The New Criterion

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Notes & Comments: April 2020

Cancel culture comstockery

At *The New Criterion*, when we hear the name "Woody Allen," we think first not of his movies but of an anecdote that Hilton Kramer, our founding editor, liked to tell.

Attending a dinner at the old Whitney Museum on Madison Avenue and Seventy-fifth Street, Hilton was pleased to find himself seated next to an attractive and agreeable young woman. Woody Allen was also in attendance, but he was on the opposite side of the table facing a large window that looked out upon the street. Of course, the window also looked in upon the diners. Allen announced that he could not abide being seen by anonymous passersby and insisted that he change places with the young lady.

Settling into his new chair, he asked whether Hilton ever felt embarrassed when he met socially artists whom he had criticized in print. "No," Hilton replied, "Why should I? They are the ones who made the bad art; I just described it." Allen, Hilton recalled, lapsed into gloomy silence. It was only on his way home that Hilton remembered that he had written a highly critical piece on *The Front*, a PC movie about the Hollywood blacklist in which Allen acted.

That anecdote encapsulates something essential about Hilton's practice as a critic: his focus was always on the work, not on the personality of the artist. It also encapsulates something essential about the querulous and brittle narcissism of the filmmaker.

Woody Allen, although he continues to crank out movies, is a much-diminished presence on the cultural scene when compared to the Woody Allen of the 1970s and early 1980s. But last year he nevertheless found himself caught up in the #MeToo hysteria when Amazon backed out of a four-film deal, alleging that Allen "made a series of public comments suggesting that he failed to grasp the gravity of the issues or the implications for his own career." According to Amazon, Allen's tort was twofold. First, he was said to have expressed sympathy for Harvey Weinstein, then at the beginning of his downfall. He also accused his adopted daughter, Dylan Farrow, of "cynically using the #MeToo movement" when she publicly repeated allegations that Allen had abused her when she was a child.

Fast forward to early March 2020. The Hachette Book Group suddenly announced that its Grand Central Publishing imprint would be bringing out *Apropos of Nothing*, a memoir by Allen, in early April. In an interview, Michael Pietsch, Hachette's CEO, noted the controversy surrounding Allen but said that "Grand Central Publishing believes strongly that there's a large audience that wants to

hear the story of Woody Allen's life as told by Woody Allen himself. That's what they've chosen to publish."

A few days later, a group of Hachette employees staged a walkout to protest the book's publication. The next day, Hachette announced that it was hopping onto the cancel culture bandwagon and dropping the book.

"The decision to cancel Mr. Allen's book was a difficult one," said a spokesman for the publisher (so difficult it took twenty-four hours to achieve). "At HBG we take our relationships with authors very seriously, and do not cancel books lightly. We have published and will continue to publish many challenging books."

Translation: Hachette, as Oscar Wilde said in another context, can resist anything except temptation. Just so long as a book does not attract the ire of the politically correct establishment, the firm is all for publishing "challenging" books. (Item: *Commandant of Auschwitz*, a memoir by Rudolf Hoess, is published by Hachette.) But trespass on that PC orthodoxy and watch the capitulation, leavened by moralistic handwringing, begin. As Groucho Marx is supposed to have said, "These are my principles. If you don't like them, I have others."

Our interest in Woody Allen is minimal. Yes, his early movies and writings are funny. Then he discovered Ingmar Bergman. The quantum of pretension and narcissistic self-seriousness proceeded to swamp the comedy. For us, the prospect of wading through "a comprehensive account of [Woody Allen's] life, both personal and professional" (as Hachette put it when the publishing skies were sunny) is queasy-making.

But Hachette had determined that many readers would be interested in Allen's life story. They simply forgot to check with the feminist commissars to see if Woody Allen passes muster in the age of #MeToo. He doesn't.

Allen, like many celebrities, has maintained a complicated personal life. In 1980, he started a long affair with the actress Mia Farrow, the former wife of both Frank Sinatra and André Previn. Allen and Farrow dated for more than a decade but never lived together.

The pack of children, mostly adopted, in the Farrow household is hard to keep straight. For this story, the important figures are Moses—whom Farrow adopted after her divorce from Previn and whom Allen himself adopted in 1991—and a daughter called Dylan, whom Farrow adopted in 1985 (Allen also adopted her in December 1991).

And then there is Satchel, born in 1987, whom the world knows by one of his middle names, Ronan, the *New Yorker* writer who specializes in investigating other people's sex lives, real and imagined. Ronan, Mia Farrow acknowledged, might "possibly" be the biological son of Frank Sinatra, with whom she "never really split up." Physiognomists would not find that surprising. (That Allen paid child support for Ronan for years usually goes unmentioned.)

There is also Soon-Yi Previn, an abandoned South Korean girl whom Farrow and Previn adopted in 1978 when she was about eight. Allen raised eyebrows in 1992 when he began an affair with Soon-Yi, then in her early twenties. He and Farrow split, acrimoniously. In 1997, Allen and Soon-Yi married.

So far, it is just the usual Hollywood sex circus. But around the time that Farrow and Allen split, he was accused of touching Dylan, then seven, inappropriately. Allen has always denied it. The facts remain somewhat murky. Connecticut's prosecutor ultimately declined to pursue the case, despite announcing that he had "probable cause" to do so. The state police referred the case to the Yale New Haven Hospital Child Sexual Abuse Clinic, which concluded that "Dylan was not sexually abused by Mr. Allen." The lead doctor of the clinic said under oath that Dylan "either invented the story under the stress of living in a volatile and unhealthy home or that it was planted in her mind by her mother."

Dylan has periodically revived the charge against her adoptive father. Moses Farrow

and Soon-Yi have taken Allen's side. Ronan, whose book *Catch and Kill* was published by another imprint at Hachette, has led the charge against his estranged father. "Your policy of editorial independence among your imprints," he thundered in an email to Michael Pietsch, "does not relieve you of your moral and professional obligations as the publisher of *Catch and Kill*, and as the leader of a company being asked to assist in efforts by abusive men to whitewash their crimes."

But there are no crimes. There are only allegations. Even after two lengthy investigations, Allen was not charged. As the world saw during the course of Brett Kavanaugh's confirmation hearings, the principle of "innocent until proven guilty" has been replaced with "innocent until accused." It is a poisonous development.

In this context, it is worth noting that Ronan Farrow used his perch at *The New Yorker* to attack Kavanaugh during his confirmation hearings, adding fuel to the fire started by the fantasist Christine Blasey Ford. It was he, in a piece co-written by Jane "Dark Money" Mayer, who introduced the world to Deborah Ramirez, one of the women who, once Kavanaugh's nomination to the Supreme Court was announced, half- or quarter-remembered (with coaching) some drunken party at which Kavanaugh may or may not have been present when he, or possibly someone else, made lewd advances to her. Michael Avenatti also tried to bring forward hazy accusers.

In a long and thoughtful blog post published in May 2018, Moses Farrow laid out the particulars of the Farrow–Allen melodrama as he understood them. He paints a very different picture from that offered by Mia, Ronan, and Dylan Farrow. For one thing, after meticulously reviewing the details of Allen's relations with his family, he concludes that "I never once saw anything that indicated inappropriate behavior at any time."

Regarding Allen's relationship with Soon-Yi, he notes that they "rarely even spoke during her childhood. It was my mother who first suggested, when Soon-Yi was 20, that Woody reach out and spend time with her. He agreed and . . . [t]hat's how their romance started." When the affair went public, many were appalled that Allen should be involved with his "step daughter." But Moses observes that Soon-Yi was "not Woody's daughter (adopted, step, or otherwise)." He acknowledges that the affair was

> unorthodox, uncomfortable, disruptive to our family and it hurt my mother terribly. But the relationship itself was not nearly as devastating to our family as my mother's insistence on making this betrayal the center of all our lives from then on.

According to Moses, after discovering Allen's affair with Soon-Yi, Mia Farrow embarked on a campaign of vilification against them both, "drilling it into our heads like a mantra: Woody was 'evil,' 'a monster,' 'the devil,' and Soon-Yi was 'dead to us.'"

He goes on to describe a horrifying regimen of physical and psychological abuse meted out against the children by his mother. There was also this:

> My mother, of course, had her own darkness. She married 50-year-old Frank Sinatra when she was only 21. After they divorced, she moved in to live with her close friend Dory Previn and her husband André. When my mother became pregnant by André, the Previns' marriage broke up, leading to Dory's institutionalization.

Not exactly Marmee in *Little Women*.

Reflecting on the decision to cancel Woody Allen's book, Suzanne Nossel, the CEO of PEN America, noted sadly that "the end result" might well be that "readers will be denied the opportunity to read it and render their own judgments." But of course that is precisely what cancel culture is all about: deploying the mob to replace freedom and opportunity with stultifying moral disapprobation.

Private parties: the forgotten letters of Anthony Hecht

by William Logan

The great letter writers may be dead. Though the hurry-scurry of email has reinvented, with a vengeance, the mail deliveries six times a day in Regency London, the surge of ephemera allows no more than pinched and hasty replies. After a dozen exchanges on some trivial matter within the hour, you want to slash your wrists. However much we long for the day when a letter from a good friend was an occasion, to be read at leisure and set aside a month before replying, that day is never coming back.

Not everyone required letters to put personality on stage. Diaries served natural graphomaniacs like Pepys and Boswell, a locked closet in which all secrets could be concealed. Letters nonetheless became a confessional for the literate, if they were moved to confess at all. Some writers never needed any correspondent in particular, taking opportunities as they came and making of accident all that was wanted. Shaw, for instance, always had something to say (or something he couldn't bear not to say); and it didn't matter whether the correspondent was a brow-beaten actress who at the fortieth performance had wrecked the rhythm of her lines or a widow who didn't mind the playwright rabbiting on in condolence, as he often enclosed a rather generous check. Byron opened his heart to almost everyone; but his most brutal secrets were probably lost with his memoirs, burned all too eagerly by his friends. Only his letters remain to give us the personality lost to the flames.

Most letter writers, though, prefer a confidant or two. To the mass of their friends they may be almost mute, with a tongue never indiscreet. The more such writers keep buttoned up, the more they require a familiar—now and again they simply must run to hounds. I'm not speaking of writers who force advice upon the young—Lord Chesterfield, for instance, or Rilke. No, for a letter writer to exhaust the darkest resources of the medium, there must be a secret sharer, a doppelgänger, the sort who appears no more than two or three times in a life.

For later readers who don't mind rummaging through private correspondence, every writer demands, at the least, a shadow who does not reject his letters. T. S. Eliot and Ezra Pound found in each other a co-conspirator; and perhaps for that reason in their letters they engaged more in peacockery than private revelation, often in stage whisper and whimsical voice. They were so busy dressing for show that the private was left behind. The reader learns from their letters little explicit, but overhears far more than he hears. (Eliot was so private even his own roommate, a close friend, was shocked when Old Possum failed to return from church one morning, having in secret married his Faber and Faber secretary.) Only in fairy tales do sweethearts who court by letter live happily ever after; but, once the wedding sheets are stained, lovers rarely need to send each other anything but a note from upstairs to down.

Anthony Hecht met William L. MacDonald in 1954 at the American Academy in Rome. Hecht was a young American poet who had

just published his first book, *A Summoning of Stones*. He'd won the first Rome Fellowship in Literature three years before, and with his new wife had returned to the Academy with Guggenheim Fellowship in hand. MacDonald, an architectural historian a year or so older than the poet, arrived at the Academy on his own Rome Fellowship, accompanied by his own new wife. The men gradually became close friends, entering into a correspondence that gave them license for jokes bad and bawdy, obscene limericks, an occasional sexy postcard or cheesecake photo, cartloads of male jesting and tomfoolery, as well as the sustained acts of provocation from which memorable letters are made.

The correspondence was slow to catch fire—indeed, the postcards and truncated letters from the first ten years of their friendship fill only seven pages. Once the exchange began in earnest, however, the envelopes, despite lapses and silences, shot back and forth robustly for a quarter of a century. Not all the letters and postcards survive, but of the 440 discovered almost all have been collected in *A Bountiful Harvest*, edited with passion and determined labor by Philip Hoy, who was also responsible for *Anthony Hecht in Conversation* (1999; third edition, 2004), an interview by mail that rambled on intelligently for more than a hundred pages.[1]

The lives of Hecht and MacDonald had been disrupted by the war. Like most returning GIs, they started their careers belatedly. Hecht had received his BA *in absentia* from Bard while fighting in Europe. Though in 1946 he entered Kenyon College as a special student to study with John Crowe Ransom, the young poet soon had a nervous breakdown. He had been present at the discovery of the Flossenbürg concentration camp in Bavaria and suffered nightmares years afterward. Hecht taught a little at Kenyon, Iowa, and NYU before entering Columbia for an MA in English. MacDonald had dropped out of college before the war (he served stateside as a bombardier instructor), but afterward matriculated at Harvard for his BA, eventually working for the MA and Ph.D. His first dissertation was rejected while he was still in Rome, and he didn't receive his doctorate until he was thirty-five.

After Rome, both returned to academic careers, Hecht at Smith (then Bard and Rochester) and MacDonald at Yale (then Smith). As was usual then, they were hired as instructors, the rank below assistant professor, though each had spent time as an instructor elsewhere, Hecht for three years. Academics at research universities now no longer suffer the crippling course loads of sixty years ago. Young professors often taught four courses a semester, sometimes with a different preparation for each. (Sylvia Plath, teaching at Smith the year after Hecht arrived, railed against the huge stack of papers she was forced to grade, one week 120 of them, half for a senior academic still giving the same lectures she'd heard as a student years before.) Soon each man had children. Lectures, torpid committees, soul-killing student essays, and, of course, families may have left little time for their own work, much less correspondence.

Finding a sympathetic intelligence is difficult, but it's far easier to lose one than find another. (Think of Melville's devastation after losing the friendship of Hawthorne, to whom he had dedicated *Moby-Dick*.) Hecht and MacDonald stayed fast friends through marriages, divorces, the birth of children and the death of a child, remarriages, new children, illnesses, triumphs, disasters, all in the middle realm of middle-class university life. Such a friend provides that most difficult thing, much less common than the services of a muse (who apparently can be found at any streetcorner or café table). It is for such an intelligence that the writer writes, not in the expectation of perfect understanding, but in the expectation of expectation. We write at first because we must, but later we write because one or two people know us deeply and nevertheless want to read us.

Though the correspondence didn't gather speed until the late sixties, there were early signs of the tenor and temperament the pair would adopt, those of eyebrow-lifting, cock-hatted

1 *A Bountiful Harvest: The Correspondence of Anthony Hecht and William L. MacDonald*, edited by Philip Hoy; Waywiser Press, 544 pages, $49.

gentlemen with a world-weary smirk. So, Hecht in 1961 about bringing his boys for a visit:

> How are you fixed for entertaining a wizened old man and two appealing young boys? These are part of a small troupe of itinerant actors who have toured Paraguay in "The Wild Duck" and have turned to me for help. Their tastes are modest, but they snore in Norwegian.

Hecht was thirty-eight, so not quite wizened. Or this, a decade later:

> You must be as distressed as I am about what the church has done to St. Ursula. They have de-canonized her; scratched her from the calendar, broken her halo, plucked off her wings, and tossed her harp into the discard. And all this simply because some recent investigation suggests (merely *suggests*, mind you) that those eleven thousand virgins were not precisely virgins. In fact, it now appears that Ursula was making a pretty penny in the white slave racket, and headed an organization that might easily rival the PLAYBOY empire.

A few years earlier, MacDonald sent a mocked-up program for the lecture series the two had cooked up. The four lectures, delivered alternately starting with Hecht, were to be titled "Famous Streetcar Accidents," "LITTLE Women," "Great Literary Non-Swimmers," and "Different-shaped Crates."

These dry humors were made that much drier by various competitions the men set themselves, beginning with a long-running skirmish over their closing signatures. Eventually the cast of characters from some dissipated franchise of Madame Tussaud's included, among other worthies, Timon of Brooklyn; Uriah, all in a Heap; Publius Invidious Nasal; Timon of Buzzard's Gulch; Richard the Chicken-Livered; St. Pincas the Bland; Timon of Akron; William the Inextinguishable; Milton of Saudi Arabia; Charles the Overweight; Ethelred, the Moderately Well-Prepared; and Sarah, Duchess of Marlboro Lights, as well as a file that can only be marked "Get it?"—Eddie Puss, Galley-Layo, E. Llipsis, Aunt Tizzy Payshun, Ivan Idea, and, best of all, Patty O'Furniture.

Similar Olympiads were held for salutations (Dear Imperator, Dear Dr Dynamo) and both return and mailing addresses (one of the best of the latter is directed to "Señor William MacDonald, Procurator of Sheboygan"). The drolleries of two academics became, through relentless ingenuity, the long record of an extraordinary fondness. The silliest and hardest fought of their contests came over who could procure stationery from the most arcane hotel, business, or government office. They even began to squabble, in their nickering way, over whether embossed stationery was superior to flat, and whether letter paper from hotels where the writer had never stayed was illegitimate. (Hecht apparently employed compliant friends abroad for his cache.) Some heights were reached when the poet flaunted letterheads from "Saunier, 'Enterprise de Déménagements pour La France à L'Étranger'" and "Rogier & Cie, 'Dentelles & Guipures Noires & Blanches,'" and MacDonald "Tom Sawyer Motor Inns" and "The Byzantine Institute Inc." To that stranger, the reader, the jousting is as annoying as it is amusing, "The Battle of the Frogs and Mice" carried out by typewriter.

A correspondence so much in love with pissing, moaning, and growling, with small bouts of pride in achievement or recognition inserted, might seem rigidly impersonal; but between the initial and final ruffling of feathers the letters became progressively more revealing. Year after year their mailboxes filled with pugnacious teasing on purloined stationery, each man reporting on the absurdities of the world or of his colleagues, with MacDonald goodhearted, forgiving, ready to make friends, never more delighted than when he took early retirement from Smith and found his lectures so much in demand he could indulge himself in scholarly work without worrying about a regular income. Hecht was Nature's sufferer, prickly, grinding along at teaching, irritated by the abysmal quality of his students, puffing his chest a little as each prize landed on his doorstep.

The poet was not above using poetic arms in the clash of wit. The man who co-invented the double-dactyl preferred the limerick in such engagements.

Said Mary to Gabriel, "Oi!
Well, at least I am glad it's a boy.
But what should I say
When my waistline gives way?
That I'm filled with elation and goy?"

Such *coups de poésie* must be classed, as limericks usually are, as groaners.

That naughty old Sappho of Greece
Said, "What I prefer to a piece
Is to have my pudenda
Rubbed hard by the enda
The little pink nose of my niece."

Hecht's sins should no doubt be visited upon the reader, as Eliot's King Bolo poems recently were, in a *Complete Poems*.

Even MacDonald occasionally tried his hand, making these *opera minora* distant cousins to the results of Leigh Hunt's sonnet competitions.

There was a Young Man, name of Rex
With extremely small organs of sex,
When accused of exposure
He replied with composure:
"De minimis non curat lex."

"The law does not concern itself with trifles," reads the editor's helpful gloss.

It was just a hardened old fossil—
As a find, nothing colossal—
But the Vatican thought,
From the wonders it wrought,
'Twas the peter of Paul, the Apostle.

(I've corrected MacDonald's lineation and added indentations to the B-rhymes.)

One can forgive the *Boy's Own* humor, the Polish jokes, the endless badinage and repartee, and the painfully extended improv on the grounds that men will be boys. Eliot and Pound certainly japed and jiggered like schoolboys, but Hecht and MacDonald perhaps more like graduate students. It's easier to forgive the schoolboys. The humor often falls flat, especially when nasty—MacDonald three times over a decade mentions his "heroine," a "Miss Modene Gunch of Lubbock, TX, who was as you probably know Miss Vacant Lot of 1976." (Her first name was really Modine, as the editor scrupulously notes, and she was crowned not Miss Vacant Lot but Miss Vacant Lot of the World.) The humor of the day grows a little tiresome when extended to half a thousand pages. Things get no better when MacDonald writes Hecht in ridiculous pidgin on stationery from an Aleppo hotel, inviting him to consider "advertsing your splendids book, MILLIONS TINY SHADES, here in great Muslim world. Oil shieks prefer billions; next volume could you oblige your Muslim followers?" The book had been titled *Millions of Strange Shadows*.

Hecht's dyspepsia often leaks out when he speaks of his unhappiness with his students:

> I detest poetry-writing courses; my students at Rochester have never been any good at all. I taught for one semester at Harvard in 1973, and for one semester at Yale in 1977. In those two brief periods I had excellent students in poetry-writing courses.

He names the young Harvard and Yale poets, crowing over their achievements—a MacArthur Fellowship, two Amy Lowell Poetry Travelling Scholarships, and books from Knopf and Viking, neglecting to mention that his no doubt fulsome letters of recommendation might have helped a little. (He may have been a judge for the Amy Lowell.) Still, at Rochester, he declares, "I have never had any student who could write worth a damn, much less get published." He calls Washington University students, when he visits as Fannie Hurst Lecturer, "no dumber than usual." The Georgetown students prove "very poor" and some of their papers "dreadful." Hecht gives as an example, in that way of English Department professors, "One student of mine wrote on a term paper that John Donne's mother was the sister of Thomas Aquinas. . . . [W]hat the student meant was that Donne's mother was descended from the sister of Thomas More."

Hecht did not have a grudge against the world, just a broad streak of rancor and choler, a private rage though he had won impor-

tant prizes (the Pulitzer, the Bollingen) and in 1982 was named Consultant in Poetry to the Library of Congress, the position soon renamed Poet Laureate. Despite these laurels, he had missed other honors (*The Venetian Vespers*, though a finalist, failed to win the National Book Critics Circle Award in poetry) and was thwarted in his wish to be appointed to the Boylston Chair at Harvard, which eventually went to Seamus Heaney. Like many poets, Hecht felt he hadn't quite been given his due.

