did not come from just two proto-parents, one of whom was formed from the rib of another.

He also knew that, absent the creation story about the Garden of Eden, the theory of original sin seemed unworkable. His essay "Notes on Some Possible Historical Representations of Original Sin" questioned the Catholic Church's view of Genesis.

In 1926, after the essay was seen by the Vatican, Teilhard was prohibited from publishing his philosophical writing. His lectures were banned. His license to teach at the prestigious Institut Catholique de Paris was revoked—permanently. Teilhard continually revised his work, hoping it would be accepted, but to no avail.

Close friends advised him to leave the Society of Jesus and join the diocesan priesthood. Others suggested he leave the priesthood altogether. But how could he? He had taken vows as a priest, which he refused to relinquish. He loved the Church and was indebted to the Jesuits who had educated him and shown him the path he had embraced. As he said, "I am held fast in the Church by the very views which help me to see her insufficiencies."

Yet his disagreement with the Church continued to gnaw at him, especially when he was forced either to resign or sign six propositions assenting to church doctrine. He signed but noted reservations, especially regarding proposition four, which stated that all people came from Adam.

Later, Teilhard lived mostly in China and the United States, where he remained highly respected for his scientific work. He had two heart attacks, which Duffy suggests were caused by stress—the fatal one in New York when he was seventy-three years old. Not welcomed in France, he was buried in Hyde Park on the grounds of what was then the St. Andrew-on-Hudson Jesuit novitiate. It is now part of The Culinary Institute of America.

After Teilhard died, Duffy writes, his friends gathered his many philosophical essays into thirteen books and published them. Some became bestsellers.

In 1961, the Catholic author Flannery O'Connor (1925–64) published her popular short story "Everything That Rises Must Converge," quoting Teilhard's statement *tout ce qui monte converge*. It later became the title story of a posthumously published collection. O'Connor is said to have appreciated Teilhard's views, although she had difficulty accepting his idealism because of the evil she saw around her.

In 1962, the Church found it hard to tolerate the ambiguities it found in Teilhard's books and imposed a *monitum* (warning) on his work. Interestingly enough, despite the *monitum*, Teilhard is today seen primarily as a religious writer, even though he mainly published scientific papers. Ultimately, he displeased both scientists, who disputed his spiritual take on evolution, and conservative Christians, who believed that Genesis was literally correct.

Teilhard believed that some dogmas no longer made sense, and that the language in which they were conveyed was often "clumsy, obsolete, and unclear." In addition, he said that the religion needed to keep its primary focus on Christ rather than outdated laws and dogmas.

Several recent popes—St. John Paul II, Pope Benedict XVI, and Pope Francis—have praised Teilhard's thinking. Pope Francis was asked to revoke the *monitum* in 2017, and, according to Duffy, it's possible he will, although he hasn't as of this writing. She also hopes that Teilhard will be named a doctor of the Church, and in this noteworthy biography she makes a compelling case for both deeds.

Notebook

Norman Stone, 1941–2019

by Jeremy Black

"Thank God I'm not in that system any more." My last email from Norman, sent on June 7, eleven days before he died, included criticisms of Oxford and Cambridge. That the most talented British historian of European history of his generation had felt it necessary to part company with them was proof that his criticisms were no empty gripes. As so often with the skein of life, his path was shaped by a temporary aberration: briefly carried away by the meritocratic ethos of that age, Oxford, in filling its Chair of Modern History in 1984, decided to make an appointment on talent and looked to an outsider, one, moreover, who was not only highly qualified but also, coming from Glasgow Academy, provincial middle-class and right-wing. When Oxford realized what it had done, it reversed direction and sought to make him, in effect, redundant. The spinning started immediately. Norman had an alcohol problem, as if that were at all unusual in Oxford, not least among the historians. Patrick Wormald drank himself to death in 2004, but then he was acceptable because he had been at Eton and Balliol. Norman was interested in sex, but that again was scarcely unusual among the Oxford historians.