There's no worse example of forced drollery than Hecht's final report as Poetry Consultant. The first had apparently been formal as mourning clothes. The second:

> During my own period as Consultant poets were limited to writing sestinas, rondeaux and rhyme royal on the Persian Gulf Crisis, post-coital sadness, and the National Geographic Society. Deviations either in materials or forms were dealt with instantly and mercilessly, and it is with a genuine sense of regret that I turn in the boot, the rack and the official thumb-screws of office. . . . I can do no less than point out to my successor that anyone who takes upon himself the role of Caesar must expect the attendant risks. There were the usual assassination attempts.

This excruciating and miscalculated display of buried pique and cocksnootery could not be more embarrassing. Seven hundreds words in this vein prove only that the poet had no future as a stand-up comedian.

Hecht was Jewish, born in New York City in 1923, where he grew up in comfortable circumstances that during the Depression became uncomfortable. His father's small manufacturing firm, The New England Enamel Company, made household utensils; but he loathed the business and, according to Hecht, was ruined three times. Hecht's mother, whose family supported the firm (her parents were apparently wealthy), insisted that he resign from management.

Eventually the elder Hecht stepped down, accepting a salary. Mrs. Hecht confided to her son that it was secretly subsidized by her family, and that she planned to file for divorce and leave him destitute. She was lying, the poet discovered. The business might once have had, before Hecht's birth, more extensive interests. In 1928 the U.S. Court Board of Tax Appeals was asked to determine whether the company had cheated on its taxes in a complicated transaction toward the end of World War I involving the sale of steel ship-plates and open-hearth bars.

The use of personae is perhaps not surprising in a poet from a family full of secrets. (Think of the rogues' gallery his closing signature inhabited.) Sometime after the war, he began dressing in dapper suit and tie, often bowtie, and speaking with the tinge of an English accent, as if he'd purchased everything including the accent on Savile Row. Hecht's friends ignored these affectations, or even liked him the more for being the self-made man few self-made men are. Like most personae, it was a rejection more than an embrace.

In poems like "A Hill," some shipworm of fury has bored deep into the oak. On a warm afternoon at the market outside the Farnese Palace, a man has a vision of

> a hill, mole-colored and bare. It was
> very cold,
> Close to freezing, with a promise of snow.
> The trees were like old ironwork gathered for
> scrap
> Outside a factory wall. There was no wind,
> And the only sound for a while was the little
> click
> Of ice as it broke in the mud under my feet.
> I saw a piece of ribbon snagged on a hedge,
> But no other sign of life. And then I heard
> What seemed the crack of a rifle.

The vision dissipates, and the speaker is returned to the piazza. "I was scared," he remarks, "by the plain bitterness of what I had seen." Ten years later, he realized that he'd looked upon that hill before.

> at last, today,
> I remembered that hill; it lies just to the left
> Of the road north of Poughkeepsie; and as a boy
> I stood before it for hours in wintertime.

Considering Hecht's long misery and depression, the speaker's reflection after the vision is telling. The unalloyed *ressentiment* that steals into the letters is soul-rending in poems, especially those more autobiographical. Letters, unlike fiction or poetry, hew more or less to the facts.

It's hazardous to draw a straight line from Hecht's poems to his life, when the work sometimes has such a teasing relation to experience. (The Robert Frost of the poems remains at odds with the Robert Frost who breathed and spat.) As a boy, Hecht had been sent to three private schools, including Dalton and Horace Mann. He remembered at the latter having "no good friends." If he spent part of the winter upstate then, it has escaped his critics. During the early years of the war, however, he attended Bard, located in Annandale-on-Hudson on the "road north of Poughkeepsie." College boys, even unfledged ones, rarely consider themselves boys. The contrast between the sunlit, ancient culture of Rome and the barren, frozen world surrounding that naked hill exaggerates a psychology while giving it excuse to appear. Hecht inherited Rome by hard graft; but perhaps he felt his grasp upon it fragile, that he was always in danger of being dragged back to the cringing, grimy, go-ahead America of his childhood. "A Hill" opens the poet's bleakest and most private book, *The Hard Hours* (1967), for which he won the Pulitzer; the excess of suffering it records is moving because the effect often outstrips the cause. It's tempting to suggest that Hecht found the art to conceal the life.

The poet was widely known to be thin-skinned, especially about reviews. His unexamined rage appears only twice in these letters to MacDonald, and when the wrath of Achilles comes the trigger seems trivial. (Where he does examine it, he sounds, as Plath does, like someone who has spent too long on the psychiatrist's couch.) Hecht's younger brother, Roger, was a crippled epileptic who had inherited the family's apartment, though the brothers owned the library and furnishings in common. When lack of space forced his brother to contemplate selling some of the books, Hecht listed those he wanted and gave him permission to sell anything else. Roger was apparently cheated in the sale, offered pennies on the dollar for rare books; worse, one of those sold was the opening volume of a first-edition set of *Tom Jones* that Hecht had reserved for himself. He wrote MacDonald,

> Roger . . . could not remember the name of the person who had taken the books, had idly thrown away the receipt, and could not even remember who had recommended this factor to him. My reaction to this has been abnormally strong, and I recognize the feelings as those with which I have not been afflicted for many years. . . . They are generated by that kind of remarkable, seeming unwittingness which, even if it were pure, would betoken a lack of concern with the feelings of others; but which is more likely to be mixed with an incalculable portion of either conscious or unconscious malice. Roger's feelings about me could not fail to be painfully complicated with admiration and envy. . . . Since there has been nothing else whatever in the way of family heirlooms that has come my way or that I cared to have, this is a matter that I am struggling to cope with.

Though he thought his brother's reaction blithe and uncaring, Hecht was slightly embarrassed about what he called this "vastly overdetermined reaction." He wrote again ten days later:

> I knew at once that the loss was almost entirely symbolic, though the knowledge did not in the least diminish my Gordian knot of rage, guilt, and other violent emotions that I had thought pretty well buried for good. In fact, the chief shock was to find myself experiencing feelings that had blissfully been banished for so long, but which had once festered in ulcerous silence for years.

Part of his outburst, perhaps, came because Roger had never bowed low enough before his older brother's achievements.

Only in poetry could Hecht find release from that gnawing anger, a deforming affliction that also appears in *Selected Letters* (2013). Though Roger was almost certainly guilty of

simple carelessness, not malice, the incident may provide a key to Hecht's permanent state of grievance. He manages never to mention here or in the selected letters, except twice briefly when Roger was a teenager, that his "crippled and retiring" younger brother was also a poet—not as gifted as Hecht but not meanly talented, either. Hecht's silence reads as another attempt to escape his childhood. Roger eventually published four books of poetry; but in the letters to MacDonald, apart from those about the missing volume of *Tom Jones*, he doesn't exist.

Three years later, when Hecht was retiring from Rochester to take up a position at Georgetown, he wrote MacDonald that the previous year a colleague, a Dickens and D. H. Lawrence scholar at the end of his career, had been given a "huge fandango" involving lines by Lawrence set to music, an evening concert, and a series of lectures another evening in the man's honor. The next retiring scholar received similar attention, including a concert and dinner for two hundred and fifty. Arrangements for the latter had taken most of an academic year, but the semester was almost over before the chair suggested that the poet give a reading and invite some fellow poets to read, with cocktails and dinner to follow. Mortally offended by the slight, Hecht replied that on short notice such a reading by friends would be impossible. No notice was taken of his departure. It makes a reader wonder whether his colleagues later missed Hecht at all. (Sylvia Plath in 1958 mentioned his "pale monkey-sneer.") The breastplate of self-regard was something the poet could never shed.

Much of Hecht's *Selected Letters* is filled with collegial replies to poets he knew well and poets he'd taught (many obviously currying favor); but even as he lathered praise over one of their new poems Hecht retained a chilly touch of formality, as if he wore his three-piece suit even to bed. The letters, apart from the few there to MacDonald, are often tepid, businesslike, slightly stale, the work of a man who had filled his world with acquaintances kept at a slight distance. Perhaps Hecht could not offer even those he called friends much of himself—perhaps, to take a darker view, he didn't have enough of a self to give. The little he chose not to conceal was deeply embedded in the poems. That rather dull selection of letters lies a long distance from the exhausting display of puckish show-offishness and buffoonery in *A Bountiful Harvest*, with a good deal exposed of the man beneath the carapace.

The end of the friendship was as brutal as it was swift. During a dinner party at the Hechts in 1990, conversation turned to Trajan's column, completed in 113 A.D. to commemorate the end of the Dacian Wars. The column stands at the center of one of Hecht's finest poems, "The Cost." A boy and girl on a Vespa go wheeling around the monument, mimicking the "raw recruits/ And scarred veterans" who spiral up its face, the couple probably ignorant, in their heedless way, of the battles fought or the price in blood. The last lines read:

> And why should they take thought
> Of all that ancient pain,
> The Danube winters, the nameless young who fought,
> The blood's uncertain lease?
> Or remember that that fifteen-year campaign
> Won seven years of peace?

MacDonald happened to mention that the wars had lasted no longer than two or three years (101–102 A.D. and 105–106 A.D.). Hecht was taken aback. His good friend had seen the poem in *Encounter* when first published two decades before and written Hecht to express his admiration. The poet, who preened a bit over his research, among other things, was deeply hurt that MacDonald had not even mentioned this silly mistake. The poem depended entirely on the long war having won but a short peace—indeed, the haunting error made nonsense of the moral. The Vietnam War, as the editor notes, was still raging in the background as Hecht wrote.

The poet apparently said nothing at the time, but after the guests had departed spent all night searching out his source. The reference, it turned out, had been entirely mistaken. The men spoke the next day, and words were exchanged. The breach was total. They never

reconciled, and the only correspondence thereafter amounted to a note from Hecht now lost and three clipped postcards of a sentence or two from MacDonald, the last written twelve years before Hecht died in 2004. No more amusing signatures, no more stationery filched from obscure hotels. There's not a breath of humor in them. Hecht never corrected the terrible error.

This dispiriting end to a long, intimate correspondence, and a friendship of heartfelt importance to both men, is inexplicable except in terms of Hecht's easily wounded pride. MacDonald told the poet, according to the editor, that he had remained silent because he thought the error of little importance. If so, he underestimated Hecht's steaming vanity and corroded self-esteem. He had a Caesar's arrogance about his poetry, as most poets do; but "The Cost" remains the only important poem to come out of that lost war in Southeast Asia. The history may be faulty, but the truth is lasting.

Though many of his late poems were gorgeously, absurdly, pointlessly baroque, at this distance Hecht looks increasingly like the major poet of that talented generation born between Lowell and Plath. Stronger in moral seriousness than Wilbur, less clever and flighty than Merrill, Hecht was far darker than any of the others. Despite his occasional archness and terrible puns, he said things that must be said. Perhaps that nonpareil John Ashbery rivals him in reputation, though not in depth; and a poet of depth must be seen through a glass darkly.

This meticulous edition reveals the Hecht long shielded from others—jovial, boastful, even generous. That the letters also show a defensive and often unhappy man, and that in the end he ruined a friendship so sustained, make little difference. Perhaps it was always inevitable.

Jane Kenyon's seasons
by Averill Curdy

This small volume of selected poems by Jane Kenyon, in its battered, padded mailer, arrived looking like it had been lost, trampled in a snowbank, and chewed by a dog before landing at the right address.[1] Then the book sat on my sofa table. "What are *you* going to make of this," a friend asked, declaiming a few lines with all the tension of an old clothesline. And it's true. I knew what Kenyon's poems were *like*, knew that they were part of that plain-style free-verse tradition of the personal lyric that has dominated American poetry in the last fifty years and put me to sleep for twenty. My attitude was not unlike that of Sir Joshua Reynolds towards the masterpieces of Dutch painting. While traveling through Holland to look at paintings by Vermeer, Cuyp, and others, the English Grand Manner painter wrote condescendingly of their art as repetitive, dull, and "barren of entertainment" because of its lack of narrative and "poetical" quality, and because of its seemingly narrow focus on Dutch life—Dutch food and drink, Dutch landscape, Dutch interiors of Dutch households of Dutch rich and Dutch poor. With so many poets of the past and present to read and re-read, I'd never felt the need to engage with Kenyon's poetry on its own terms.

The project of a book such as this one—the best work distilled like an attar from the collected poems of a beloved poet who died twenty-five years ago from leukemia, prematurely at the age of forty-seven—seems almost old-fashioned in this rambunctious time when the arts of branding and self-promotion sometime take precedence over other, quieter arts. The seventy-four poems in the book are arranged chronologically. The selections were made by Kenyon's husband, the poet Donald Hall, before his own death in June 2018, as a final act of love for his wife, one imagines, and as a final favor to readers, including those like me who might require only the invitation to arrive at the right moment in order to enter. Every poet should have the privilege of enjoying the affectionate yet discerning sensibility of an editor such as Hall at their service. In this book he has assembled what amounts to Kenyon's spiritual autobiography, as modest and profoundly moving in its way as the casual perfection of a single stroke of lead white describing the touch of light on a pewter vessel.

Kenyon's poems possess the same apparently effortless touch found in certain paintings, which helps to give them the intimacy and self-possession of a diary, whether the subject is the dismay of the body in illness or the pleasurable routines of the poet's life in New Hampshire, where she moved with Hall in 1976. At their weakest, the diaristic quality can result in poems that feel too anecdotal and merely "nice," as in the poem "Finding a Long Gray Hair," from which my friend had despairingly quoted: the poet, scrubbing floors, "repeating the motions of other women," finds a long gray hair in the bucket and feels her "life added to theirs." More

1 *The Best Poems of Jane Kenyon*, selected by Donald Hall; Graywolf Press, 112 pages, $16.

often, however, the dailiness of a diary carries with it the observations of the small details that occur within the repetitions of seasons, tasks, and emotional weathers, which set one manifestation of a season, for example, apart from another. These are the beautiful changes that also establish the vulnerable character of human life in time, as in the short poem, "The Pond at Dusk," where the "green haze on the trees changes/ into leaves and what looks like smoke/ floating over the neighbor's barn/ is only apple blossoms." The poem closes with men struggling to carry a heavy casket, the disaster no longer an image momentarily tricking the eye, but the actual death we each bear and that brings with it the end to all change.

The care with which Kenyon registers not only her love of the quotidian, but also her attention to the changes and repetitions observed within cycles of time (human, natural, and sacred) may have something to do with her lifelong experience of depression: "Oh when am I going to own my mind again?," she asks at one point. In "Having It Out with Melancholy," Kenyon documents the travails of the disease, the medications tried and abandoned, the judgment masked as advice offered by friends oblivious to her real suffering, and her own awareness of the self that has been lost. "A piece of burned meat wears my clothes," she writes. It is daily life that regains its color and perfume when depression lifts; that one's mind can change is the hope that may be clung to. (The reverse is also true, of course: respite from depression, that "unholy ghost," is recognized only to be tenuous and temporary.) The endurance and fortitude required to live with chronic depression—and the occasional manic episodes that punctuated Kenyon's lows—is also perhaps why Kenyon displays in poem after poem an affinity for early spring, when the first signs of new growth struggle to show themselves, when creatures such as skunks and sparrows start to return to a New England landscape whose distinguishing features may still be hidden by snow or disfigured by mud.

Melancholy. This more poetic synonym for depression was used for centuries to describe one of the four temperaments of pre-twentieth-century proto-psychology. Kenyon's use of the term connects her work to that of her poetic forebears, such as Charles Wesley (1707–88), a founder of Methodism and composer of over nine thousand hymns and poems, including "Hark! The Herald Angels Sing" in the eighteenth century, a time that represents the second great flowering of melancholia after the early modern period. Unlike a writer such as Sylvia Plath, whose aesthetic is ineluctably twined with mental illness, charging her work with some of its emotional and figurative charisma, Kenyon's rhetoric won't allow her to claim her depression as a form of special knowledge. Wesley and other poets of his period recognized the importance of feeling as a counter to eighteenth-century propriety and chilly rationalism, believing melancholia, in particular, kept the heart open. But they were also wary of unregulated feeling, or "enthusiasm," which only later acquired its more positive connotations. As such, their poetry is a bridge between the neoclassicism of the Augustan poets and the more ardent sensibilities of the early Romantics such as Wordsworth. As in the work of Wesley and his contemporaries, feeling is everywhere present in Kenyon's poetry, but it is always measured. In the poem, "Thinking of Madame Bovary," Kenyon writes:

> Everyone longs for love's tense joys and red
> delights.
> And then I spied an ant
> dragging a ragged, disembodied wing
> up the warm brick walk. It must have been
> the Methodist in me that leaned forward,
> preceded by my shadow, to put a twig just
> where
> the ant was struggling with its own desire.

In his memoir of his life with Kenyon, *The Best Day The Worst Day*, Hall notes that Jane's paternal grandmother was the "fierce Methodist" of her poems, as here, where Kenyon's quiet irony treats "Methodism" as if it were a trait, like stubbornness, or a cleft chin, which could be passed down through generations. Hall also writes of the importance that their small, local church assumed in the lives of two

for whom Sundays in Ann Arbor, where they'd met and married, had been days of recovery from Saturday night cocktail parties. Even now it would be difficult to attend a mainline Protestant church without encountering Charles Wesley's hymns. His brother John, publishing a collection in 1780 as the *Hymnbook for People Called Methodists*, described the book as "a little body of experimental and practical divinity," highlighting the Wesleyan idea, according to the historian and biographer John R. Tyson, that religious experience was meant to connect life and thought.

"My old desire of escaping out of this life possessed me all day," wrote Charles Wesley in his journal after years of tribulation, physical and spiritual. Often wearied by illness, Kenyon is also sympathetic to the struggle of inhabiting an actual body in time, as in the third section of the poem titled "Cages":

> And the body, what about the body?
> Sometimes it is my favorite child,
> uncivilized as those spider monkeys
> loose in the trees overhead.
>
> They leap, and cling with their strong
> tails, they steal food
> from the cages—little bandits.
> If Chaucer could see them,
> he would change "lecherous as a sparrow"
> to "lecherous as a monkey."
>
> And sometimes my body disgusts me.
> Filling and emptying it disgusts me.
> And when I feel that way
> I treat it like a goose with legs
> tied together, stuffing it
> until the liver is fat enough
> to make a tin of paté.
> Then I have to agree that the body
> is a cloud before the soul's eye.
>
> This long struggle to be at home
> in the body, this difficult friendship.

This desire for a kind of spiritual clarity and calm that the body, "needy and full of desires," can obscure isn't the only note that Kenyon strikes, however. There is the wry humor of her face in the mirror seen the morning after a night of insomnia: "You're still here! How you bored me/ all night, and now I'll have/ to entertain you all day." There are the pleasures of the body, too: the smell of sex lingering on her hands and noticed while at a dinner party with friends, for example. Or the lovely image from an early poem where she offers to her beloved the gestures of her hands, commanding, "Wear them in your hair."

To frame the relationship to the body as a difficult friendship is one of Kenyon's characteristically quiet, unassuming metaphors. Throughout the work, Kenyon relies on understatement, images and figurative language from mainly domestic or natural discourses, and straightforward, mostly declarative sentences that register subtle tonal shifts through deft line and stanza breaks. Like the poetics of Charles Wesley, who wrote and preached for the working poor, criminals, and others marginalized by England's established church, as well as those of George Herbert before him, Kenyon's poetics represent, at least in part, a way of avoiding hubris. In that context, even a poem like "Finding a Long Gray Hair" has its place, as the poet feels her life joined across time to the lives of nameless others through the humble performance of a task—scrubbing the floor on hands and knees. In the apparent simplicity of her means the true difficulty of joining life and thought in poems that might both communicate and endure vanishes, which enables the poems to enact the kind of grace Kenyon sought, and often found, despite the difficulties of depression, aging, and illness in her own life.

Methodism, like Calvinism before it, hoped to reform Protestantism from within. Both movements stressed the necessity of a worshipper's personal, unmediated relationship with God, and both accepted the doctrine of humanity's total depravity as a result of original sin. Unlike Calvinists, however, who believe that only a select few will be saved (and the choices an individual made in life can only jeopardize that pre-ordained salvation, rather than secure it), Methodists believe that individuals can experience God's grace, exercise free will in living a life acceptable to God, and receive salvation because God is just and merciful. Throughout

the collection, Kenyon frames her experience—surviving another depressive episode, feeling a sudden, unexplained joy, or seeing afresh one of the quiet rituals of a long marriage—in terms of grace. But Kenyon's own personal relationship to the divine is made most explicit in the penultimate poem of the book, "Woman, Why Are You Weeping?," when the poet has lost her sense of being "blessed and kept" by her God.

The poem's title comes from the Gospel of John, when after the crucifixion Mary Magdalene arrives at Jesus's tomb to find it empty. Asked by two figures in white why she is weeping, she answers, "they have/ taken away my Lord, and I don't know/ where they have laid him." Kenyon opens her poem with this episode, using it to introduce her own spiritual crisis following a trip to India:

> Returning from long travel, I sit
> in the familiar sun-streaked pew, waiting
> for the bread and wine of Holy Communion.
> The old comfort does not rise in me, only
> apathy and bafflement.

The spiritual certainty that had provided a secure foundation for her life has disappeared "as surely as if my luggage had been stolen from a train." Her encounter with India and its spiritual traditions, the multiplicity of Hindu gods which seemed to have its parallel in the calm acceptance of so many worshippers amid so much suffering, has left her feeling the emptiness of all religious forms, in the way that language itself can also suddenly become meaningless to a child first encountering some familiar form named in a foreign tongue. The personal god, her "Lord" that Kenyon knew and calls "a person whose life I held inside me" and who "heard [her] cry," has abandoned her. Looking around her, at the stranger sleeping on the sidewalk "who loves what cannot be understood," or the infant whose dead body has been slipped into the Ganges in lieu of cremation, Kenyon writes:

> I lose my place
> I don't know why I was born, or why
> I live in a house in New England, or why I am
> a visitor with heavy luggage giving lectures
> for the State Department. Why am I not
> tap-tapping with my fingernail
> on the rolled-up window of a white
> Government car,
> a baby in my arms, drugged to look feverish?

The bafflement that Kenyon undergoes in this moment, the feeling of being suddenly undone by experience, is demonstrated by the enjambed repetitions of, "why . . . why I am . . . why am I not." The consolations of a personal relationship to God and a belief in divine providence are overwhelmed by such human suffering on so wide a scale as to seem impersonal and to which no mere personal response—despite the open heart—can seem adequate. Whether Kenyon's faith survives this test or not, whether the devastating silence is answered at some point by more than the sounds of her own sorrow, as Mary Magdalene's was, are questions that remain unanswered by the poetry, though Hall notes in his memoir that this spiritual despair was overcome like other previous episodes of depression had been. Twenty-five years after Kenyon's death, we live in a different world, and there may be readers who will be able to forgive neither Kenyon's depiction of India, nor her naïveté at the end when she asks her departing God, "What shall we do about this?"

In 1994, Kenyon was diagnosed with a form of leukemia found usually in children who often survive it, but which was particularly virulent in her case. In addition to chemotherapy and radiation she underwent a bone marrow transplant, each treatment more harrowing than the last, each treatment bringing her closer to death in order to try and save her life. Most of her last fifteen months was taken up with treatments, but Kenyon had two months, May and June, in the year before she died when she was able to work, revising the above poem as well as others for a book that would be published posthumously. In her final week, she and Hall went over the poems, discussing them and ordering them together, a process he describes in the chapter of his memoir titled "Eleven Days." Of the last poem (both in that posthumous book and in

this one) he writes, "We both knew that 'The Sick Wife' was unfinished, that if she had lived she would have revised the poem. I asked her, 'If I can find a way to print it as an unfinished poem, and say so, may I print it?' She thought hard and said yes." In Hall's Afterword to *Otherwise* (1996), he speaks of "The Sick Wife" as being unfinished. Though that caveat wasn't included in the collected edition of Kenyon's work published in 2005, nor would readers know it encountering the poem in this new book, it seems necessary to acknowledge it now, as a poignant gesture towards all that was left unfinished—friendship, gardens, love, poems—by the poet's death.

It will be spring, but still cold, still liable to snow in New Hampshire, when *The Best Poems of Jane Kenyon* is published. It has been a difficult year in Chicago, where I've read these poems through the darkest January on record—a month in which the city saw the sun for only two days. Walking along the shore of Lake Michigan one afternoon, I passed a line of gulls on a breakwater. The lake and sky nearly merged in a glaucous hue, but the overcast had thinned slightly, and the angle of light illuminated the gulls so that they looked fashioned from some softly glowing precious metal like palladium. The effect lasted less than a minute, and when I turned my head to look again the gulls were their usual dingy, inarticulate white. It's an effect I've seen before, and it always reminds me of the light captured in the pearl earring in Vermeer's famous painting. In the painting, the pearl achieves a similar, almost unearthly lustrous intensity, in part because it represents the area of highest contrast in the painting, the relative lightest point located beside the relative darkest point. A similar manipulation of these principles is also found in the cold, northern light that pervades Vermeer's *View of Delft*. There, a cloudy sky's combination of shadow and light provides the clarity of illumination upon the city below. These modulations of light and dark, the deceptive simplicity of means and apparent humbleness of subject matter, share attributes with Kenyon's faith and find parallels in her poetry. It's difficult to imagine our way back into the time when viewers like Sir Joshua Reynolds were blind to the virtues of Dutch painting—works that taught us how to see certain effects of light and that raised the common matter of daily life to high art. Still, like Reynolds, I may remain immune to poems that share certain qualities with Kenyon's—their plainness, their often anecdotal quality, and their relationship to personal life—though there was something in this work that surprised me, that made me stop and linger, that changed my mind.

An equilateral triangle
by William Wootten

Robert Frost (1874–1963) and Edward Thomas (1878–1917) are the Pound and Eliot of regular verse, twentieth-century poets who, by tearing off the fustian and listening to how people actually speak, showed how "making it new" need have nothing to do with modernism. And while Frost is much the better known, few rival Thomas as a poets' poet—the many who have paid tribute to his work include W. H. Auden, Philip Larkin, Ted Hughes, Seamus Heaney, and Derek Walcott.

The story of the Frost–Thomas friendship has its biographical attractions too. When they first met in October 1913, Thomas was thirty-five, Frost thirty-nine. Their lives looked like examples of failed promise. Since coming to England the previous year, Frost had finally published his first book of verse, but it had caused little stir. Thomas might have been an established name on the London literary scene, but his talent as a prose writer had been spread over far too many commissioned books and articles. By August 1914, though, things were looking up. Thomas's reviews of Frost's *North of Boston* (three of them, no less) were appearing in the U.K. press that month and doing much to establish Frost's reputation both in Britain and America. Frost had been showing Thomas how some of his prose might be recast into verse. Meanwhile, the Frost and Thomas families were living three meadows apart from one another in rural Gloucestershire. The weather was good, the cost of living low. The two men could spend their free hours walking, talking poetry, and observing the rural flora and fauna (as well as being a book reviewer, literary critic, and general freelance writer, Thomas wrote books on the English countryside). Britain's declaration of war on August 4 as yet only distantly impinged.

Wartime economies were, however, affecting other writers. "De la Mare (greatest of living poets) has just lost twelve or fifteen hundred a year by being dropped by the publisher he read [manuscripts] for," wrote Frost in his letter to Sidney Cox of August 20. Walter de la Mare (1873–1956) has for many decades been a name more on the lips of grade school teachers than in the work of critics, but Frost's claim of "greatest of living poets" was sincere. In December 1913, Frost wrote to John T. Bartlett that de la Mare was "the one man we are all agreed to praise here. His 'The Listeners' is the best poem since the century came in." Thomas joined in the praise: he was to tell the author Eleanor Farjeon that, of the hundreds of books he reviewed over the years, "Frost's *North of Boston* and de la Mare's *Peacock Pie* were the only pure gold [he] ever unearthed."

For all Thomas's justly earned reputation for critical probity, his unearthing process wouldn't serve as a model of book reviewer's best practice. Thomas and de la Mare had been friends since March 1907; they and their families had summered together just as the Frosts and Thomases were summering now. Drafts of many of the children's rhymes de la Mare wrote for *Peacock Pie* (1913) and the

poems he wrote for *The Listeners* (1912) had been sent to Thomas for comment; Thomas had in turn sought de la Mare's opinion on his prose. By 1912, however, the friendship had hit a lull. In a letter of that year, Thomas commented that de la Mare "is a too busy man now, reading for Heinemann & reviewing multifariously & never quite unpuckering in our scanty meetings." Since Thomas was having trouble acquiring enough reviewing assignments to make ends meet, de la Mare's excuse of overwork would have been particularly irksome. (In fact, the chief cause for reticence and scanty meetings was de la Mare's love affair with the London literary editor Naomi Royde-Smith, but de la Mare doesn't seem to have confided this to Thomas.) So, from Thomas's point of view, Heinemann's firing of de la Mare was the perfect cue to reinvigorate the friendship and to introduce de la Mare to Frost. "We wish you were at the other corner of the triangle, & that an equilateral one," Thomas wrote to de la Mare in August 1914.

A century on, the notion that de la Mare might indeed be a poet to put with Frost and Thomas has begun to occur to critics too. Julie Kendall's *Edward Thomas's Poets* (2012) documents how de la Mare and Thomas figure in each other's work and how frequently Thomas's poems echo de la Mare's. It even points out that "The Sun Used to Shine," the Thomas poem remembering that August with Frost, has similarities with an earlier prose essay inspired by the friendship with de la Mare. Angela Leighton's *Hearing Things* (2018) devotes a chapter to reading Frost, de la Mare, and Thomas as a trio. Leighton is fascinated by how the three listen—essentially, what the Imagists do for the eye, they do for the ear. Nevertheless, the connections between them aren't just a matter of aural sensitivity. Put the three poets' greatest hits alongside each other and you will find that Frost's "The Road Not Taken" and "Stopping by Woods on a Snowy Evening" and Thomas's "Adelstrop" employ the structural template established by "The Listeners." A traveler stops briefly—de la Mare's "Traveller" outside a house in a forest, Frost's in a wood, Thomas's at a country railway station—before continuing his journey. The reader is given the impression that the stop has been of great significance, yet precisely what that significance is is left something of a puzzle. In "The Listeners," "Adelstrop," and "Stopping by Woods," the traveler also hearkens to the surrounding sounds. In "The Listeners," the traveler with his horse has somehow "kept his word"; in "Stopping by Woods," the traveler with his horse has "promises to keep." And this is before one comes to more thought-provoking similarities of theme and sensibility.

Frost and Thomas themselves seem to have noticed the resemblance, at least in "The Road Not Taken": replying to a now-missing letter from Frost about the poem, Thomas reassures Frost it has a "newness" that is "not like . . . de la Mare"—which he wouldn't have bothered to say had he or Frost or both not been worried that it might be. Nevertheless, in Thomas and especially in Frost, de la Mare's presence often feels a little spectral, both in the spooky sense (when not writing haunted poems, de la Mare was a writer of ghost stories) and in the way that it helps to be in the right light and frame of mind to notice it. The beginning of "The Road Not Taken," for instance, when the narrator, contemplating the two roads in the yellow wood, pronounces himself "sorry I could not travel both/And be one traveler," reads very differently once you've been haunted by the ghosts and doublings in de la Mare and then Thomas.

It was natural enough for de la Mare to decline Thomas's August invitation: rustic seclusion certainly wouldn't have helped secure him more work in London or more meetings with Royde-Smith. But in retrospect, it is apparent he was at a crossroads. That autumn, de la Mare fell seriously ill, so he never did get to meet Frost before the latter's return to the States in February 1915. Moreover, after August 1914 de la Mare's relationship with Thomas noticeably soured. In December Thomas asked de la Mare if he would persuade Edward Marsh, the editor of the popular *Georgian Anthology*, to include Frost

in the second volume of the series. Thomas told Frost: "I gather Marsh is engrossed now and reckoned not to be approachable, but I don't know whether to believe it. I saw de la Mare and that is what he said. But he and I have withdrawn from one another I fancy. At least I know I am never myself as long as I am with him." De la Mare praised *North of Boston* (if somewhat less fulsomely than Thomas) when he reviewed it for the *Times Literary Supplement*. Moreover, the country was at war, and Marsh was Private Secretary to Winston Churchill, First Lord of the Admiralty. It's unlikely that de la Mare was lying or that Thomas even really thought he was. What mattered, however, was that Thomas had decisively transferred his principal allegiance to Frost. In the ensuing months, when Thomas mentioned de la Mare, he did so almost always with either a grouse or a note of envy at de la Mare's good fortune (in March 1915, de la Mare was awarded a Civil List pension of £100).

Thomas's first real poem was completed on December 3, 1914. His style moved quickly from being that of a sort of Anglo-Welsh Frost to one which, while situated somewhere between Frostian speech sound and de la Mare's lyricism, has a thoughtful, soft-spoken hesitancy all of its own. Frost's support was unstinting, de la Mare's less so: when sent poems for comment in March 1915, de la Mare seems to have been really positive about only four of them. Rather than appreciating Thomas's metrical innovations, de la Mare feared that Thomas had "gone wrong over metre." "*You* can't go to De la Mare" for yourself, Frost wrote to Thomas on April 17. Along with the question of whether to leave prose for poetry, with opportunities for a freelance writer drying up in England, Thomas also needed to decide whether to follow Frost to America or join the army.

So, July 1915 was not the best time to press Thomas for his true opinion of "The Road Not Taken," a poem which, according to Frost, was prompted by Thomas's tendency, on their "botanizing walks" through the English countryside, to haver over which route to take before sighing over the other. Thomas, who was feeling less troubled by self-determined free choice and its ironies than by competing compulsions and obligations, wasn't inclined to see the lighter side of the poem, observing sharply: "It is all very well for you poets in a wood to say you choose, but you don't."

Thomas's own verse would ponder roads and travelers from a different vantage. In January 1916, he writes of "Roads":

> They are lonely
> While we sleep, lonelier
> For lack of a traveller
> Who is now a dream only.
> From dawn's twilight
> And all the clouds like sheep
> On the mountains of sleep
> They wind into the night.

In the poem, echoes of Frost and de la Mare are felt absences. The "clouds like sheep" recall how "clouds like sheep/ Stream o'er the steep/ Grey skies where the lark was" in de la Mare's poem of elegiac ghostly doubles, "Autumn." But Thomas is less joining with his friends than bidding them goodbye, for "Now all roads lead to France." In July 1915, Thomas enlisted in the Artists' Rifles. Decades later, Frost would declare that the decisive pull had been Thomas's desire to prove his courage after backing down in a dispute he and Frost had had with a gun-wielding gamekeeper. But this may say as much about Frost as it does about Thomas and his complex motivations. When asked at the time by Farjeon why he enlisted, Thomas simply picked up a pinch of earth and crumbled it, saying: "Literally for this."

It was de la Mare, not Thomas, who would cross the Atlantic—in November 1916, to receive an award on behalf of the war poet Rupert Brooke, and to lecture while he was there. By this time, Thomas's feelings towards de la Mare had warmed, in part because de la Mare had been instrumental in securing Thomas a £300 grant from the Royal Literary Fund (he tried for a Civil List pension but Thomas was deemed too young). On October 29 he wrote to de la Mare: "I should like to be coming too. As I can't, give my love to Frost if you

find you can see him. He is at Franconia, New Hampshire, but would come a long way to see you," and, two weeks earlier to Frost: "I hope you will see him at last." Frost evidently took this to mean that a letter from de la Mare would soon arrive arranging to meet. On November 6, however, Frost wrote to Thomas that a friend told him of having scheduled "lunch or something" with de la Mare in New York; the visit was so imminent de la Mare must have decided to leave Franconia off his itinerary. Frost, who had been busy securing the U.S. publication of *The Listeners*, added "I'm a little hurt." To Louis Untermeyer, he was more frank: de la Mare

> has only treated Thomas, to whom he owes more than half, measurably well. . . . I suspect that the man who rhymes with Delaware is a bit of a British snob. . . . I'm almost sure he scorns America and has only come over for what he can get out of us and against us. . . . If he is half as bad as I am afraid he is, he might spoil the poems. . . . My not meeting De la Mare in England was rather accidentally on purpose.

Thomas's comments should have mollified Frost slightly:

> You must not take it all badly . . . he does not often go anywhere when he is not actually asked. He will be anxious and uneasy in America. He did not want to go & people will be crowding round him. If he found himself in your house I imagine he would be as glad as you. I hope he will come.

On December 14, Frost wrote de la Mare an invitation and de la Mare duly stayed the night in Frost's new home in Amherst, Massachusetts. Writing in 1921 to Jack Haines, a mutual friend of his and Thomas's, Frost recalled:

> Elinor and I . . . made it a little uncomfortable for De la Mare because he wouldn't come right out in hearty acknowledgement of what Edward Thomas had done for him by timely and untimely praise. I suppose De la Mare had really forgotten. Such we are as we swell up and grow great.

This was also the occasion Frost asked de la Mare about the "queer" meter of "The Listeners," only to have de la Mare remark he hadn't "noticed anything at all about the verse in it queer or unqueer." Usually, de la Mare loved to talk prosody. The Frost and Thomas scholar Ralph Pite once suggested to me that perhaps Frost was—or de la Mare just assumed Frost was—preparing to call de la Mare's treatment of Thomas's unusual meters hypocritical. The idea sounds likely enough.

Writing to Thomas, who was then serving in France, de la Mare appears to have skimped on details. On March 6, 1917, Thomas told Frost that "He says you don't look as well as you ought to. Whatever he said would be little of nothing. He said he wished we could have a talk." The stay with Frost appears to have had its effect, but the time when de la Mare and Thomas could talk through past misunderstandings had gone. To de la Mare on March 9, Thomas wrote, "I wish you had said more about Frost. . . . You say it would be good if we could have a talk, but, you know, I fancy it would not do to have a real friend out here."

Thomas was killed by a shell on the first day of the Battle of Arras, April 9, 1917. Later that year, de la Mare published a brief elegy:

> *To E. T.: 1917*
> You sleep too well—too far away,
> For sorrowing word to soothe or wound;
> Your very quiet seems to say
> How longed-for a peace you have found.
> Else, had not death so lured you on,
> You would have grieved—'twixt joy and fear—
> To know how my small loving son
> Had wept for you, my dear.

In this uncharacteristically personal lament for his friend and the godfather to his child, de la Mare explicitly states that Thomas has been lured on by death. Thomas's chronic depression had brought him to the edge of suicide on more than one occasion. Indeed, the day before Thomas met Frost happened to be a day de la Mare had talked Thomas out of killing himself. Hearing that Thomas had not only joined up, with dependents and in his late thir-

ties, but had also deliberately sought a transfer to the Royal Garrison Artillery and front-line service in France when gainfully employed by the army elsewhere, must have had a too familiar ring to de la Mare.

Frost was prone to suicidal thoughts himself and had felt for Thomas in his dejection. Yet the man who had been writing to him from northern France didn't came across as suicidal: "I should like to be a poet, just as I should like to live," Thomas affirmed in his March 6 letter. For Frost, Thomas's death was the fitting conclusion to a tale of personal redemption in accord with Frost's own ideals of choice and martial valor. Writing to Thomas's widow, Helen, Frost declared that Thomas had proved himself "as brave as the bravest": "I knew from the moment when I first met him at his unhappiest that he would someday clear his mind and save his life." Out of the three alternatives: "death where there is no choice"; "death where there is a choice not so noble"; and death by "a noble choice," Thomas had "found the greatest way." "I want to tell him, what I think he would like to hear from me, that he was a poet." The man who wrote this letter would not have taken kindly to the way de la Mare's poem mentions neither Thomas's poetry not the fact that he had died for his country. Nor would Frost, who was possessive over Thomas's memory, have taken well to de la Mare's publicly claiming Thomas as "my dear." Even Frost's condolence letter finds him telling Helen Thomas "you must let me cry my cry for him as if he were almost mine too."

Frost's first elegy to Thomas was written in 1919 and published in the *Yale Review* before being collected in *New Hampshire* (1923). That its title is "To E. T." seems not to have struck its commentators as remarkable. But it should have. "E. T." is the way Thomas signed his letters to de la Mare; Thomas and Frost were on first name terms. But then Frost's poem is more of an answer to de la Mare than it is an address to Thomas. The elegy begins by overturning the sleep as death metaphor in "To E. T.: 1917," telling Thomas "I slumbered with your poems on my breast." As well as the man whom Frost can publicly call "brother," this celebrates the E. T. who did not stop in 1917, but whose legacy lives on. It is an honoring of the "soldier-poet . . . who went to meet the shell's embrace of fire/ on Vimy Ridge."

After a poetic exchange like that, one would expect a long and bitter feud. Frost—who never forgave Helen Thomas for her frank memoirs of her husband—could certainly bear a grudge. And yet, from then on, the relationship between Frost and de la Mare transformed itself to compliments and smiles. In a letter from 1924, Frost called de la Mare a personal friend before saying: "There's no Englishman I'd rather see honored in America." Following an evening of poetry with de la Mare in 1928, Frost cheerfully labels him "one of the best of the best" (it's not entirely clear if he's talking about his poetry or company—probably both). For his part, de la Mare in old age would speak of Frost as a "great friend." So why the change of heart? There was de la Mare himself who, when Frost got to know him, proved to be the opposite of the monster Frost had imagined in November 1916. In old age, Frost said: "I liked Walter de la Mare very much I mean first as a poet, second as a man . . . a fine fellow, one who never felt called on to buy a high hat." De la Mare's admiration for Frost's poetry, which de la Mare would place in his much-purchased anthologies, must have helped as well.

But I suspect the main push behind the shift was something de la Mare had written. In that letter to Jack Haines in January 1921, Frost declared that "*We* didn't have to wait until he was dead to find out how much we loved him" (my italics), implicitly filing the appreciations of Thomas's life and poetry de la Mare published shortly after Thomas's death among the expressions of love sent after their due date. Frost then wonders what de la Mare would say in his Preface to Thomas's *Collected Poems*. As it transpired, what Frost read there did much to reconcile him to de la Mare. De la Mare writes:

> every friend Thomas had must be conscious—though none more desperately than I—of an inexpressible regret that so much more was his to give if richer opportunity had been taken and a more selfless receptivity had been that friend's to offer. Every remembrance of him brings back his

company to me with a gladness never untinged
by this remorse.

The harshest words on the subject of de la Mare's treatment of Thomas were now being said by de la Mare to himself.

The year 1921 was also the year de la Mare published a longer elegiac poem to Thomas, "*Sotto Voce.*" It describes walking with Thomas one hot day in the years before Thomas turned to verse. The noonday sun is described in the manner of the moon. Thomas hushes de la Mare to listen to the strange, quiet sound of a nightingale practicing the song it will "sing when dark is spread." Together yet separate, each walker hears the bird in his own characteristic way, its song figuring the soft-voiced poetry Thomas will one day write. The poem leaves time and space for other walks and friends, and it locates Thomas's fullest presence not there with de la Mare, but in the future after nightfall.

Frost's "Iris by Night" in *A Further Range* (1936) also recalls a natural wonder in the company of Thomas, this time in the Gloucestershire countryside where Frost and Thomas are caught within a rainbow cast by the moon. Within a complex pattern of symbol and allusion, the poem figures itself not as an indignant riposte to de la Mare but as a fulfillment to the prophesy of "*Sotto Voce.*" De la Mare may be unbounded by this rainbow, but the way Frost and Thomas stand "softly circled round/ From all division time or foe can bring/ In a relation of elected friends" gives implicit space for other friends less close. Frost's moon-seeming sun pays its respects to de la Mare's sun-seeming moon and his own time with Thomas in a way de la Mare might read and recognize.