It was said that Norman's work no longer approached the quality of his first two books, which was hilarious given the number of Oxbridge dons who had not written two of any distinction in the first place, instead taking early retirement but forgetting to notify the authorities. They said he was a bit hit-and-miss in terms of regular teaching habits. Well, that also was scarcely unusual in the Oxbridge of his era. For example, my D.Phil supervisor at Oxford made no effort to conceal his lack of interest in the role, and totally lacked Norman's charisma and capacity to inspire. Norman, in contrast, was particularly helpful to younger historians who showed a mind as open as his was.

No, Norman's crimes clearly were to be right-wing and provincial middle-class. The latter readily could have been forgiven if the don had displayed or acquired the necessary values to fit in, but the particular combination of Norman's characteristics proved toxic. This was the Oxford that turned down Margaret Thatcher for an honorary doctorate and where hostility to the Right became, as it remains, a reflexive substitute for rational thought and argument. So Norman, who demonstrated a deep integrity in never disguising his views, was anathema. Indeed, in 1991, he became a trustee of the Margaret Thatcher Foundation.

Norman's talents were raw. He was particularly strong in languages: on top of French, German, and Spanish, he added Hungarian, pressing a pin into his thigh to keep himself awake while learning the vocabulary, before acquiring others including Polish, Italian, and Serbo-Croat. He had spent time in a Bratislava prison for trying to help a Hungarian dissident to escape. This provided an opportunity to broaden his language skills. Alongside bridge, music, and Turkey, languages were his choice for recreations in his *Who's Who* entry.

Norman's first book, *The Eastern Front 1914–1917* (1975), drew on these languages and

was even more impressive because of the difficulties of research in Eastern Europe during that period. The book showed that Russia collapsed because of a crisis of distribution and war administration, not one of production.

Norman's engagement with Eastern Europe was also seen in later works, notably *Europe Transformed, 1878–1919* (1983), *The Atlantic and Its Enemies: A Personal History of the Cold War* (2010), and histories of Czechoslovakia (1989) and Hungary (2019). *Europe Transformed* was particularly effective. It appeared in the Fontana History of Europe, the best such series then available in English, but a distinctly patchy one. Good on culture, Norman's volume was far better than the other modern ones, and offered much to bright students. He had an instinctive flair for paradox, for the pithy observation, the all-encompassing example, the barb that undercut the established view. Norman's sentences were well-crafted, and his erudition, blended with an impressive literary style and wicked humor, made his work immensely readable.

In *Europe Transformed*, Norman very much presented a Russia that was developing prior to the First World War, with rising living standards for the peasantry. Thus, the Communist Revolution appeared a rank disaster.

Norman was indeed clear in his views on the malign character of the subsequent Russian developments and in his criticism of historians, such as Richard Evans and Richard Overy, who he felt were overly favorable to Communism. Norman understood the moral and material bankruptcy of Communism long before others.

His keen interest in Eastern Europe, one that eventually landed him in Budapest, was important to his politics. These politics were reflected in his committed journalism, notably (but not only) his column in *The Sunday Times* from 1987 to 1992; in his support for Margaret Thatcher, including his offering advice on foreign policy and speech-writing; and in his academic life. Thus, in 1983, he wrote an obituary of E. H. Carr (1892–1982), a Cambridge don who had written extensively in favor of the Soviet Union. Norman's piece, "Grim Eminence," in the January 10, 1983 edition of the *London Review of Books*, is still well worth reading. This was historiography in the raw, a work that captured the extent to which writing on history overlapped with politics and involved real people and not the interchange of impersonal ideas. Norman's piece enhanced his unpopularity, and it is scarcely surprising that he did not join the serried ranks of acceptable flag-bearers for received wisdom in the British Academy.

His knowledge of Eastern Europe and understanding of Germany made Norman's journalism of particular significance in the late 1980s and early 1990s, as first Communist control of Eastern Europe, and then the Soviet Union, disintegrated. Like television work, journalism attracted Norman because he understood the need to reach out to a wider public, instead of despising them as so many liberal intellectuals did; because he wanted and needed the money; and because he felt frustrated at Oxford. The money was important because he was not the beneficiary of inherited wealth: his father, a fighter pilot, had died in a war-time training accident when Norman was one year old. Moreover, he wanted to enjoy himself: he was never an ascetic. Instead, he was an engaged drinker and a committed smoker with a face that moved from cherubic to lived-in.