If, in poetry as in life, the shape of the Thomas–de la Mare–Frost triangle appears far from equilateral, it is less because of Frost's evolving attitude to de la Mare than because de la Mare's interest in Frost seems merely professional and polite: anthology spots and good reviews are very nice to have but don't carry the same weight as an enabling influence upon your best work. There is one notable exception, "The Railway Junction," from de la Mare's 1933 collection *The Fleeting*. Like "The Listeners," its elliptical narrative and elusive symbolism resist confident explanation. Nevertheless, the poem, its melancholic train stop and solitary thrush singing, evidently has in mind Thomas's sunny late-June train halt at "Adelstrop" and how that poem listens first to a blackbird, then "all the birds/ of Oxfordshire and Gloucestershire." "The Railway Junction" also brings to mind the forking ways of "The Road Not Taken," and perhaps also Thomas's time with Frost: in a later stanza, there is a gamekeeper with a gun. But, overwhelmingly, "The Railway Junction" is a halt of absence and solitude, as in its first three stanzas:

From here through tunnelled gloom the track
Forks into two; and one of these
Wheels onward into darkening hills,
And one toward distant seas.
How still it is; the signal light
At set of sun shines palely green;
A thrush sings; other sound there's none,
Nor traveller to be seen—
Where late there was a throng. And now,
In peace awhile, I sit alone;
Though soon, at the appointed hour,
I shall myself be gone.

The silence of A. M. Klein

by Carmine Starnino

In 1957, the biographer Leon Edel was passing through Montreal and decided to call on his old friend A. M. Klein. Then forty-eight, Klein had emerged from the immigrant streets of his "jargoning city" to become the most prodigious poet at work in Canada. Raised in a Yiddish-speaking household, he studied Hebrew, was educated in English, and learned French. (In one poem, Klein wrote that the ships docked at Montreal's harbor unloaded not just cargo but "lexicons.") He channeled that polyglot upbringing into English-language poems of uncommon fluency, an eloquence fueled by an endlessly self-replenishing gift for arresting phrases. Klein's prose, with its improbable range, was no less remarkable. He reeled off plays, lectures, speeches, editorials, book reviews, short stories, and novellas. He even took a stab at a spy thriller. This rhetorical largesse echoed in his baritone delivery. A gifted orator, Klein could quiet a packed hall. His poetry readings had a declamatory flow that mesmerized. His was the voice of a man who wrote for sound as much as sense, a man obsessed with the musicality of words.

That man was nowhere to be found when Klein greeted Edel at the door. It had been decades since the two were undergraduates at McGill University, walking home together on winter evenings after class. As a student in the mid-1920s, Klein was driven, voluble, quick on the uptake. Two years his senior, Edel was awed by his friend's precocity—Klein had appeared in *Poetry* magazine at the age of nineteen—and would go on to publish the first major article on his poetry. Edel eventually decamped to New York and, through their correspondence, kept tabs on his friend's rapid development. Klein's second book, *The Hitleriad*, was published by James Laughlin at New Directions; his third, *Poems*, was reviewed by Randall Jarrell. Two midlife breakthroughs then brought his brilliance into full view—a poetry volume called *The Rocking Chair*, which won Canada's top prize, the Governor General's Award, and a novel, *The Second Scroll*, published by Knopf and praised by *The Nation* as "profoundly important and certainly a work of genius."

Klein, in turn, had leaned heavily on "My dear Leon" for help as he labored on a massive study of *Ulysses*. Their relationship was based on kindred obsessions and a fondness for debate—and that afternoon in 1957 Edel expected, as he later wrote, a "lively reunion." Instead, he was made to sit at one end of a room, while Klein, in a dark suit, stood at the other, staring out of a window. "There was no conversation though I tried many subjects," Edel recalled, describing Klein as "completely flattened out, as if in a living death."

We now know that Klein was in middle of one of the most brutal psychological unravelings in modern poetry. Seven years earlier, he had became prone to angry outbursts and attacks of extreme paranoia. Suicide attempts followed, which led to admittance to a psychiatric hospital and electroshock therapy. Then, starting in 1955, Klein slowly retreated from public and professional life. He stepped down as editor of the weekly newspaper *The Canadian Jewish Chronicle*,

quit his law practice, and resigned from the bar. At the same time, Klein took the literary career he had assiduously built and razed it. He gave up writing new poems, abandoned his second novel, and stopped responding to letters. Royalty checks went uncashed. Reprint requests were ignored. When the Royal Society of Canada awarded him a literary medal, he snubbed the ceremony. Most disturbing, Klein effectively ceased speaking. In 1959, two years after his encounter with Edel, he was asked by another visitor if he was working on any new projects. Klein nodded in the direction of his desk, which was bare. So extreme was his self-imposed exile, he skipped his wife's funeral in 1971 and sat *shiva* by himself, at home. He died the following year, in his sleep, from an apparent heart attack.

Few events in Canadian literature have generated as much talk as Klein's plunge into silence. His breakdown was, according to his biographer Usher Caplan, "the last possibility that any of his friends could have imagined." When P. K. Page, the poet Klein was closest to during the late 1940s, received word of what happened, her reply was swift: "Abe? Impossible." Klein had displayed none of the maladjusted qualities that might have marked him for such a demise. "A warm gregarious man with a bubbling sharp wit" is how one poet recalled him. Another summed him up as "a great talker, humorous and always stimulating." By his mid-thirties, when many of his Montreal contemporaries were still finding their footing as writers, often living hand-to-mouth with no fixed address or permanent job, Klein had not only published his first poetry book and opened a law practice, but was also a husband and father. He was stable, scandal-free, productive, above the fray.

He had, to be sure, an exalted sense of dedication. "All I am really interested in, above everything, is writing poetry," he once wrote in a letter; "Everything else in my life is a mere adjunct, a means to an end." But he also detested melodramatic dicta and could be surprisingly pragmatic about his art. In 1945, to a question about his motives as a writer, he wrote: "What shall I say in reply: 'I sing because I must!'—How phoney! Or that I wish to improve the world with my rhyme!—How ridiculous." During a 1950 interview, he praised himself as "extremely well-adjusted" and used his life as "proof of the error of the idea that to be a poet 'you must be somewhat cracked.'"

Yet he did crack. What his son Colman described as "an act of non-physical suicide" left his friends profoundly rattled. Three years after Klein's death, during an often heated symposium on his work held at the University of Ottawa, Seymour Mayne declared Klein's silence "a crucial 'secret' of our literature that must be plumbed by biographers and critics." Friends, colleagues, and academics embraced the call. Klein's final years of solitude, which spanned a period nearly as long as his writing career, have been dissected and fervently psychoanalyzed in academic papers, literary essays, and memoirs. His oeuvre has been scoured for telltale personae and troubling self-images, any early signs of a short-circuiting mind or of a self-destructiveness lurking beneath the surface of normalcy.

There were many. The "little cherub" who, "glimpsing God's work flaw'd,/ went mad, and flapped his wings in crazy mirth." The "prowler in the mansion of my blood," whom Klein sees as his "kith and kin." The spring break-up in Montreal's harbor that from its "ice tomb" frees "last year's blue and bloated suicides." Or the play Klein obsessed over and helped produce in 1952, about, in his words, a "broken, storm-crossed" writer with a "split personality" who returns to an empty home after killing the mistress he left his family for, and who talks "quietly, reasonably, almost ingratiatingly, and then—suddenly, because of a word, or a memory—off he goes into a tantrum of emotion."

The sleuthing and speculation helped seal Klein's afterlife as what the critic George Woodcock called "a tragic cliché." Mordecai Richler used him as the template for the failed poet L. B. Berger in his 1989 novel *Solomon Gursky Was Here*. Leonard Cohen dedicated a song to him on his 2004 album *Dear Heather* ("Let me cry help beside you, teacher," he intones). Klein's story has spawned a documentary, a television movie, and a play. He is nearly as well known for the words he never wrote as for the words he did.

The last few decades have seen an attempt to correct this imbalance with a flurry of posthumous publications: a two-volume complete poems, an edition of his letters, a collection of literary essays and reviews, a selection of journalism, a volume of short stories, and a compilation of his diaries, prose fragments, and notebooks. Many of these titles are table-busters, reminding us of Klein's industry. Yet every act of scholarship also returns us to the first principle of his legend: the endpoint. It's not only impossible to think of Klein apart from his silence, but also of the fact that the silence has, at times, been studied more closely, and with greater urgency, than anything he committed to paper. Like haunted detectives, we persist in visiting the crime scene to contemplate the outline chalked around Klein's interrupted career. Nearly half a century after his death, he remains one of literature's most baffling cold cases.

What makes Klein unique, however, is that he tried, in his own way, to diagnose his condition. Indeed, if there is a primer for decoding him—and for appreciating what might have brought him to the edge of the precipice, and pushed him over—it would be "Portrait of the Poet as Landscape," his moving, 164-line examination of the poet's isolation. Klein worried constantly about poetry's decline as a civilizing force. He believed poets had a principal role in shaping the culture at large, and, because that role was public, he believed public recognition was crucial to their influence.

Being irreconcilably alienated from society was, therefore, an extinction-level threat—a threat Klein felt in his bones. He monitored his own reputation with vigilance and resented what he saw as the widespread indifference to his work. He became especially, and increasingly, bitter at how he had given over so much his life to a calling that the world had so little use for. The predicament of the lonely and unread bard is, of course, hardly new. But "Portrait of the Poet as Landscape" is one of the few poems to explore it with bold, forensic self-awareness, and to do so using a hard-won mix of wit and lament, a style exquisitely reconciled to the despair it conveys. The poem is, effectively, a reverse *Künstlerroman*, an account not of an artist's coming of age, but of his undoing. Klein made his most successful song from a confession of failure and, as a result, cast himself as the perfect guide to the forces that, even today, conspire to turn the poet into a "throwback, relict, freak."

Klein isn't the first poet to go dark. Rimbaud threw over poetry at twenty-one and fled to East Africa to run guns. Hopkins refused to produce a line of verse for seven years as he debated the relationship between his duty as a Jesuit priest and his role as a poet. Paul Valéry, frustrated with the way his feelings clouded his thinking, quit for two decades. In the late 1930s, George Oppen kicked the habit for nearly a quarter century in the belief that, amid the spread of fascism, composing poems was "absurd" (he went on to win a Purple Heart in World War II). Shortly after publishing her *Collected Poems* in 1938, Laura Riding renounced her life as a poet, claiming she had "reached poetry's limit."

Klein's silence, however, is different. To start, it wasn't an act of heroic renunciation. It had no motive, no objective. It wasn't carried out in fealty to an ethical or religious principle, nor did he inflict it on himself because he wanted to bring his vocation to heel. If anything, Klein's siege of inertia, despondency, and exhaustion brings to mind Ezra Pound's line: "I did not enter Silence. Silence captured me." Of course, Klein's disintegrating mental state was also, to some degree, a medical condition. His family even begged him to try new drugs, which he rejected.

But a biochemical imbalance can't really account for how, until he began coming apart in mid-1950s, nearly every professional and creative decision Klein made suggested a man terrified of silence—of being silenced and of being met by silence. No sooner had he finished one project than he was onto the next: speaking engagements, weekly editorials, a university lecturing stint, a run for political office—all while practicing law. To succeed, Klein relied on his command of language, a fluency he lavished on his poetry and prose, two areas where he worked hard to stave off linguistic scarcity. He worked full-tilt; with his wife at the typewriter, he dictated articles without pause or revision. Determined to never be at a loss for words, he hunted constantly for diction that was odd, specialized, sparkling, or rare. What he couldn't find, he coined. Far from

a surprise, the silence that engulfed Klein seems to have been, on some level, anticipated.

What that silence puts in perspective, in other words, isn't the catastrophic about-face of an otherwise balanced man. It's the likelihood that Klein's reputation for normalcy so dominated the general perception of him that the growing precariousness of his state of mind naturally went unnoticed. Klein, it should be admitted, wasn't remotely *maudit*—he never believed angst was a guarantee of poetic power. ("A good poet," he wrote, "is one who makes conviction issue from his work without sending irresponsible summonses to God and History and Luck to testify on his behalf.")

Yet from his earliest days, he was trapped in a death grip with his vocation, in plain view of admirers. Poetry, for Klein, was the highest of high callings, the apex art. Thus elected, the poet's duty was to furnish readers with a vision of coherence. Roughly four decades later, Seamus Heaney would call this concept "redress." Good poetry, Heaney believed, had a "counterweighing function"; it transformed, or redressed, social imbalances into an imagined alternative, an aesthetic counterreality. Such acts of redress went straight to the heart of Klein's own responsibilities to the world—responsibilities sharpened by his political anxieties. Horrified by revelations of the Holocaust, Klein's editorials began to evince a pessimism. Klein started to write about the resurgence of totalitarianism, the rise of anti-Semitism, the threat of nuclear war. We can track this rising distress in his letters and notebooks, too. Believing in poetry as a form of action, he rejected the "effete aestheticism" that turned the poet into nothing more than "a sort of inspired chronicler" and instead endorsed poets as "part of the fighting forces, as much so, indeed, as is the trumpeter, marching into the fray."

The burdens of this elevated purpose meant that, for all his intense productivity, poems didn't come easy, or often. Klein loved language ardently, compulsively (high school classmates recall seeing him at the public library reading dictionaries from cover to cover), but his all-out commitment to poetry created punishing expectations. To do the act justice, Klein believed he needed to draw on every aspect of his intellect, background, and experience. There could be no half-measures. But what crept in, by the end of his career, was the sense that he was trying to do something well that might not merit doing at all. In a way, his public image ("your scholar's mind neat as your hair," according to Irving Layton) could hardly have been more misleading.

Here was a surpassingly troubled man beset by an oppressive sense of poetry's nobility. Indeed, the nerve-flaying nature of his literary ambitions is incomprehensible without his final collapse—a defeat that, if nothing else, highlights the barely manageable bargain with greatness Klein tried to strike. Poetry became a high-risk venture for Klein, in other words, not because the act was pushing him into dangerous psychological territory, but because he was leveraging more and more of his self-worth against an art whose valuation was, practically speaking, worthless. "And so bit by bit," as Edel described it, "the will to achieve was eroded."

Karl Shapiro appeared to intuit such an outcome when he cautioned Klein, in a 1948 letter, that he was "too much the artist, too much the conscience of art." Leonard Cohen was similarly unsettled by Klein's outsized sense of duty. In a talk he gave at Montreal's Jewish Public Library in 1964, Cohen berated the audience for never fully supporting Klein as an artist. But he also blamed Klein—then already silent for a decade—for deriving the terms of his happiness from a community that "despised the activity he loved most." Cohen, in fact, confessed to being "disturbed" by Klein's poems, "because at certain moments in them he used the word 'we' instead of the word 'I'; because he spoke with too much responsibility." To use "we" meant that poetry could never quite be its own reward. It meant that while the poet had an obligation to language—an obligation Klein carried out lavishly—he also had an obligation to a fragmenting culture in a dark time, offering up himself, and his verse, as a principle of order.

But for poets saddled with these beliefs, using "we" also meant near-certain, and near-unendurable, disappointment. Klein was full of words and full of anger at a society unmoved by what he could do with them. He took that indifference as a rejection of the very parts of his nature that had steered him toward poetry.

One can't help but surmise that, by the mid-1950s, the shock left Klein sick and frightened. "No honest poet," wrote T. S. Eliot, can ever be free of the fear that "he may have wasted his time and messed up his life for nothing." And where Klein is concerned, what may have accelerated his slide into abject hopelessness was self-loathing at having frittered away his talents writing bumf for a whiskey magnate. In 1939, Samuel Bronfman, the president of Seagram's distilleries, hired Klein as his public relations consultant. Although highly remunerative, the job, which Klein held until 1962, forced him to churn out speeches, birthday and anniversary greetings, annual company reports, and souvenir programs for fundraising banquets. In a despairing 1942 notebook entry, Klein called the work a "humiliation."

In "Portrait of the Poet as Landscape," Klein made that humiliation his subject. "Describe being a poet," he wrote in his notebook around the early 1940s, when first plotting out the poem: "Who wants him in this age, the day of gasoline and oil?" In tackling that question, Klein foreshadowed some of the soul-searching due to happen over the next decade. The poem—placed last in Klein's final major book of poetry, *The Rocking Chair*, published in 1948—appeared six years before Randall Jarrell's "The Obscurity of the Poet" and Delmore Schwartz's "The Vocation of the Poet in the Modern World," two manifestos that deplored the poet's status in the twentieth century. Klein's poem anticipates a number of their arguments: that there was no longer a public for poetry to address, that the art had found itself radically at odds with society's main drift, that the poet's centrality was eclipsed by mass culture.

But Klein also explores the idea that the crisis betrays something doomed about the art itself. Written in a clear-eyed, sober voice, "Portrait of the Poet as Landscape" doesn't just see outsiderism as the *sine qua non* of the modern poet, it sees it as a preexisting condition, a hereditary jinx—the poet as a "character, with a rehearsed role." Klein's success in capturing this mood is what helps make the poem so unclassifiable. Mock-epic, cultural jeremiad, Berrymanesque "survival poem" *avant la lettre*, "Portrait of the Poet as Landscape" was something new for Klein, though it spoke of the end of something. It's a fitting irony that the creative zenith of his career was the poem that provided a thoroughgoing account of its downfall.

Divided into six parts, Klein's poem tracks the progress of a speaker coming to terms with his accursedness. What we notice, at first, is the tone: a voice talking itself firmly into accepting the inevitability of the situation, as if moving through the various stages of grief. The poem begins as a kind of exasperated elegy for the poet, a figure whose presumed death no one has bothered to mourn or even report ("the radio broadcast lets his passing pass") and whom Klein imagines "in a narrow closet/ like the corpse in a detective story,/ standing, his eyes staring, and ready to fall on his face."

But the poet, we soon learn, is not dead, just unseen "like the mirroring lenses forgotten on a brow." This is Klein's bitter joke: that poets, the moment they try to make their mark, become posthumous. They have died before their actual deaths. What Klein is pondering here are the consequences of living, as he put it in an earlier poem, "under interdict"—excommunicated from society, without hope of reprieve. It's a storyline Klein returns to in his poems and prose: the artist as outcast, spurned by a community deaf to his message. (In an unfinished novel, Klein created a doppelgänger poet named Kay who attends his own funeral and praises the eulogy because "nobody mentioned the fact that I was a poet. I have kept the secret well. Now, no one will ever know of what I died.")

While many poets focus on their artistic origin stories, Klein kept prefiguring, and perfecting, versions of his ignominious flameout. "Portrait of the Poet as Landscape" cycles through various portraits of disinheritance. In his lonely eminence, the poet is the "sigh" in "a shouting mob." He is reduced to "an X, a Mr. Smith in a hotel register," "a shadow's shadow" who has been "cuckolded," or, disturbingly, is "his mother's miscarriage." The speaker complains about being usurped by frauds (tycoons, politicians, popular entertainers), remembers why he fell in love with language ("the torso verb, the beautiful face of the noun"), lacerates himself over his vanity, pines for the fame he will

never enjoy. All the while, he watches his peers, in a bid to deny their own isolation, escape into the "schizoid solitudes" of cliques who "live for themselves, or for each other, but nobody else."

"Portrait of the Poet as Landscape" includes enough covert biographizing that the poem can be seen as a running commentary on Klein's own career—"a requiem for himself," Edel described it. But it is also a pretty good confessional fable about, in Robert Lowell's phrase, the "generic life" of Klein's generation (and, to some extent, our own). Klein belonged to the first group of Canadian poets who, in the late 1930s, openly embraced professionalization and began competing for attention in the new reputation economy of prizes, publications, reviews, and readings. Letters from this time fill with shoptalk about fads, rivals, money, grants, book launches, missed opportunities, and acclaim—both chased-after and thwarted ("Fame, the adrenalin," the poem calls it). In his own correspondence, we can see Klein—that model of decorum—fume, brag, and lash out at critics, a performance one academic called "a volatile mixture of delusions of grandeur and extreme insecurity."

A little of that cut-and-thrust finds its way into "Portrait of the Poet as Landscape." The poem doesn't just brood on the forces shunting poets to the sidelines. It also tries to understand the harm these forces pose to the art, describing worst-case scenarios that double as descriptions of the experimental excesses Klein no doubt saw around him—then-emerging avant-gardisms that likely made Klein feel even more alone. (In 1948, he published an editorial excoriating the Nobel committee's gullibility in rewarding the "derivativeness" of an "entrepreneur-poet" like Eliot.)

Among the poets he targets are those who, confined to the company of their own kind, give up on language as mettlesome force—lose their "bevel in the ear"—and turn poetry into a performative gesture, confusing artistic will for deed. Or the poets who, defiant, write to please themselves, distorting "truth to something convolute or cerebral." It's hard not to think of "Portrait of the Poet as Landscape" as a poem where Klein damns the literary game he was convinced he could never win anyway.

Klein's poem was published nearly a decade before his literary life was well and truly over, leaving us with the sense that he was grieving his crack-up ahead of time, in preparation. Even then, "Portrait of the Poet as Landscape" seemed to be strewing clues about where things were headed. Klein had a gift for finding poetry's institutional breaking points, those moments of discouragement and paralysis that make it hard to uphold the faith. But these breaking points, of course, aren't unique to poetry. Even the most optimistic writers today will concede they write for an audience that lives on a media diet of emoticons, GIFs, memes, abbreviated words, and sentence fragments. Algorithms have moneyballed the act of writing, transforming language into one more vector of data.

In this post-codex world of WhatsApp and TikTok, where our aggregator-minds have become what Robert Hughes once called "shifting anthologies of the briefly new," literary neglect is a growth industry. Cynthia Ozick has protested the deterioration of "serious" criticism. For Merve Emre, the personal essay as "triumphal act of narration" is disappearing. And when Will Self states that literary fiction is "doomed to become a marginal cultural form, along with easel painting and the classical symphony," he is drawing on the basic terms Sir Philip Sidney used four hundred years ago when he begged readers not to "scorne the sacred misteries of Poesie." Soon, every serious literary writer will struggle with the same delusion that overtakes poets: the belief they deserve to be read, and the wanting of others to believe it too.

With "Portrait of the Poet as Landscape," Klein becomes not merely one of last outriders of a vision that saw the poet as a central cultural figure, he also becomes the custodian of any calling that, forged through a long discipline of study and training, tries to "bring/ new forms to life." Klein reminds us that, beyond the lurid dramas of alcoholism and mania that wrecked the lives of mid-century American poets like Berryman and Lowell, there is a quieter but no less crushing occupational hazard attached to careers consecrated to a "declassé craft/ archaic like the fletcher's": oblivion.

In the second half of "Portrait of the Poet as Landscape," the portrait-making tries to capture the spectral nature of a man vanishing from his own life, a quiet, "slippered" figure flickering out. The speaker comes to accept he is being effaced from historical memory—an impostor, he writes, has memorized "his personal biography,/ his gestures, his moods," has "come forward to pose/ in the shivering vacuums his absence leaves." (It bears recalling that Klein originally titled his poem "Portrait of the Poet as a Nobody.") But the poet isn't being removed from the picture as much as being dissolved in it. Stripped of his specialness, he is so assimilated into modern life—"so anonymously sunk in his environment," according to Klein's notes on the poem—he is part of the background, invisible.

Still, Klein refuses to cast off the role, even in the face of complete defeat. Instead, he retreats, gifts intact, and tries to transform his neglect, that "stark infelicity," into a kind of style, a way of existing in relation to an indifferent world. "These are not mean ambitions," he says, of his dreams to rescue the world through art. "It is already something/ merely to entertain them." The man we encounter in these chin-up lines is a version of Denis Donoghue's "poet-victim" who "has contrived to preserve a certain scruple from the wreck of his fortune." A big poem about a shrunken sense of vocation, "Portrait of the Poet as Landscape" doesn't just end, it hits rock bottom:

> Meanwhile, he
> makes of his status as zero a rich garland,
> a halo of his anonymity,
> and lives alone, and in his secret shines
> like phosphorous. At the bottom of the sea.

These level-toned lines feel eerie and irrefutable; with them, the poem closes on a statement not of neglect, but endurance. The poet has embraced his own low standing and plunged it as far down as possible, to where he now "shines/ like phosphorus"—a telling image since phosphorus's glow is a product of decay. The poet will go on sending out his light, but a light robbed of potency and influence. Here we have Klein, and his moment, in a nutshell. As the weight of the world presses down on him, his only vital sign is a gift he cannot switch off and no one can see.

Klein's poem doesn't tell us how to solve the problem of neglect, but it does provide a framework for thinking about it in a stark and powerful way. By embracing the poet's "status as zero," and making of it a "halo," Klein's poem dramatizes one of the most awful truths about being a poet: you must deceive yourself if you want to survive in the world. "The really hard thing," the British poet Peter Porter once said, "is to make your own destiny coincide with the necessity of your art. Most poets are forced to fake the coincidence, if only because they cannot bear the thought of being judged irrelevant by history."

Klein's poem is about the intolerable consequences of faking the coincidence, how it leaves us with no choice but to write from a place of self-conscious irrelevancy. To be a poet, then, is to practice a brand of magical thinking. We pretend a lot is at stake in an art that makes nothing happen. To put it another way, poetry's value depends on everybody believing in its value. When nothing is left to reinforce this bit of face-saving theater, the magic dries up. Klein's silence is the story of how poets, betting everything on a pretense, have rendered their life an open falsehood. The poet's career is today an extended project of fooling himself.

Klein's torments left behind a plainer fragment of the man, his verbal fervency doused. He became the negative equivalent of what he always pursued. Everything that made his poetry special—heft, well-constructedness, linguistic charisma—disappeared into a neurasthenic drift. But maybe cessation didn't mark something abandoned but something fulfilled. Maybe his lifelong project was brought to completion, consummated. Klein sometimes spoke of the "hapax legomenon," a Greek term for a class of words of which only one instance is recorded—a word used once, and then not seen again. On the other side of that singular word, of course, is the force it disappears into and which protects it: silence. In a sense, Klein was the *hapax legomenon* of Canadian poetry and his final silence his most subversive masterwork.

T. S. Eliot's animus

by Adam Kirsch

When I was beginning my career as a writer in the late 1990s, I met an older literary critic who talked about "crushing" people with his negative reviews. He said it ironically, but still with a certain infectious glee—knowing it was exactly the kind of thing that creative writers accuse critics of thinking in secret. For a critic to take pleasure in crushing a writer or a book suggests that he is governed by aggression and envy thinly disguised as impartial judgment. The English critic Cyril Connolly seemed to substantiate this idea when he wrote that the function of the critic is to stand at the gates of Parnassus, where writers line up for admission to immortality, and as each one steps forward to bash him over the head with a club.

But mere spite could never motivate anyone to write lasting or truly interesting criticism—all it can produce is hatchet jobs, designed to demolish rather than to convince. (Indeed, who reads Connolly's reviews now?) If I kindled, as a young writer, to the idea of crushing bad writing, it was more in the spirit of Voltaire's battle cry against the Church, *écrasez l'infame*—a kind of principled fury at the violation of literature. This idea notoriously appeals to young critics more than older ones, who almost always mellow into appreciation, for the same reason that all kinds of aggressive idealism appeal primarily to the young. They don't yet know that mediocrity is not an aberration but the way of the world, nor do they have a sufficiently developed power of empathy to want to avoid hurting real individuals in the name of an abstract ideal.

Still, I continue to believe that any critic who wants to write something lasting—who believes that criticism can be a species of literature—must write partly out of aggression. Or perhaps a better word is animus, in the sense of a fixed intention, a partiality. Literary journalism describes and explains literature and ideas as they are—the way Edmund Wilson, a master journalist, explained modernism in *Axel's Castle* and Marxism in *To the Finland Station*. Criticism tries to move literature and ideas in the direction of what should be.

Few critics in history have been more successful in that endeavor than T. S. Eliot, whose poetry and criticism worked in tandem to redefine the way the twentieth century thought about literature. He was the rare writer whose best essays were as significant and influential as his best poems. In the years following World War I, he produced a clutch of masterpieces in both genres: poems like "Gerontion" (1919) and *The Waste Land* (1922) alternated with essays like "Tradition and the Individual Talent" (1919) and "The Metaphysical Poets" (1921). In his 1932 Norton Lectures at Harvard, Eliot took as his subject "The Use of Poetry and the Use of Criticism," and the writers he focused on were almost all poet-critics, from John Dryden in the seventeenth century to Matthew Arnold in the nineteenth. That he himself was the latest, and perhaps greatest, member of this lineage was left implied, but by then it didn't need to be stated outright.

The poet-critic has been an institution in English literature because usually only an artist

has the stubborn animus, the conviction that art should be one way rather than another, that makes for interesting criticism. To write something new is to imply that the writing which already exists is insufficient. Of course, this can never be demonstrably true: there is always already more than enough literature to occupy any reader for a lifetime. Only an artist's egotism, his certainty that he has something new to offer that the world should not be without, gives him the fruitfully skewed perspective on literature required to see it as deficient. Harold Bloom's theory of "the anxiety of influence" gave formal statement to this agonistic element in all artistic ambition. "To imagine is to misinterpret," Bloom writes, which means, among other things, to misinterpret all existing poetry to its own detriment in order to make room for something new.

Bloom's own antagonism to Eliot has various literary and ideological sources, but the most important is just this expressive antagonism of the "descendant" for the "precursor." For it was Eliot who first formulated this dialectic in his essay "Tradition and the Individual Talent." Characteristically, however, where Bloom describes the relationship between past and present in terms of anxiety and rivalry, Eliot emphasizes the mutual adjustment that brings both sides into harmony, or as he says, "conformity":

> The existing order is complete before the new work arrives; for order to persist after the supervention of novelty, the *whole* existing order must be, if ever so slightly, altered; and so the relations, proportions, values of each work of art toward the whole are readjusted; and this is conformity between the old and the new.

For Eliot, criticism is one of the means of effecting that adjustment. "The poetic critic is criticizing poetry in order to create poetry," he writes, and it is certainly true that Eliot the critic helped to create the taste by which Eliot the poet was enjoyed, even though—or, better, precisely because—his work in the two genres was so different in tone and approach. *The Waste Land* famously baffled many of its first readers with its fragmented, allusive, chaotic voices; one critic (the father of the novelist Evelyn Waugh) called it the work of a "drunken helot." It's easy to condescend to such a reaction now, but it would be a mistake to discount the provocative, disruptive force that Eliot deliberately brought to bear in *The Waste Land*. The leading English poets of the period were the so-called Georgians, who favored plain-spoken language and country settings—as, for instance, in Gordon Bottomley's "The Ploughman":

> The seasons change, and then return;
> Yet still, in blind unsparing ways,
> However I may shrink or yearn,
> The ploughman measures out my days.
> His acre brought forth roots last year;
> This year it bears the gleamy grain;
> Next spring shall seedling grass appear:
> Then roots and corn and grass again.

A reader schooled on verse like this—spoken straightforwardly by a single lyric voice, using ideas and imagery that would have been familiar to the Greek and Latin poets—could only have been discomfited to open *The Waste Land* and find lines like these:

> I remember
> Those are pearls that were his eyes.
> "Are you alive, or not? Is there nothing in
> your head?"
>
> But
> O O O O that Shakespeherian Rag—
> It's so elegant
> So intelligent

At first sight, the disorganization here—the cross-cutting voices and mixed-up allusions spanning centuries—could well sound like a direct transcript of a disorganized mind. But the magisterial tone of Eliot's criticism instantly dispels that possibility. Clearly, the writer of the essays is a person of intelligence and judgment, a writer who knows exactly what he is doing. It follows that what looks like chaos in his poetry must actually be a deliberately chosen difficulty whose function it is up to the reader to figure out.

In fact, Eliot argues in his criticism that difficulty is the only possible approach for a truly modern poet to take. In his essay "The Metaphysical Poets," he made the case for the rehabilitation of that school of seventeenth-century English poets, such as John Donne and Andrew Marvell, who had long been critically disdained for being artificial and over-intellectual. The subsequent course of English poetry had left their kind of writing behind, cultivating instead the sonorous rhetoric of Milton, the urbane balance of Pope, the rich fantasy of Keats and Shelley. It was Samuel Johnson who named this school "the metaphysical poets," and he didn't intend it as a compliment. "Their amplification had no limits; they left not only reason but fancy behind them, and produced combinations of confused magnificence that not only could not be credited, but could not be imagined," Johnson wrote in his *Lives of the Poets* in 1779.

Almost a hundred and fifty years later, Eliot insists that the standard Johnsonian view of poetic history has things backwards. The metaphysicals were not a dead end, but instead the embodiment of an intellectual vitality that poetry needs to rediscover. If they appear strange and artificial, that is only because English readers have lost the expectation that a poet should appeal to the mind as well as the ear and the heart. Eliot's essay concludes by drawing a direct line from the seventeenth century to the twentieth:

> Poets in our civilization, as it exists at present, must be *difficult*. Our civilization comprehends great variety and complexity, and this variety and complexity, playing upon a refined sensibility, must produce various and complex results. The poet must become more and more comprehensive, more allusive, more indirect, in order to force, to dislocate if necessary, language into his meaning.

Clearly, this is a defense of the poetics of *The Waste Land*, which Eliot would publish the following year. Eliot here proposes what the American critic Yvor Winters later attacked as "the fallacy of imitative form"—the idea that expressing chaotic inner experience requires a chaotic arrangement of language. But it's characteristic of Eliot that he finds an impeccably traditional warrant for the difficulty and complexity that, in his own verse, sounds so revolutionary. The drunken helot turns out to know much more about the history of poetry, and about the hidden resources of that history, than his opponents do.

Eliot wrestled, however, with the question that he imagined a reader would ask: why should someone capable of writing great poems choose to spend his time writing critical prose? Eliot wrote an enormous amount of criticism—his prose output exceeds his verse by at least ten to one—but he was never able to arrive at a satisfactory formulation of his motives. Certainly he is unwilling to argue that criticism can be written, like poetry, for its own sake—that it is, in his philosophical term, "autotelic," an end in itself. His very reverence for poetry compelled him to see criticism as a lower form of writing, an adjunct to literature rather than literature itself. In this Eliot agreed with most literary opinion throughout history. No one has ever said of criticism what Keats said of poetry, that it should come as naturally as leaves to a tree. Criticism seems incapable of immediacy because it is always necessarily about something—about literature, whose direct relationship to life and language it can only envy.

Fifty years before Eliot wrestled with this problem, it had also troubled Matthew Arnold, a poet-critic who was in many ways Eliot's role model and, also, for that very reason, the frequent target of his sarcasm. When Eliot set himself to think about the purpose of criticism in a major early essay, "The Perfect Critic," from 1920, he did so in dialogue with Arnold's 1864 essay "The Function of Criticism at the Present Time."

Arnold, like Eliot, worked at a demanding job—the nineteenth-century poet was a school inspector, the twentieth-century poet a bank clerk and publisher—and both produced comparatively little poetry. Yet they devoted much of their writing, especially as they grew older, to critical essays about literature, religion, and politics. When Arnold

writes about the function of criticism, there is a certain note of apology. It's all very well to suggest that a writer is better off focusing on creation than criticism, Arnold says, but what if one simply has a greater talent for criticism? "It is almost too much to expect of poor human nature, that a man capable of producing some effect in one line of literature, should, for the greater good of society, voluntarily doom himself to impotence and obscurity in another," he writes, with barely concealed reference to himself.

While Arnold readily grants that "the critical power is of lower rank than the creative," he goes on to mount a defense of the critic, especially in the context of nineteenth-century English literature. It is not open to writers in every age, he argues, to create works of genius. To reach the heights of Greek tragedy or Elizabethan drama a writer needs a healthy culture to provide him with the "elements" and "materials" of his work—above all, with vital and credible ideas. And this is where the critic comes in: it is up to the critic to "make an intellectual situation of which the creative power can profitably avail itself" by distinguishing between what is genuine and what is inferior in the art and thought of his age.

In Victorian England, which Arnold saw as philistine and intellectually provincial, there was a wide field of activity for such a critic—not just in the sphere of literature, but in politics and society as well. "Life and the world being in modern times very complex things, the creation of a modern poet, to be worth much, implies a great critical effort behind it," Arnold says. The implication is that, while he himself was born at the wrong time to become a great poet, he can at least contribute to the future flowering of poetry through his critical work. He concludes by comparing himself, with no little pathos, to Moses on Mount Nebo:

> That promised land it will not be ours to enter, and we shall die in the wilderness: but to have desired to enter it, to have saluted it from afar, is already, perhaps, the best distinction among contemporaries; it will certainly be the best title to esteem with posterity.

Eliot's early essay "The Perfect Critic" offers a rather different defense of criticism, arguing that it is only the creative writer who can be an adequate literary critic. He makes this point by attacking two critics to whom he was, in fact, deeply indebted: Arnold, whom he dismisses in the essay's first paragraph as "rather a propagandist for criticism than a critic," and the British man of letters Arthur Symons. It was Symons whose book on French Symbolist poetry had first introduced Eliot the undergraduate to writers like Jules Laforgue and Tristan Corbière, who proved to be the keys that allowed him unlock the sound of modernism in his own work.

Eliot does pay tribute to that book, calling it an "introduction to wholly new feelings" and a "revelation." But it served that purpose, Eliot says, only because he was not yet familiar with the poetry Symons was writing about. When it comes to more familiar material—for instance, Symons's book on Shakespeare's plays that Eliot is reviewing—the defects of his criticism become plain. These are the defects of what Eliot calls "impressionistic" criticism, an approach which ostensibly offers "the faithful record of the impressions, more numerous or more refined than our own, upon a mind more sensitive than our own."

Though Eliot does not name him, it was Oscar Wilde who offered the classic formulation of this approach to criticism, in his 1890 essay "The Critic as Artist." Here Wilde takes a paradoxical pleasure in overturning the conventional hierarchy that places creative writing above criticism. Wilde says that "the highest Criticism, being the purest form of personal impression, is in its way more creative than creation." The critic makes art out of his experiences of art; criticism is "the record of one's own soul" as it encounters great poems, paintings, or music. And since the purpose of art is nothing else than to provoke such impressions in its audience, one can say that the goal of art is to inspire criticism—a direct reversal of the usual belief that the goal of criticism is to increase our appreciation of art.

In taking issue with this idea, Eliot strikes at the weak point of impressionistic criticism,

which is that the "art" it creates—the verbal record of an aesthetic experience—is never as good as the art that inspired that experience. In fact, Eliot argues, the more directly a critic attempts to turn his criticism into a work of art—to compete with the poem, play, or painting he is writing about—the more clearly he reveals that he is not capable of free artistic creation. With a critic like Symons, Eliot writes, "reading sometimes fecundates his emotions to produce something new which is not criticism, but is not the expulsion, the ejection, the birth of creativeness." Impressionistic, aesthetic criticism, this metaphor suggests, is abortive, a miscarriage of the imagination; in such critics, there is "a defect of vitality or an obscure obstruction which prevents nature from taking its course."

This metaphor suggests an explanation for why poets make the best critics of poetry: they are not trying to use prose for the aesthetic purposes that only poetry can achieve. The criticism of an artist "will be criticism, and not the satisfaction of a suppressed creative wish," Eliot writes. He contrasts Symons with the poet Algernon Swinburne, whose poetry is hypnotically musical, but whose prose is clear and logical. Symons's prose, Eliot notes, does not resemble Swinburne's prose, but his verse, which leaves it betwixt and between—neither true poetry nor true criticism.

What true criticism sounds like, instead, Eliot shows by example. It is not woozily impressionistic but logical and argumentative, concerned above all with clear definitions. The epigraph to "The Perfect Critic" is taken from the French critic Remy de Gourmont, whom Eliot and Pound both admired: "Eriger en lois ses impressions personnelles, c'est le grand effort d'un homme s'il est sincère." The goal of a "sincere" man is "to erect his personal impressions into laws"—a formulation Eliot returns to in the body of the essay. "The moment you try to put [aesthetic] impressions into words, you either begin to analyse and construct, to '*ériger en lois*,' or you begin to create something else," he writes.

Yet as the essay develops, it becomes clear that Eliot does not believe the critic should literally issue laws about how poetry should be written—the way the neoclassical critics of the seventeenth century did when they decreed that all dramas must observe the Aristotelian unities of time, place, and action. "The dogmatic critic, who lays down a rule, who affirms a value, has left his labour incomplete," Eliot writes; "a precept . . . is merely an unfinished analysis." Issuing a blanket rule or prohibition incites defiance in the thoughtful reader. When a critic does his job properly, this defiance is outwitted; the critic's insight into a particular work or author is so convincing that the reader "will form the correct judgment for himself."

Of course, there is no objectively correct standard of judgment in literature; the act of judgment is a process that takes place in an individual human mind, rather than a permanent decree or canon declaring that one poet is better than another. What Eliot means by the "correct" judgment, then, is really the judgment that the critic wants the reader to adopt. The goal of the critic is to impose his way of reading on his audience, to make it seem so natural and inarguable that one has no choice but to follow it. This sounds authoritarian, and indeed Eliot's critical voice is extremely commanding, issuing pronouncements as if they were self-evident and banishing dissent with sharp sarcasm.

But a way of reading is finally a way of thinking and experiencing. Poetry is a means of giving the reader access to the poet's thoughts and experiences, but when a poet does this, we call it a gift: the poem is an offering of one mind to another, a way of breaching the individual's usual painful isolation. When a critic does the same thing, his communication of consciousness tends to be called an imposition, even an act of arrogance, as though the critic wanted to commandeer the reader's mind.

Eliot concludes "The Perfect Critic" by attacking "the torpid superstition that appreciation is one thing, and 'intellectual' criticism something else." After all, the attempt to "analyze and construct," to *ériger en lois*, stems from the same root as the impulse to create a poem: both should be understood as responses to

inner experience and attempts to share that experience. "The two directions of sensibility are complementary," Eliot writes. Their difference stems from a difference in form: the form of criticism is necessarily argumentative and forensic, seeking to control and define rather than to give and express.

But giving and controlling, Eliot suggests in *The Waste Land*, have the same root. In the last section of the poem, "What the Thunder Said," the single syllable "DA" is interpreted as the beginning of different Sanskrit words: "datta" means "give" while "damyatta" means "control." When I first read Eliot's criticism, it was the desire for control—to reshape the world of literature according to the dictates of his own particular animus—that most impressed me and appealed to me. The young critic—and Eliot was at the beginning of his literary career when he wrote his most important essays—needs to express that animus as much as the poet needs to express his visions.

But control, in literature as in life, never lasts very long. Eliot's lasted longer than most, two or three decades, but today it has vanished and may even work to his disadvantage as our more democratic republic of letters strongly resists the type of authority that he incarnated. What remains is what his criticism tries to give—a particular way of experiencing poetry that is, ultimately, inseparable from his own deepest needs and desires. Eliot's affinity for complexity and difficulty, combined with his longing for order and discipline; his need for clear distinctions that allow each thing to be what it is and not something else; his love of the past and desire to be absorbed into it, so as to deflect the existential risk and terror of the present—all these qualities shine out from Eliot's criticism as much as from his poetry, his thought about religion and politics, or indeed his biography. And it is this unity, this ability to impress his way of being on every form he touched, that marks Eliot as a great artist.

Poems

"The cemetery by the sea"

by Paul Valéry, translated by Nathaniel Rudavsky-Brody

In his "Petition to be buried on the beach at Sète," Georges Brassens, another native of that windy little port town south of Montpellier, asks the "good master" Paul Valéry to pardon his proposal for an even more seaside burial than his own.

By 1966, when Brassens' song was recorded, Valéry had been interred some twenty-one years in the cemetery evoked in his best-known poem. Even during his lifetime he had been touched by "immortality/ Grotesquely laureled, bound in black in gold," enshrined as France's greatest poet, the stuffed-and-fêted figure of Poetry itself. *The Cemetery by the Sea*, his one personal piece in an oeuvre of abstract, impressionistic, or purely musical works, was read in salons and schools, dissected by scholars, dismissed by young hotheads, gently ribbed by the likes of Brassens.