Oxford, of course, provided plenty of opportunities for drinking. As it was with Richard Cobb, his predecessor in the Oxford chair, this was not a matter so much of overcoming the dullness of academic gatherings, but rather of a rich pub culture. Cobb was very open about which of those two options he preferred, and Norman, another maverick who did not fit in, had a similar response. At times, his alcoholism was a serious problem, and it left a trail that included blighted hopes. Indeed, Norman had a talent for self-destruction. Cobb himself regarded *The Eastern Front* as "splendid," and Norman as "having done a marvellous job on that old horror Carr," but also maintained that Norman was "accident prone."

His frustration was much in evidence in 1997, when Norman moved to Ankara's Bilkent University, where he spent most of

his remaining career. He preferred the salary, smoking opportunities, and curriculum of his new home, and was delighted to be shot of what he saw as the parochialism, political correctness, and narrow-mindedness of Oxford. Petronella Wyatt, later writing in *The Daily Telegraph* in December 2012 on why she rapidly left Oxford as a student, complained of the same, and noted being told by Norman, "You won't be happy here. . . . I get out as much as possible to escape these - - - - - -." As Wyatt correctly reported, Norman in part "loathed the place . . . for its adherence to the Marxist-determinist view of history."

A former Turkish student, Murat Siviloglu, observed to me of Norman's eye for talent: "If he saw any light, he would lavish with praise, patronage and protection. . . . He was like a character from a nineteenth-century Russian novel, a genius of eccentric habits." Another friend, a fellow British writer, Donald Sturrock, noted: "What other historian could enthrall you with tales of how he had escaped from Haiti at dead of night? . . . a man who liked to drink the cup of life to the full . . . a connoisseur of opera, pianists, and conductors. . . . Though he saw the big picture . . . he also loved human detail. . . . [He was] immensely warm and sociable."

His impish sense of fun characterized meetings and correspondence. Indeed, the coruscating wit was yet another reason why the left-liberal establishment hated him—he was capable of generating deep belly laughs in an audience. That is deeply subversive, as his political and other observations could transfer to the reader/listener all the more effectively for that. As he was not interested in climbing the greasy pole, that was doubly reprehensible.

Although distance ensured we did not meet as much as I would have liked, we communicated regularly. His emails were funny, wry, and possessed a "fuck it" quality of defying political correctness. At the same time, he had a continued commitment to accuracy. Thus, in May, he emailed correcting a joke about Lenin in Poland that I had re-sent: "Lenin actually was in Austrian Poland in 1914. They let him go to Switzerland and didn't intern him."

Often amiably hammered, but still functional, interesting, productive, and hugely funny, Norman continued to be phenomenally bright to the end. There were flaws about his later books, but they remained masterpieces of concision, like his history of the First World War. So also with the consistency of his politics and his robust expression of them. Frequently he praised Mrs. Thatcher, expressed disapproval of Scottish nationalism, criticized the self-hatred of the West, attacked the educational changes of the 1960s, and made known his views on the problems with "this bunch of marshmallows" (politicians) or "all these superficial people yapping into mobiles."

Ironically, it is the failure of Thatcherism that resonates most strongly when looking at Norman's career as a whole. Her commitment to freedom meant that the Left was able to consolidate its control of the universities, while, in the Blairite aftermath, political correctness came greatly to the fore. These days, a Norman would be removed at once for some thought, expression, or action deemed inappropriate, and/or banished to an Orwellian, indeed Maoist, course on sensitivity that would turn any sane individual desperate with dismay and anger. That, of course, is a comment not only on a true closing of the Western mind but also, more particularly, on the failure of the humanities and social sciences both in society and in the universities.

I was lucky to know Norman. I enjoyed his sardonic wit, the clarity of his mind, his integrity. I can recall his aptly caustic comments about the platitudes of others at a conference jamboree in Sweden that we both found somewhat troubling. He was a definite case of the hero, not some cardboard cutout collection of virtues, but a troubled man who saw clearly and stood for his values with vigor. That was his true honor.