This most personal poem, though, had a most impersonal beginning: the decasyllable line. Let's back up. After a promising debut as a young Symbolist in the 1890s, Valéry was silent for almost two decades. Then, in 1912, André Gide and Gaston Gallimard presented him with a manuscript of his earlier poems, which they intended to publish. He set to writing a forty-line "farewell to verse" that grew into the magnum opus *The Young Fate*; more poems followed, the poems that would make up *Charms* and others that would be appended to the *Album of Early Verse* when it, too, finally appeared.

The Young Fate and most of the *Album* are composed in twelve-syllable alexandrines, the essential meter of classical French verse. The poems of *Charms* contain plenty of alexandrines of course, but also hexasyllables, octosyllables, pentasyllables, and heptasyllables. *The Cemetery by the Sea* alone uses the ten-syllable line, a rare bird in French after the sixteenth century. Valéry recounts how the poem was born from a musical impulse, "an empty rhythmic figure . . . that came to obsess me." The compositional constraints he set for himself, he says, the desire "to try raising that Ten to the power of Twelve," imposed on this poem the form of a monologue on the "simplest and most constant themes of my emotional and intellectual life," themes "associated with the sea and the light of a certain place on the shores of the Mediterranean."

Ten syllables in French makes for a rhythmically unstable meter, with neither the heavy finality of the alexandrine nor the square completeness of octosyllables. I approximate this lightness of foot with a mix of tetrameter and pentameter lines—one of just two cases where I opt for such irregularity in my translations of Valéry's poetry. I try to catch the musical tension that makes this poem, tinged "with a color of philosophy," tending towards "the idea of death and pure thought," at once so personal and so abstract. As Brassens implies, the powers-that-be were perhaps heavy-handed in their canonization of Paul Valéry's seaward gaze. Translation gives us the chance to approach it with fresh eyes and fresh ears.

—Nathaniel Rudavsky-Brody

The cemetery by the sea

Μή, φίλα ψυχά, βίον ἀθάνατον
σπεῦδε, τὰν δ' ἔμπρακτον ἄντλει μαχανάν.
Do not, O my soul, aspire to immortal life, but exhaust what is possible.
—Pindar, Pythian Ode 3

This peaceful roof of milling doves
Shimmers between the pines, between the tombs;
Judicious noon composes there, with fire,
The sea, the ever-recommencing sea . . .
O what reward, after a thought,
Is a long look across the calm of the gods!

What subtle flashes, finely wrought, consume
So many fleeting diamonds of foam,
And what a perfect peace is taking form!
Under a sun that pauses at the brink,
Pure workmanship of an eternal cause,
Time glitters, Dreams are knowledge.

Stable treasure, Minerva's simple shrine,
Great mass of calm and manifest reserve,
Disdainful water, Eye that holds
Within you, veiled by flame, such depths of sleep,
O my silence . . . Roof, both edifice in the soul
And golden summit of a thousand tiles!

Temple to Time contained in a single sigh,
To this pure point I climb and find my breath,
Surrounded by my seaward gaze;
And as my greatest offering to the gods,
The calm and glittering brightness sows
Across the heights a masterful disdain.

As fruit dissolves in consummation,
As it transforms its absence to delight
When in a mouth its form is lost and dies,
I breathe the smoke I will become
And the sky sings, of shores transformed
To rumor, to the soul that is consumed.

Brilliant sky, true sky, it is I
Who change! After such pride, after such strange
Indolence, and yet suffused with power,
I surrender to this shining air,
My shadow sweeps the houses of the dead
And with its fragile motion leads me on.

My soul left open to the solstice fires,
I hold your lancing, your unsparing gaze,
O striking justice of the light!
Pure, I return you to your rightful place:
Look at yourself . . . But to return the light
Is to leave the other half in lifeless shadow.

For me alone, in me, and mine alone,
Close to the heart, the wellsprings of the poem,
Between the chasm and the pure event,
I wait to hear that dark and bitter well,
My inner greatness, echoing in my soul
Its ever-future emptiness!

Do you know, feigned captive of the branches, gulf
That eats away these slender iron grates,
Bedazzling secrets on my eyes, even closed,
What body drags me to its idle end,
What forehead draws me to this earth of bones?
A spark there thinks of my departed ones.

Closed and sacred, filled with a weightless fire,
Fragment of earth offered up to the light,
This place is pleasing, overspread by flames,
Composed of gold, dark trees and stone, where so
Much marble trembles on so many shadows,
The faithful sea asleep across my tombs!

Splendid dog, drive off the idolater!
When with a shepherd's smile, slow and alone,
I put to pasture this mysterious herd
Of white-fleeced sheep, my peaceful tombs,
Keep far from them the prudent doves,
The empty dreams, the curious angels!

The future, seen from here, is idleness.
The keening insect scratches at the dryness;

Everything's burned, undone, and taken up
To some unsparing essence in the air . . .
Drunk on absence, life is vast,
Bitterness sweet, and the mind clear.

The dead are well here, hidden in this earth
That keeps them warm, dries out their mystery.
High Noon above, unstirring Noon
Conceives itself, and satisfies itself . . .
Whole head and perfect circling crown,
I am the secret change in you.

There's no one else but me to hold your fears!
My doubt, my limits, my remorse,
Are your great diamond's fatal flaw . . .
But in their marble-heavy night
A formless people at the roots of the trees
Has slowly taken up your cause.

They dissipated in a heavy absence,
The red clay drank the whiteness of their kind,
Their gift for life flowed out into the flowers!
Where are the kindly phrases of the dead,
The individual art, the singular souls?
Now larvae spin where tears once formed.

The piercing cries of tickled girls,
The lashes, the teeth, the moistened eyes,
The charming breast that plays with fire,
The yielding lips suffused with blood,
The final gifts, the hands withholding them
All go into the earth, and back in play!

And you, great soul, are you waiting for a dream
That will be truer than these lying colors
Created by surf and gold for eyes of flesh?
So will you sing, when you are light as air?
All flies! Life washes through my presence,
Saintly impatience also dies!

Lean consolation, immortality
Grotesquely laureled, bound in black and gold,
That changes death into a mother's breast,
The pious ruse and the fine lie:

Who does not know, and who does not refuse
That empty skull, and that eternal laughter?

Deep fathers, uninhabited heads,
Who are the earth and mingle all our steps
Under the weight of so much shoveled dirt,
What truly gnaws, the irrefutable worm,
Is not for you asleep beneath the slab:
It lives on life, and will not let me be!

Could it be love, or hatred for myself?
It comes so near me with its secret tooth
That any other name would do as well!
What difference! it sees, it wants, it dreams, it touches!
It loves my flesh, and even in my bed
I only live to feed that living being . . .

Zeno, cruel Zeno, Zeno of Elea,
So did you pierce me with your feathered arrow
That quivers, flies and does not fly?
The sound engenders me, the arrow kills!
Ah, sun . . . A tortoise shadow for the soul,
Achilles striding motionless along.

No! . . . On your feet, return to passing time!
My body, break this pensive form!
My breast, drink in the birth of the wind!
A breath of freshness coming off the sea
Gives me my soul back . . . O great salt power,
Let's run to the waves, to reemerge alive!

Yes, great sea, gifted with feverish dreams,
Panther skin and antique chlamys pierced
By a thousand flashing idols of the sun,
Pure Hydra drunk upon your own blue flesh
Who in a roar that is at one with silence
Over and over catch your glittering tail,

The wind is rising . . . We must try to live!
The vast air opens then shuts again my book,
The waves dare surge in spray above the rocks!
Scatter, pages dazzled by the light,
Break, waves! Exulting waters, break
This peaceful roof where sailboats dipped like doves!

Reflections

The astonishing Pieter de Hooch

by Anthony Daniels

During my adolescence, Pieter de Hooch was my favorite painter, and to this day if I were given the choice of any picture in the world's galleries to own, I might very well choose his *Woman Peeling Apples with a Small Child* (*ca*. 1663) that now hangs in the Wallace Collection in London.

It was this painting that first provoked me to ask questions (strictly in the privacy of my own mind; I never expressed them to others for fear of appearing precious, pretentious, or even ridiculous) about the nature of artistic merit. What was it about this painting that so moved me and that allowed me to look at it over and over again with unceasing pleasure? For the first time in my life, I tried to formulate reasons for artistic preference.

I was about fourteen at the time, and during the school holidays my father would take me to his office where I worked as a temporary filing clerk. The office was just round the corner from the Wallace Collection, in those days almost completely unfrequented, and many times I would spend my lunch break in it. Indeed, so few were the visitors that I felt that the Wallace Collection was my own private gallery.

I always made straight for the de Hooch (there was another painting by him in the gallery, *A Boy Handing a Woman a Basket in a Doorway*, which was as just as beautiful, though I held it in slightly less affection). Of course, there were other wonderful paintings in the museum—canvases by Rembrandt, Velázquez, Van Dyck, Hals, and Canaletto among them—but it was de Hooch before whose work I always lingered longest.

Why should this be, I asked myself? His paintings in the collection were undramatic, of completely banal domestic scenes. I framed my thoughts by comparing de Hooch with Ernest Meissonnier, the once enormously fashionable nineteenth-century French history painter, of whose work there were many examples in the museum. De Hooch and Meissonnier were equally accomplished in the matter of putting paint on canvas, and indeed Meissonnier achieved almost miraculous details in his scenes of battle. And yet I apprehended without difficulty that de Hooch was by far the superior artist. There was something exhibitionistic about Meissonnier's technique, exercised as an end in itself and possibly to cause astonishment in the viewer, whereas de Hooch exercised his technique for a true artistic end.

A woman peeling apples watched by her small daughter—what could be less dramatic? The scene takes place in the corner of a room, quite grand to judge by the portion of the fireplace that we see, and by which the woman sits as her daughter of about three stands looking at her with the grave and patient intensity of young childhood. In her right hand the little girl holds an apple, and in the left some peel as the mother lets it fall. The little girl is by no means pretty, but she is sweet, calm, and well-behaved because of the love she bears her mother. Her mother does not look straight at her, but there is nevertheless an expression of quiet tenderness on her face, evidently because of the presence of her daughter.

The scene takes place in a room of luxurious austerity. There is, of course, no clutter. Bour-

geois as the house is, its inhabitants do not live in a culture of incontinent possession and disembarrassment of things: the sheer difficulty of producing anything at all, and of replacement, means that everything is valued, and attention, which is fixed on few things, is given to the aesthetic qualities of everything. Nothing in this bourgeois world could be taken for granted, not even survival from one month to the next, and thus there was an intensity to human existence that in our safer times we have lost.

There are many things to appreciate in this picture: the light that comes from the window above and forms a pattern on the wall behind the woman, the fire in the fireplace—more glowing ember than roaring flame—the elegant but not dull sobriety of the clothes of the two figures, and the overall geometric composition that is immediately soothing to the eye.

But there was also a more private reason for my deep attachment to the painting, namely the beautiful and straightforward emotional calm that reigned between the two figures, their uncomplicated and unconditional love of one another—something that I longed for as a child but never had, instead continually experiencing the petty *Sturm und Drang* of domestic conflict. To the inherent melancholy of any capture of a beautiful moment that is fleeting (the child, so fresh and tender, so full of trust, would grow old and die nearly three centuries before I first saw the picture), I added a personal sorrow over the fact that I would never experience anything like the little girl's quiet, careless rapture.

As for the ordinariness of the scene depicted, it was precisely this that pleased me by comparison with the dramatic and fussy historical reconstructions of Meissonnier. The emotional authenticity of an artist is no doubt impossible to determine, but there seemed to me nevertheless something bogus and exaggerated, almost kitsch, about a man painting Napoleonic scenes seventy or eighty years after they supposedly took place. It was a kind of straining after emotion rather than emotion itself. By contrast, I intuited that de Hooch could not have painted *A Woman Peeling an Apple with a Small Child* or *A Boy Handing a Woman a Basket in a Doorway* unless he had a deep and genuine feeling for his human subjects. At any rate, since the age of fourteen I have been unable to witness an apple being peeled without recalling the mother and her daughter.

Happening to be in the Netherlands during the exhibition of de Hooch in the Prinsenhof in Delft, I of course went to see it—twice, in fact. Curiously enough, the Delft exhibition was only the second ever to be devoted to the artist's work, the first having been at the Dulwich Picture Gallery in London and the Wadsworth Atheneum in Hartford in 1998–99. Perhaps even more surprisingly, I discovered on speaking to several educated young Dutch that they had never heard of de Hooch. Would this have been the case fifty years ago?

Little is known of de Hooch's life. He was born in Rotterdam, the son of a bricklayer, in 1629. He must have undergone some artistic training in his native city before he moved to Delft in the later 1640s, but no one knows from whom he received it. Three years older than Vermeer, who lived in Delft at that time, de Hooch is generally believed to have influenced him, and vice versa, though there is no documentary evidence to that effect. Then, in 1660, de Hooch moved to Amsterdam, where the market for paintings was much larger. The date of his death is unknown, but his son died in 1684 having spent the last five years of his life in the local lunatic asylum. It is not known whether de Hooch survived him—probably not, since no work of his later than the 1670s is known, and the last documentary mention of him is dated 1679.

What is clear is that the move to Delft was extremely important in his development. In Rotterdam he began by painting guardroom scenes, with soldiers in their cups attended by serving wenches, but the market for this genre was soon saturated. In any case, if de Hooch had remained stuck in it he would scarcely be remembered today, except, perhaps, by mildly obsessional art historians, for his work in the genre was distinctly second-rate.

Instead, in Delft, he found a genre—that he himself invented—that assured him his immortality, namely the Delft courtyard scenes that no one before him had thought to paint. The transformation of the quality of his painting once he found his subject was astonishing, something that, if one had known only his

guardroom scenes, one would not at all have predicted. It put me in mind of the transformation (if at a lower level) of the work of Thomas Jones, the jobbing eighteenth-century Welsh landscape painter who, traveling to Naples, suddenly found his subject in the walls and roofs of that city and painted pictures of them of remarkable beauty and originality. No doubt there are literary examples of the same phenomenon—a subject found, perhaps by chance, that suddenly kindles an author's genius.

De Hooch was the supreme painter of the love of a mother for her young daughter (only two of his paintings are of a woman and young boy, and only that in the Wallace Collection, which was not included in the Prinsenhof exhibition, can equal those of mother and daughter). Even a picture that might be expected to repel persons of modern sensibility, that of a mother delousing her daughter's hair, is suffused with love and serenity. The mother sits with her daughter kneeling before her, almost as at prayer in a pew in church. She concentrates on the task calmly, without horror such as we might feel at having to perform it, the kneeling girl not merely unprotesting but wholly trusting.

The existence of lice in the Holland of the time seems at first sight surprising, even disconcerting, for cleanliness was extremely important then (brooms, visible in a number of the pictures, symbolized moral purity achieved through physical cleanliness and tidiness). Only in de Hooch's earlier guardroom scenes was anything—a broken clay pipe, a card fallen from the table—depicted on a floor where it should not have been, thus representing debauchery. Interestingly, the connection between lack of hygiene and head lice is now increasingly denied in the West, on the grounds that anyone *can* catch them, but publications from Third World countries are a good deal more forthright in accepting the connection between lice and lack of hygiene—stigma being not quite so stigmatized in the Third World.

Almost everyone agrees that de Hooch was at his best during his period in Delft and that his work deteriorated after his removal to Amsterdam. I am not sure that this is accurate. The two paintings in the Wallace Collection, for example, as good as any he ever painted, are from early in his Amsterdam period, and it as only later that his paintings lost some of their quality. Whether this was from declining powers or the fact that de Hooch had to work quicker to make ends meet and undertook a genre—group portraiture—for which he was not perfectly suited, I do not know. He was never quite as accomplished a painter as Vermeer, but you can be very good indeed and still not be as good as Vermeer.

It is always tempting to draw too many conclusions from paintings such as de Hooch's, for example about life in the Dutch Golden Age. We are always on the lookout for times and places in which life was without today's ugliness, though we know that, taken all in all, we should not change places eagerly with those who lived in this or any other supposedly golden age. The extremely prosperous Delft of today fortunately retains much of the beauty of de Hooch's time, and until the twentieth century builders knew how to add without destroying. But we have our own little problems. Next to our hotel was an old synagogue, in whose courtyard some people lit candles in commemoration of the seventy-fifth anniversary of the liberation of Auschwitz. There were armed police in attendance.

Theater

The United States of Shakespeare

by Kyle Smith

The peak of American theater criticism was achieved in Cincinnati in the 1840s, when a viewer observed the regnant English Shakespearean William Macready playing Hamlet's madness as a fey "fancy dance" and responded by tossing half a sheep's carcass on the stage. No subsequent critic has been able to match the wit, pithiness, or puissance of this anonymous theatergoer's appraisal. By comparison, his successors in this profession speak an infinite deal of nothing.

We learn the tale of the sheep-carcass critique in James Shapiro's *Shakespeare in a Divided America: What His Plays Tell Us About Our Past and Future*, a book that doesn't quite live up to its thesis but is replete with amusing trivia and anecdotes placed in their historical contexts, from the 1830s until today.[1] In essence, each chapter is a sparkling dinner-party story, though few of them reverberate much beyond their immediate settings.

The book is apparently one of many accomplishments that can be indirectly credited to the presidency of Donald Trump. When, in the summer of 2017, at Central Park's Delacorte Theater, Julius Caesar was portrayed as a buffoonish likeness of Trump surrounded by a retinue of sycophants in MAKE AMERICA GREAT AGAIN caps, and was duly slain on stage each night, Shapiro, a Columbia University Shakespeare scholar, was often present. Shapiro is the Shakespeare Scholar in Residence at the Public Theater, which produced the play, and he consulted on the project with its director, Oskar Eustis, whose ill-advised decision it was to turn Julius Caesar into yet another entry in the overstuffed file of overly excitable anti-Trump commentary. Shapiro thinks the outcry against the decision to portray the murder of the president was misdirected. After all, the events of the Ides of March hardly constitute an unmixed blessing in the play, and hence Trump haters were in effect being told to be careful what to wish for. Nonetheless, if Eustis was surprised by the disgusted reaction by some Trump fans, given the nonstop abuse rained on the President by cultural nabobs, he ought not to have been. Moreover, by the summer of 2017 (indeed much earlier than that), hysteria-born portrayals of Trump as one kind of dictator or another had become cliché, and Eustis should have considered whether the idea was really as novel as he thought it was. Eustis reportedly came up with the idea on the morning after the events of the historically hilarious night of November 8, 2016, and it's best not to make important decisions while in the grip of outraged disbelief.

That production inspired Shapiro to ponder other occasions in American history when Shakespeare's words helped to spark or illuminate angry partisan divides. *Shakespeare in a Divided America* begins with its most riveting, indeed most shocking and horrifying, chapter, an investigation of John Quincy Adams's views of *Othello*. Adams was critical of slavery and opposed to the annexation of Texas (because it

1 *Shakespeare in a Divided America: What His Plays Tell Us About Our Past and Future*, by James Shapiro; Penguin Press, 320 pages, $27.

would extend slave territory), and he argued passionately and successfully before the Supreme Court on behalf of the slaves in the *Amistad* case. Yet in the 1830s Adams was unenlightened on the matter of "amalgamation," the then-current term for what is now called miscegenation. Adams's analysis of *Othello* is troubling today, and it's also awful literary criticism.

The English actress Fanny Kemble, age twenty-three, who was seated next to the sixty-six-year-old Adams at a dinner party, later recalled with horror that when the conversation turned to Desdemona, the former president told her "that he considered all her misfortunes as a very just judgment upon her for having married a 'nigger.'" The last word was a verbatim quotation. Shapiro notes that Adams was apparently annoyed by his encounter with Kemble, who said she was rendered speechless by this and other remarks, and he continued to brood on the matter. In a pair of essays published in 1835 and 1836, he expanded on his views: "My objections to the character of Desdemona arise from . . . what she herself does. She absconds from her father's house, in the dead of night, to marry a blackamoor," Adams wrote in one piece. In the other, he said, "her fondling with Othello is disgusting. . . . the great moral lesson of the tragedy of Othello is that, black and white blood cannot be intermingled in marriage without a gross outrage upon the law of Nature; and that, in such violations, Nature will vindicate her laws." Adams further held that we should find satisfaction in the play's climactic act: "when Othello smothers her in bed, the terror and the pity subside immediately into the sentiment that she has her deserts." Adams here seems abandoned by both his heart and his senses; what Harvard-educated man would advance such a preposterous reading of the play? It's disorienting to learn that such a cultivated man could hold such benighted views even as he campaigned against the evils of bondage. Racial prejudice (we learn again) was so pervasive that it could contaminate the thinking of the most brilliant and liberal-minded men, and we have Shakespeare to thank for revealing this sordid reality. An apt comparison (unnoted by Shapiro) might be to consider that the matter of the Central Park production of *Julius Caesar* similarly reveals how otherwise brilliant people of our own time allow their disgust for Trump to engender conceptual errors, even inanity.

Shapiro uses the occasion of that contretemps to vent a bit about all things Trump, labeling Steve Bannon (without evidence, in a digression on a Bannon-led production of *Coriolanus*) a "racist white guy" and asserting, "There has always been a tug-of-war over Shakespeare in America; what happened at the Delacorte suggests that this rope is now frayed." (Wouldn't a frayed rope that is about to break be a good thing in this metaphor, since it would end an unfortunate tug of war with neither side able to declare victory?) "When one side no longer sees value in staging his plays, only a threat, things can unravel quickly," Shapiro says. Yet if even one person in America said there was no longer "value in staging [Shakespeare's] plays" because a play showed a Trump parody getting stabbed, such a person goes unmentioned in Shapiro's book. Shapiro's analysis of the *Julius Caesar* dispute is not only overheated, it's utterly obtuse: the production "confirmed what was already clear to many; that the Far Right was willing to display a ruthlessness . . . the Left could rarely match."

As Shapiro is aware (since he mentions this, hurriedly, as if it is of no pertinence), *Julius Caesar* opened in the Delacorte Theater the same week that a Far Left gunman shot Republican Congressman Steve Scalise and three others on a baseball diamond. In Central Park, the worst that the "Far Right" proved capable of was a one-to-two minute interruption of one performance. Which side sounds more "ruthless" to you? As *The Wall Street Journal*'s Holman Jenkins wrote of pundits who speak of every matter in terms of their Trump hatred, "They banalize our world, empty it of interest and meaning." Caesar-as-Trump was the most banalizing choice imaginable in the summer of 2017, following month after month of punditry informing us that Trump was a fascist/authoritarian/dictator. The previous September, to choose one example out of an infinitude, the *New York Times* critic Michiko Kakutani turned her *entire review* of a Hitler biography into a dart aimed at Hitler's

supposed epigone Trump. (Hitler used radio and film. Trump appears on television. Two peas in a pod!) Progressives, even those as cultured and knowledgeable as Shapiro, are evidently blind to this, but cliché is cliché.

The book is a worthy one overall, and useful in reminding us that the Orange Julius affair in the park was a damp squib compared to the fireworks at a Greenwich Village production of *Macbeth* in 1849. A mob, twenty-five-thousand-strong, appeared at the Astor Place Opera House in a dispute that left roughly two dozen dead and was the worst civic disturbance in the first half of its century. Mainly the clash was about class and nationalism, but Shakespeare was an important inciting influence. Two actors—a manly American, Edwin Forrest, with a strong working-class fan base (I kept thinking of Mel Gibson), and that effete Brit, William Macready, who attracted the nobs (Daniel Day-Lewis?)—were feuding about rival approaches to Shakespeare that overlaid neatly onto the dispute between the middle and working classes on the one hand and the white-glove aristocrats whose haunt was the posh Astor Place Opera House (where a Starbucks stands today) on the other. At the time, Shakespeare's plays were still mass entertainment, not a hobby for the educated, and actors attracted fierce followings. Forrest was mocking Macready's refined cosmopolitanism by following his U.S. tour and putting on rival mass-appeal productions of whatever play Macready was starring in.

While Macready played Macbeth at the Astor location, Forrest was putting on the same play a few blocks away on Broadway. A crowd that had been whipped into hysterics by a Tammany Hall pol and a handbill asking "WORKING MEN: SHALL AMERICANS OR ENGLISH RULE IN THIS CITY!" tried to disrupt the performance (Macready and Co. continued acting silently in the din), then attacked the theater, which provoked a response from the militia that led to running battles in the streets. Police fired into the crowd and killed innocent bystanders. Theater audiences of the day behaved much as they do at today's sporting events, where crowds are encouraged to perform and demonstrate their allegiances, but that habit fizzled out after the Astor Place riots. "Theatergoing in America would henceforth be a quieter and more passive experience," Shapiro writes. Today it's hard not to admire the good taste, if not the brickbat-tossing, of the mid-nineteenth-century working man, whose descendants would reserve such performative passion for professional wrestling matches.

The most fabled murder of one Shakespearean by another inspires a chapter in which Shapiro acknowledges the speculative nature of much of what he offers but nevertheless weaves a fascinating web of all the strands connecting John Wilkes Booth and Abraham Lincoln's thoughts about the Bard, which in both men's cases bordered on the obsessive. Shapiro notes that Booth—who along with his brothers Junius and Edwin, perhaps the leading actor of the age, comprised one of the most prominent families of Shakespearean actors—performed *Hamlet*, *Richard III*, and *Macbeth* dozens of times, but he had a special fondness for *Julius Caesar*, in a production of which he played Antony the year before assassinating Lincoln. A friend allowed that Booth once told him, "Of all Shakespeare's characters, I like Brutus the best, excepting only Lear." While playing Macbeth, Booth had mastered a bravura piece of stage business, leaping into the witches' den from a rocky ledge ten or twelve feet above the stage. The maneuver would prove useful during his infamous escape from Ford's Theater.

Yet though a few Confederate-sympathizing newspapers did indeed laud Booth as the Brutus of his generation after the assassination, the public came to view the murder in terms of *Macbeth*, with Booth reduced to an ingrate and, more important, Lincoln raised up to the level of Duncan, perhaps the least flawed sovereign Shakespeare ever created. The historian Richard Wightman Fox said a description of Duncan was so widely quoted in the months of mourning Lincoln that it became "virtually the official slogan of the mourning period." Of the slain king it was said that he

> Hath born his faculties so meek, hath been
> So clear in his great office, that his virtues
> Will plead like angels, trumpet-tongued, against
> The deep damnation of his taking-off.

At times, Shapiro simply uses his framework as a pretext for sharing stories about the conjunction of history and theater with only the occasional half-hearted effort to tie these to anything the Bard ever wrote or stood for. The chapter on Cole Porter's 1948 musical *Kiss Me, Kate* is, for instance, an engrossing discussion that situates the show in the context of a forgotten detail of our cultural history—the widespread collapse of marriages after the war. A surge in the divorce rate was perhaps due to the hastiness with which many wartime marriages were proposed and/or to changing sex roles after the number of women in American workplaces doubled in the 1940s and millions of women had served as heads of households as well as breadwinners for the first time. Shapiro thinks male frustration with women's increasing independence is the reason scenes of men spanking women became popular (appearing in at least twenty-eight films that decade, he reckons).

Spanking goes unmentioned in the text of *The Taming of the Shrew*, Porter's source, but became strongly associated with it because a *New York Times* review of *Kiss Me, Kate* was topped by a photo from the spanking scene in the musical. This image, in turn, captured the fancy of the show's marketing department, which used it so widely in advertising that it became the show's visual signature. Shapiro's attempts to link the production history of *Kiss Me, Kate* to Shakespeare's words are such a stretch that I worried his arms might pop out of their sockets. No college student—much less a distinguished scholar—should write a passage as desperately presentist as "Long before our modern-day black sites and their enhanced interrogation techniques, Shakespeare understood that the surest way to break people was first to disorient them, then to deprive them of food and sleep." That's at the start of the chapter. At its conclusion Shapiro tells us, "In our own day the recent clamor to 'Make America Great Again' harkens [*sic*] back to a fantasy version of this period in the nation's history," and that the show provided "a fleeting glimpse of the struggle in postwar America for greater sexual freedom, racial integration, and women's choice." Oh, *Kiss Me, Kate* is about abortion and racism, is it? Sounds like the sort of thing an aging college professor might find himself saying while desperately pandering to bristlingly woke students.

Most of the book falls into one of these two modes: thoughtful digression or contrived linkage. A chapter on the 1998 Oscar winner *Shakespeare in Love*, for instance, sparkles with backstage gossip (Julia Roberts was originally cast to star as Will's supposed muse Viola but refused to perform beside any actor but Day-Lewis, who declined to take the title role), but almost none of it has anything to do with Shakespearean divisions in America. It's fun to be reminded, however, that in the year before the film was released, Monica Lewinsky placed a Valentine's Day classified ad in *The Washington Post*, addressed to "HANDSOME" and signed "M," that quoted *Romeo and Juliet*, with the young lady mischievously framing herself as Romeo because she had managed to "o'er perch these walls." Both the affair played in the film and the one in the White House were adulterous, which yields one of Shapiro's grandstanding asides about how the United States was "steadfastly puritanical" on adultery because "in 2001, only 7 percent of Americans thought that having an extramarital affair was morally acceptable." If ninety-three percent of twenty-first century Americans hold a view, it's the remaining seven who would appear to be extremists, no? Shapiro also throws in some superfluous pandering to sexual minorities, noting that in an early draft of *Shakespeare in Love*, Will's paramour was disguised as a boy for an extended period of time, yet he loved her anyway. Shapiro thinks this version of the story would have evinced a "deeper understanding of love," although gayer is not necessarily deeper. There can be little doubt that Harvey Weinstein, the film's producer, was more motivated by box-office potential in making the switch, but, again, Shakespeare has nothing to do with this. Shapiro is probably correct to stamp *Shakespeare in Love* by far the single most popular Shakespeare-related movie in American history, though it's unfortunate that such a simpering and meretricious take is the one that prospered above all others. "What fates impose, that men must needs abide," I suppose. But no one ever said the fates have impeccable taste.

Art

"Vida Americana" at the Whitney

by Karen Wilkin

"Too much is expected of Art, that it mean all kinds of things and is the solution to questions no one can answer," Stuart Davis once wrote. Yet even Davis, as committed a leftist and political activist as he was a dedicated painter, would have had to admit that in Mexico, beginning in 1920, art had been successfully used to address such difficult questions as "How do we instill national pride and unity in a culturally and economically diverse population recovering from a decade of bitter civil war?" The answer, under the new constitutional government, was a program of ambitious public murals, commissioned from left-leaning artists who wholeheartedly supported the new regime. These often monumental cycles were intended to remind Mexicans of their pre-colonial past through allusions to indigenous traditions pre-dating the arrival of the Spanish. At the same time, the murals' celebration of rural, agrarian, "peasant" Mexico was designed to foster ideas about a progressive present, untainted by the Europeanized values of the cities. Formally, the murals were meant to recall a long, homegrown artistic heritage, independent of the European influence embraced by the ruling classes—altogether, the people's art.

Davis, like many thoughtful Americans, was initially interested in the Mexican project, but no matter how much time he had spent working for social change and artists' rights, he was primarily a devout modernist who always put aesthetics first. Despite his political convictions, he dismissed as equally reactionary both the illustrative academicism adopted by the Communist party as its official style, especially after the mid-1930s, and its wildly popular capitalist equivalent, the social realism of the American Scene painters. ("The only corn-fed art that was successful," Davis quipped, "was the pre-Columbian.") What should have made the Mexican public art projects appealing to him, beyond the social attitudes they embodied, was that their simplified images and overt narratives were notably less conventional and less sentimental than either Soviet celebrations of happy workers or American glorifications of the farmer. Most of the Mexican muralists, as they came to be known, developed a visual vocabulary of chunky forms that owed nothing to Renaissance or Greco-Roman ideals, instead recalling the sturdy figures of pre-Columbian ceramic sculptures, Aztec and Olmec images, and Mayan reliefs, made contemporary by modern clothing, the regional costumes of Mexican peasants, and the broad-brimmed sombreros and cartridge-filled bandoliers worn by the followers of Emiliano Zapata, the militant land reformer/folk hero of the Mexican Revolution. The murals' blunt forms, crowded spaces, and the broad, flat, overlapping shapes, asserting the integrity of the wall, often carried over into the artists' easel painting, as did the subject matter, which ranged from idealized versions of the lives and costumes of the rural population (absent the hardship and deprivation of hardscrabble farming) to fierce political commentary. Printmakers, photographers, filmmakers, and sculptors all became part

of the movement. The most acclaimed and best known were *Los Tres Grandes*—José Clemente Orozco, David Alfaro Siqueiros, and especially Diego Rivera—but many other Mexican artists took part in the project, adopting a similar formal approach to express similar sentiments.

Artists north of the border were attracted by the art programs and the idea of a simpler, "authentic," rural society, a utopian notion promulgated by books and media attention. Many traveled south to see what was happening for themselves, sometimes signing on to work with their Mexican colleagues on their vast projects, and sometimes staying. By the mid-1920s, however, political tensions and a change in regime in Mexico reduced the scope of the programs, and the leading Mexican artists began to look to the United States for patronage. Between 1927 and 1940, *Los Tres Grandes* all traveled to the United States for extended periods, making prints and easel paintings, teaching, exhibiting, and executing mural projects, with notable and wide-ranging effect, notwithstanding the economic crisis in this country after the stock market crash of 1929. Many American artists were sympathetic to the Mexican painters' politics, especially given the upheaval of the Great Depression, in the 1930s. The formal characteristics of the Mexicans' work resonated, as well, with artists interested in alternatives to European models, while the mural projects themselves provided a spur and a template for the public art programs of the WPA.

Now the revelatory exhibition "Vida Americana: Mexican Muralists Remake American Art, 1925–1945," at the Whitney Museum of American Art, examines the pervasive influence of *Los Tres Grandes* and their *compadres* on their American colleagues—everything from direct cause and effect to oblique suggestion, from straightforward imitation to freewheeling allusion.[1] It's a large, varied, exhilarating, and instructive show whose high energy level and intensity is signaled by the "Fiesta Pink" wall color that first greets us. We are introduced to the Mexican artists through exemplary works, generally organized thematically, by *Los Tres Grandes* and their sometimes less familiar contemporaries, who include María Izquierdo, Rufino Tamayo, and the sculptor Mardonio Magaña—as well as, of course, by the wholly familiar Frida Kahlo. Works by a notably diverse group of Americans, including Elizabeth Catlett, William Gropper, Philip Guston, Jacob Lawrence, Jackson Pollock, Ben Shahn, and Hale Woodruff, among many others well known and not, are grouped with Mexican pictures that stimulated them, directly or indirectly, leaving no doubt about the powerful influence of the form and content of the Mexican experiment on eager young artists in this country. To enlarge the story, there's a short tourist board film accompanied by paintings provoked by the same spirit of what the exhibition terms "romantic nationalism," along with excerpts from a less idyllic Mexican film about rebellious fisherman and from an unfinished film about Mexico by Sergei Eisenstein.

Conceived over many years and organized by the Whitney's curator Barbara Haskell, who also contributed to and edited the informative catalogue, "Vida Americana" is amazingly comprehensive, even though it is, of necessity, restricted to easel paintings, works on paper, prints, photographs, some sculptures, and the occasional portable mural, along with the films; murals painted on walls don't tend to move. Yet the exhibition manages to present a vivid sense of some of the murals themselves through projections, touch screens, photographs, and studies. There's a half-scale reproduction of Orozco's mural *Prometheus* (1930) for the Frary Dining Hall, Pomona College, in Claremont, California, and an enlarged period photo of Siqueiros's controversial mural *Tropical America* (1932), commissioned for the exterior of a folkloric "Mexican market" in Los Angeles. The cumulative effect is dazzling.

The thesis of "Vida Americana" is announced by the proximity of the reproductions of the two murals to selected works by young American painters who responded to them, a narrative expanded as we move through the show. In 1930, the eighteen-year-old Jackson Pollock and his artist older brother traveled

1 "Vida Americana: Mexican Muralists Remake American Art, 1925–1945" opened at the Whitney Museum of American Art, New York, on February 17 and remains on view through May 17, 2020.

to see *Prometheus*, a vast, muscular male nude, straining to explode from his niche, against a crowd of figures and flames. The teenager pronounced Orozco's raw version of a classical myth to be "the greatest painting done in modern times." The exhibition's knotty, crowded early Pollocks, all dramatic contrasts of bright and dark and no space left unfilled, made almost a decade after the young painter's initial encounter with the mural, when he had joined his brother in New York, make clear how deeply affected he was by the flickering modeling and packed background of Orozco's heroic nude—characteristics that in turn suggest the Mexican painter's admiration for El Greco, which Pollock shared. It can even be argued that the wealth of small- and large-scale incident in Orozco's fierce mural not only encouraged Pollock's innate *horror vacui*, but also ultimately led to the all-over expanses of his poured and dripped paintings.

Siqueiros's *Tropical America* had similarly long-lasting repercussions. Far from being the picturesque vision of costumed rural Mexicans in a lush landscape that the title suggests, it was a brutal conflation of motifs from Olmec and Aztec sculpture, predatory vegetation, and a crucified worker. *Tropical America* was Siqueiros's second Los Angeles mural. His first, a union organizer painted for the courtyard of the Chouinard Art Institute, involved what he called the "Bloc of Mural Painters"—student assistants, who included Philip Guston. A little later, Guston and other members of the Bloc joined together to make portable murals protesting lynchings and other atrocities. (Neither the Chouinard mural nor the protest murals have survived. *Tropical America*, painted over soon after its completion, has been recently restored.) Still later, Siqueiros helped Guston and some of his friends obtain a commission for a mural in the university museum in Morelia, Mexico: *The Struggle Against Terrorism (The Struggle Against War and Fascism)* (1934–35), a complicated image with ladders, Klansmen, and other motifs that Guston would return to many times. Pollock, too, was connected with Siqueiros, the most technically daring of *Los Tres Grandes*, as well as the most politically extreme. When Siqueiros ran an "experimental workshop" in New York in 1936, Pollock was a participant. The Mexican artist's embrace of unconventional materials, such as lacquer and automobile paint, and untraditional methods, such as airbrushing and pouring, had lasting effects on the young painter.

Rivera, the most acclaimed of *Los Tres Grandes* in Mexico and the best known in the United States, arrived as a hero in 1930. When, at the end of 1931, the new Museum of Modern Art held a major exhibition—143 works, including studies for murals, made between 1902 and 1930—it broke all attendance records. The show included a group of specially commissioned portable murals, five of Mexican themes extracted from existing mural projects, including the iconic *Agrarian Leader Zapata* holding the arch-necked horse of a dead enemy, represented in "Vida Americana" by a full-size charcoal study. After the show at MOMA opened, Rivera completed three more portable murals, these reflecting his enthusiasm for American industry and the modern city. In 1932, he was commissioned to paint an enormous mural wrapping the Garden Court of the Detroit Institute of Arts, funded by the president of the Ford Motor Company. *Detroit Industry*, inspired in part by the Ford Motor plant, features images of the factory floor and men at work, glorifying labor and American know-how even in the depths of the Depression. The mural's politics provoked controversy but also attracted a great deal of enthusiastic attention.

Rivera's next project, begun in 1933, the ill-fated mural for Rockefeller Center, grandiosely titled *Man at the Crossroads Looking with Hope and High Vision to the Choosing of a New and Better Future*, is documented by a study that was initially approved for the new urban complex. The project ground to a halt when Rivera added a portrait of Vladimir Lenin. Requested to remove the Communist leader's image, which was thought to be inappropriate for such a public place, Rivera refused, and the mural was painted out. A year later, he painted a second version for the Palace of Fine Arts, Mexico City, retitled *Man, Controller of the Universe*. The exhibition's full-size digital facsimile reveals Lenin to be conspicuously present, amid symbols of technological and

scientific progress, the natural world, soldiers with gas masks, aesthetes, frivolous bourgeois, and the masses with red scarves. The potency of Rivera's example is made evident by such socially conscious works as Ben Shahn's icons of the executed anarchists Sacco and Vanzetti, Hale Woodruff's studies for his stunning murals about the Amistad mutiny, and Thomas Hart Benton's vision of the slaughter of Native Americans by self-righteous settlers, along with a wealth of works by others dealing with the working man, oppression, and injustice. Benton eventually turned against Rivera because of the Mexican's Marxism, declaring that he was interested only in American themes. (The Marxists, of course, also turned against Rivera because he worked for capitalists—but that's another matter.)

The Bentons are just what Davis disliked most—overly explicit and, in Davis's view, reactionary in their illusionistic figuration. He was, however, a fan and friend of the much younger Jacob Lawrence, here represented by selections from the intimate, powerful *Migration Series* (1940–41)—small, eloquently pared-down images encapsulating the movement of vast numbers of African-Americans from the rural South to the urban North, works as modest and expressive as Benton's are bombastic. Primed by *Los Tres Grandes*, we begin to think about both Benton and Lawrence in fresh ways.

There are high points and not-so-high points throughout "Vida Americana." On the plus side, the opportunity to compare super-heated early Pollocks with works by Orozco and Siqueiros that influenced him and stimulated him to follow his impulses enlarges our ideas about the trajectory of "Jack the Dripper's" evolution. We gain fresh insights into the relationship between the Mexican muralists' ways of embodying political messages and the work of socially conscious African-American artists such as Elizabeth Catlett, Charles White, Charles Alston, and Aaron Douglas, as well as Lawrence and Woodruff. Here, the connections seem to be less about formal issues than about content; the works of many of the African-Americans in "Vida Americana" are notable for their broadly modeled, naturalistic forms, although their emphatic shifts of scale may owe something to Mexican precedents: witness Charles White's swirling paean to achievement, *Progress of the American Negro: Five Great American Negroes* (1939–40). Rivera's portable mural *Electric Power* (1931–32), with its clear geometry and evocative fragments of the world of industry, suggests what his MOMA exhibition might have been like. There's a surprisingly good Frida Kahlo self-portrait, *Me and My Parrots* (1941)—pay attention to the claws—which exudes an obsessive intensity completely absent from many of the works by the largely unfamiliar American and Mexican painters of the "school of Rivera." But how do we deal with the (mostly) late paintings by Siqueiros, many of them incorporating large lumps of something called "pyroxylin," which range from grotesque to repulsive? And there's his zaftig, bound female nude, *Proletarian Victim* (1933), her pale, livid skin contrasting with the thick, off-black ropes encircling her torso and thighs. Siqueiros remains puzzling and elusive, not only because of his interest in unlikely materials—what is "nitrocellulose?"—but also because of the breadth of his exploration, from passionate realism to creepy Surrealism.

"Vida Americana" disturbs our previous convictions in provocative ways. What would Stuart Davis have thought? He tried to be enthusiastic about what was happening in Mexico: "Here is an advanced realistic ideology, based on experience, and definitely progressive as a group movement," he wrote in 1937. "It has its own technology (fresco mural) and is developing its own space-color sense." But, the passionate modernist concluded, Mexican art was "culturally reactionary in the international sense because its art forms are historically obsolete." He saw Rivera as a lapsed Cubist who should have known better. The rest of us, however, will be enthusiastic. We are encouraged to consider new influences on artists whose work we thought we had come to terms with and new relationships among them, abetted by the catalogue's wide-ranging essays, which immerse us in the social and cultural history of the period. The beneficial effects of cross-fertilization and cultural exchange are brought vividly to life—yet another argument for a more welcoming stance towards our southern neighbors.

Facing Lucian Freud

by Andrew L. Shea

In the modern era, few artists have gripped the public's imagination with a legend of biography and cult of personality quite like Lucian Freud. Rarely is the painter invoked without at least a sideline reminder of his influential grandfather (Sigmund), usually followed by the observation that he is confirmed to have fathered fourteen children of his own (twelve illegitimate) and probably spawned many more than this (estimates from the rumor mill rise as high as forty). Then we learn of his extraordinary gambling addiction and his wildly polarized social life—running with the literary, noble, and social elites of his generation one night, consorting joyfully with the some of the grimiest characters from London's seedy underbelly the next. When the conversation does turn toward the pictures, it normally stops first to linger on the astronomically high auction prices they began to receive in the twenty-first century, especially in the years preceding and following his death in 2011.

That all of this extra-formal bluster might distort our appreciation of Freud's artistic achievement was already on the mind of William Feaver in 1973, when he first met the artist for an interview and led off with the assertion that he wasn't interested in Freud's private life—only the work itself. But this was a promise he could not ultimately keep. In the ensuing years, Feaver continued to speak with and interview the artist, and over time he warmed to Freud's own assertion that, with his art, "everything is biographical and everything is a self-portrait."

The initial installment of Feaver's planned two-volume biography of Freud, *The Lives of Lucian Freud: The Restless Years, 1922–1968*, in which we find the above anecdote and quotation, does much to illuminate the very real ways in which biographical circumstance provoked and informed Freud's work.[1] On a basic level, Freud's claim that "everything is biographical" aligns with the fact that he drew and painted the people *he* knew, the things *he* liked, in *his* studio and home. As such, Feaver's account of Freud's life as he went about meeting these people and bringing them into the sitter's chair is useful from an art-historical perspective. In a more complicated sense, however, Freud's recognition that "everything is a self-portrait" speaks to the more intangible and psychological elements in his work that demand sustained investigation.

Feaver, a critic and historian who has previously published books on Frank Auerbach, John Martin, and the Ashington Group, is well positioned take up the effort. A friend of the painter since that first meeting in 1973, Feaver conducted what he says are thousands of interviews with Freud, and these sometimes daily conversations have formed the backbone of his book. Indeed, nearly every page contains firsthand testimonial from the painter, and many pages are filled primarily with Freud's voice. This gives the biography a lively, often very funny, and intimate character.

1 *The Lives of Lucian Freud: The Restless Years, 1922–1968*, by William Feaver; Knopf, 704 pages, $40.

It also allows us an in-depth look into how Freud, reticent and reluctant to discuss the work publicly while he was alive, viewed his own artistic project. The arrangement presents obvious hazards (we should approach artist statements in the spirit of Reagan's attitude towards Soviet promises of disarmament: "Trust, but verify"), but Freud's commentary is on the whole unpretentious—even perhaps a bit self-effacing—and Feaver's disinterested analyses serve as useful counterpoint to the artist's own ideas.

To be sure, Feaver wastes few opportunities to share with us some of the more lurid, intimate, and unseemly episodes and escapades that transpired outside the studio. The rapid-fire stream of vignettes, from Freud's childhood in Berlin to his adolescence in various British art schools to his adult career in London, through two short-lived marriages and innumerable shorter-lived liaisons, is well documented by Feaver. There's the time when Lucian, in search of a thrill at the age of eight, took to closing his eyes and running through Berlin traffic, "To test my fate. Until finally hit. I was hit by a car and thrown up in the air and as I came down I was hit again as the car stopped." During the London Blitz, Freud the teenager was playing a different sort of Russian Roulette—"In the blackout it was almost impossible not to catch the clap"—but also pursued more conventional forms of gambling at the table and racetrack. One gallery attendant recalls an older Freud picking up a sales payment of over £4,000 (many multiples of the attendant's salary that year) and burning it within minutes at the betting-shop next door.

But as amusing as these anecdotes might be, the true value of this biography comes from the author's willingness to engage earnestly with Freud's art, from the lumpish early student works to the brilliant investigations of his later career, and to dispel erroneous conceptions of this work that remain in wide circulation.

Feaver has looked closely at Freud and his art. As it happens, alongside his biography we now have the opportunity to do the same, in the form of "Lucian Freud: The Self Portraits," an exhibition that opened recently at the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston.[2] If "everything is a self-portrait," as Freud claimed, then how might we consider the many *literal* self-portraits that Freud made throughout his life? This exhibition, which was first on display at the Royal Academy, London, seeks to investigate just this through a collection of more than forty works of self-portraiture that span the bulk of Freud's seven-decade career.

Entering the exhibition, we are greeted by the three-quarter-length *Man with Feather* (1943), a dream-like night scene in which a young Freud in black jacket and tie awkwardly pinches a preciously rendered white feather. Behind him is a series of inexplicable leaf-shaped, iceberg-like objects strewn along the ground; behind those we find a strange yellow-brick house in which a man and a black bird appear in respective window sills. Though Freud's paint-handling is clumsy and tentative, the picture maintains an icy detachment and enthusiasm for detail that holds our attention.

Critics often describe early works such *Man with Feather* as Surrealist, owing in large part to their absurdist assemblies of strange, unrelated motifs. Other self-portraits from this period include various playful stagings, such as a 1949 drawing that casts the artist as Actaeon, replete with furry face, pointy ears, and five-point antlers. But if these Kafka-esque compositions evoke then-trendy ideas about "probing the unconscious," Freud soon saw through the superficiality of Surrealist aesthetics. As Feaver writes, "Surrealism, Lucian discovered, generally meant Dalí or Breton rather than Picasso, and that, he thought, was reason enough for not getting involved." Freud's repudiation recalls Sigmund Freud's own disavowal of the Surrealists: "I may have been inclined to have regarded the surrealists, who have apparently adopted me as their patron saint, as complete fools." Crucially, automatism never seems to have informed Freud's practice at any stage. Freud's aim was in fact

2 "Lucian Freud: The Self Portraits" opened at the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, on March 1 and remains on view through May 25, 2020. The exhibition was previously on view at the Royal Academy of Arts, London, from October 27, 2019 through January 26, 2020.

quite the opposite of the automatic painters, who sought to unlock the unconscious by blocking out intellectual impetus and embracing chance and accident. As Freud wrote in 1953, "My object in painting pictures is to try and move the senses by giving an intensification of reality." For Freud, this required both extreme concentration and an exceptional level of painterly and pictorial control. Not for nothing did the critic Herbert Read name Freud in this period, with only a sprinkle of sarcasm, the "Ingres of Existentialism."

As the years went by, Freud continued to develop his eye and hand, leading to more naturalistic works that yet retained an eerie sense of the uncanny. In Boston is an important work from this first mature period: *Hotel Bedroom*, which was included among Freud's works at the 1954 Venice Biennale, where he represented Great Britain alongside Francis Bacon and Ben Nicholson. In the potent and mostly inscrutable drama, Freud leers at the viewer over his second wife (Lady Caroline Blackwood, the oldest child of the fourth Marquess of Dufferin and Ava and an heiress to the Guinness beer fortune), who lies in bed, clothed, under the sheets, hand to face, with a vacant stare up at the ceiling.

Two years later, an uncompleted *Self-Portrait* from *circa* 1956 shows us how Freud began slowly building his pictures from the inside out, painting the bridge of his nose, then his sinuses, then his eyes, then their sockets and his cheekbones, feeling his brush around each nook of flesh and curvature of form as he went. Though the paint is still thin, it is imbued with a vitality of touch absent in the more linearly fixed earlier works. The result is a pictorial experience that surpasses ordinary looking in its sheer intensity. We can't know for sure why Freud didn't complete the work, but in Feaver's biography we find a telling admission: "Painting myself is more difficult than painting people, I've found. The psychological element is more difficult. Increasingly so."

Freud's extraordinarily tight draftsmanship and his attention to the smallest detail won him early acclaim and patronage in London's art world. But despite this success, by the late 1950s he was increasingly dissatisfied with a method that he found limiting, and soon he began painting with a loaded brush and gestural hand. The artist's admiration for the expressive vitality of the paint-handling of his close friend Francis Bacon has led many to cast Freud's later work as neo-Expressionist. Feaver's biography, without discounting the possibility of Bacon's influence, does much to complicate this understanding. In an illuminating few pages, Feaver positions Cézanne as the more important influence on Freud's development: "To Freud, Cézanne was the painter who, above all, made expression (as distinct from skittering 'Expressionism') the very stuff of concentration." Concentration, of course, is the crucial element of Freud's art that extends through his entire oeuvre.

Though this comparison of Freud to the Provençal master might seem specious at first glance, it bears unpacking. Like Cézanne, Freud worked incredibly slowly, often spending many minutes just looking at his subject before mixing a color and applying a single brushstroke. For both, modeling sessions could run for hours on end, and paintings frequently required hundreds of sittings that spanned months and even years. We might consider this manner of slow optical accretion to have something to do with T. S. Eliot's idea that the artist "is in fact a receptacle for seizing and storing up numberless feelings, phrases, images, which remain there until all the particles which can unite to form a new compound are present together." The ultimate goal, for Freud and for Cézanne, was to break through the wall of intellectually presumptive "realities" that descend to cliché when manifested in paint. In Eliotan terms, it is the attempt to "escape from personality" (a concept Freud cites favorably, quoted by Feaver) that is antithetical to Expressionism and its aesthetic relations.

Of course, "attempt" is key here. Freud's maniacal desire to exert painterly control over his pictures led often to just the sorts of mannerist cliché that the whole process is designed to eschew. To my eye, this was especially the case in the 1960s, when Freud was still learning just what he could do with the loaded brush. These "loopy" paintings, of which there are a

number of examples in Boston, show Freud spreading paint at his most Bacon-esque, but without the intensity of focus that would give his later work more enduring power.

By the 1980s, however, Freud was nearing the height of his abilities. An iconic self-portrait from 1985, a "night painting" in which the artificial interior light of his London studio rakes dramatically over his aging features and bare shoulders, obliterates the works hanging nearby on their shared gallery wall. Normally on view at the Irish Museum of Modern Art, the painting shows the sixty-three-year-old Freud's obsessive quest to exert maniacal control over contour, color, and light—a King Lear of the brush.

Other works from this period and after include two large paintings that do not involve mirrors: *Two Irishmen in W-11* (1984–85) and *Flora with Blue Toenails* (2000–01). In the first, of an adult man standing behind his seated father, we find "self-portraiture" only in the sense that Freud includes in the composition two small self-portraits on canvas leaning against his studio wall. In the latter painting, Freud's presence is suggested by ominous shadow, which looms over the naked woman awkwardly splayed out on a bed—a paraphrase of Picasso's 1953 *The Shadow*, from the Musée Picasso, Paris. These two anomalous works are also some of the best in the exhibition, and they begin to suggest that self-portraiture, for Freud, is more expansive than we might initially think.

A number of important self-portraits are missed in Boston. Not included is Freud's last major contribution to the genre, *The Painter Surprised by a Naked Admirer* (2004–05), one of his stranger self-portraits, showing, as the title suggests, a naked model, sitting on the ground, hugging Freud's leg tight as he depicts the two of them alone in his studio. And then there's perhaps Freud's most shocking self-portrait: *Painter Working, Reflection*, from 1993, of an entirely naked septuagenarian Freud, save for a pair of unlaced studio boots, holding his palette in one hand and palette knife aloft in the other. The work was included in the Royal Academy's presentation but did not travel to Boston.

The absence of these two late classics, however, is offset by the magisterial half-length *Self-Portrait, Reflection* of 2002 (Private collection), the last fully developed work included in the exhibition. In it, Freud presents himself wearing an olive-green jacket and a loose gray cravat, backed up against a paint-encrusted studio wall. Documentary photographs by Freud's assistant, David Dawson, show us how Freud took to wiping excess paint from his brush onto the studio walls as he worked, creating over time an environment that blurred the lines between painting and place. In the 2002 self-portrait, Freud's densely worked visage is subsumed in the chaotic smears of oil that dance around and behind his head. To my mind, Freud made some of his greatest works in his eighth decade; here we find an artist standing bravely against the onward march of time, carving himself out of the same paint that has overtaken his life. The portrait's grim but determined countenance recalls a passage from an essay Freud wrote a half-century earlier for the July 1954 issue of *Encounter* magazine—an incandescent depiction of the impossible promise and inevitable disappointment that frames every act of painting:

> A moment of complete happiness never occurs in the creation of a work of art. The promise of it is felt in the act of creation but disappears towards the completion of the work. For it is then that the painter realizes that it is only a picture that he is painting. Until then he had almost dared to hope that the picture might spring to life. Were it not for this, the perfect picture might be painted, on the completion of which the painter could retire. It is this great insufficiency that drives him on.

"Lucian Freud: The Self Portraits" may not answer all our questions about the relationship between this fascinating artist and his often unsettling work. But it's a welcome opportunity to ponder the same in front of unusually powerful pictures. Together, the exhibition and William Feaver's new biography offer as penetrating a look into the man behind the mirror as we've had to date.

The passion of Donald Judd

by Eric Gibson

For some time, I've felt that the discipline of art history, with its emphasis on historical progression and stylistic evolution, wasn't quite adequate to the task of coming to terms with the work of the American artist Donald Judd (1928–94). Judd came to prominence in the 1960s with colored metal boxes placed either singly and directly on the floor, or in vertical groupings projecting from the wall known as stacks. They were typically seen as a reaction against the emotional expansiveness of Abstract Expressionist painting and as the germ of the Minimalist art movement, in which capacity they were said to represent the latest iteration of modernism's simplification and reduction of form. Yet looking at Judd's work in recent years, that reading has increasingly come to seem too facile. Certainly Judd felt it was. In a note to himself in 1984, he denounced what he called the "nonsense about minimalism," and observed that "most people view my work through the clichés of the art magazines and the survey books." With the looming prospect of a Judd retrospective at the Museum of Modern Art, I thought the best starting point for an appraisal would be to see the work through Judd's own eyes. So I turned to the two volumes of writings and interviews recently published by his foundation.[1]

This was no easy task, and not just because, taken together, the books run to over two thousand pages. Judd's prose swings between head-banging abstruseness and crystalline clarity, often within the space of a single page. Thus in a 1963 essay on the sculptor John Chamberlain he wrote, "Freedom and indeterminacy are antecedent to and larger than order. The order of Chamberlain's work was never a priori. The concluding order is not an essence." And so on. In the next paragraph, however, he offers this succinct and penetrating summary: "Chamberlain's sculpture is simultaneously turbulent, passionate, cool, and hard." Unfortunately, there's more of the former type of writing than the latter. (For this reason, the second volume might have been better titled "Translations," since at least the interviewers occasionally press Judd to explain himself.)

Then there is his critical vocabulary, which tends towards the broad and abstract. A number of words turn up repeatedly as descriptors or terms of approbation—"specific," "definite," "generality," for example—without Judd elaborating on what he means by them. "Quality" appears often, but it takes a while to figure out that Judd is referring to a work's overall aesthetic character and not, as one would assume given the context, levels of artistic accomplishment or an individual trait. Finally there is his adamant refusal, when talking about his own work, to use the word "sculpture." (Question, from 1966: "You said that your work is not sculpture. If it isn't sculpture, what is

1 *Donald Judd Writings*, edited by Flavin Judd and Caitlin Murray; David Zwirner Books, 1,056 pages, $39.95. *Donald Judd Interviews*, edited by Flavin Judd and Caitlin Murray; David Zwirner Books, 1,008 pages, $39.95.

it?" Answer: "I don't know what it is, and I don't feel that I have to give it a title.") He prefers the phrase "three-dimensional work." He even rejects the term "form." (It's "pretty hard to handle," he told an interviewer the following year.)

Still, a clear aesthetic gradually emerges from these pages. Judd started out in philosophy, receiving a B.S. in the subject from Columbia University in 1953, having been particularly drawn to empiricism and positivism, and that background very much defines his outlook. Question, from 1971: "What do you consider art is about, then?" Answer: "About what I know." Indeed, there are times when his pieces strike one not so much as works of art in the conventional sense but as philosophical statements, proofs of propositions about the nature of things, for which the labels should read "Donald Judd, Q.E.D.," rather than, as they uniformly do, "Untitled."

In his art, Judd sought to replace what he called "all the structures, values, feelings, and everything of the whole European tradition" with an art that does not "allude to other things" and is a "specific thing in itself which derive[s] a specific quality from its form." To this end he turned his back on all forms of illusionism and what he called "composition," or the hierarchical arrangement of the separate parts within a work. In its place he sought "wholeness," an arrangement of the disparate parts so the work is perceived as a unity.

For this reason the modern artist Judd admired the most was—wait for it—Jackson Pollock. He called him "the primary artist," and there are more citations for him in the two indexes than for any other artist. Judd doesn't see Pollock as an expressionist but as a kind of positivist. In an important 1967 essay he hailed him as the first American to break with the European tradition of part-to-part composition, the person who "created the large scale, wholeness, and simplicity that have become common to almost all good work." He went on to say that the "dripped paint in most of Pollock's paintings is dripped paint. It's that sensation, completely immediate and specific, and nothing modifies it." Also in the pantheon were Barnett Newman, Josef Albers (his "arrangement of squares within squares . . . provided enormous versatility and complexity"), Malevich, and Mondrian, although he faulted the Dutchman for his intimations of illusionistic space.

Returning to Judd's aesthetic, he embraced geometry not out of a desire for purity of form or to express essences but because it is "nonnaturalistic" and carries no outside associations. Yes, he uses color, but its purpose is purely practical. The "only point about the color was its capacity to define the form with clarity," he said in 1971. He may be making art, but he states quite clearly that he isn't creating "objects for contemplation." But we should not conclude from this that Judd was cultivating an art of mute impersonality. "Yes, of course," was his response to the question, "Do you feel your work has expressive quality?" in 1966. But he declined to elaborate, beyond adding that "I don't exactly like talking about 'spirit,' 'mysticism,' and that sort of thing, because those words have old meanings."

Thus steeped in Judd's hard-headed empiricism, I was wholly unprepared for the tidal wave of feeling that washed over me the instant I set foot in the exhibition at the Museum of Modern Art. The mood generated by the four galleries of emphatically present, brightly colored objects is one of unalloyed joy, abandon even.

"Judd," the first retrospective in the United States since the Whitney's in 1988, was organized by Ann Temkin, MOMA's chief curator of painting and sculpture, along with her colleagues Yasmil Raymond (who has since left the museum), Tamar Margalit, and Erica Cooke, and features some seventy sculptures, paintings, drawings, and prints.[2] It has been superbly installed, with works talking to one another across the galleries and enough space around each to let them reveal themselves and breathe. The show's pacing is just as good. You walk into a blast of Cadmium Red Light in the first gallery, a color midway between

2 "Judd" opened at the Museum of Modern Art, New York, on March 1 and remains on view through July 11, 2020.

fire-engine red and orange in which the punch of the former is leavened by the warmth of the latter. The next gallery is something of a color explosion as Judd's palette expands to include the whole spectrum. After that, the show throttles back, chromatically speaking, as the third gallery displays works that are either monochrome or dominated by a single color. That softens you up for the final gallery of works with multiple color combinations, dominated by an enormous (59 by 295 by 65 inches) 1991 floor piece composed of sixty rectangular elements (each one 12 by 59 by 3 inches) and employing eight different colors. This all-the-stops-out exercise in color pulsation reads like a three-dimensional version of Piet Mondrian's *Broadway Boogie Woogie* (1942–43), only without its vestigial illusionism.

Judd started out as a painter but found himself unduly constricted by the flat surface and rectangular shape of the canvas and frustrated by his inability to avoid any kind of figure–ground relationship or illusionism when he put marks down. Almost the earliest work in the show, and an exception to the Rule of Red in the first gallery, shows us his initial efforts to move in a new direction: a 1961, all-black "painting" into whose center Judd has inset a rectangular baking pan. It is a marvelously witty (dare one use that word with Judd?) and ingenious solution to the problem of illusionistic space in painting. In a move that seems equal parts Picasso (the sheet metal *Guitar* of 1914) and Duchamp (his *Readymades*), Judd here introduces actual space—that inside the baking pan. I use quotation marks in describing this work since, to further avoid any suggestion of illusionism, Judd has built it out (at four inches, it is twice as thick as a conventional painting), ensured the area around the baking pan has a uniform, surface-asserting color and texture, and painted the sides of the painting black as well, to indicate that they, too, are part of the aesthetic program. The result is a painting–object.

Within a few years he had moved into making the freestanding three-dimensional objects that elsewhere populate this gallery. Unfortunately, our understanding of this stage of his evolution is hampered by the absence of a pivotal work owned by the Judd Foundation but which couldn't be loaned: a roughly four-feet-square 1962 work in which two black enamel horizontal bands sit within a field of Cadmium Red Light and a length of pipe perforates the center. As he told an interviewer in 1971, "I did the pipe relief and kept it on the floor. . . . It was meant to go on the wall, but it looked all right on the floor. . . . And I didn't want it to sit back against the wall. A piece that was completely three-dimensional was a big event for me."

One way Manet and later Matisse revolutionized painting was to transform black from a "negative" color, one used to depict shadows and dark corners, into a "positive" one. In a 1990 stack, Judd extends this into three dimensions in ten boxes whose outward-facing sides are black while the horizontal surfaces are clear Plexiglas, the dark hue holding its own as a "real" color as sturdily as the other hues in the exhibition. But he does those earlier modernists one better by doing the same thing for gray, transforming it from a drab neutral to an element of real chromatic force. Judd said he began to color his metal works because, while he liked the material's natural appearance, he felt its color range was too limited. You'd never know it from this exhibition, where we see Judd exploiting the expressive potential of some half-dozen shades of gray, ranging from near-white to near-black, across as many types of metal, each one with its own optical texture (matte and softly snowy anodized aluminum, for example, or highly polished and brittle-looking stainless steel) and visual incident (from the mottling of galvanized iron to what in another context would be called gestural markings that make the sheets of hot-rolled steel suggest a monochrome painting by Helen Frankenthaler.) There's so much to engage you in just this aspect of the show that it merits its own exhibition some day: "Donald Judd: Gray."

Judd began working in plywood because that was all he could afford, then switched to metal in the mid-1960s because he felt he needed to define his forms "more rigorously." He added Plexiglas to his arsenal toward the end

of that decade, drawn by its reflectivity, the way it allowed a view into his volumes, and the fact that, unlike his metal pieces, color wasn't applied to but embodied in it. In his hands it is the most emotionally potent of all the materials he uses. What it does with light is just as important as its chromatic attributes. Light passes through it, irradiating nearby forms and surfaces with its designated hue. A 1968 stack in the second gallery is ravishingly beautiful. Its outward-facing surfaces are polished stainless steel and its horizontal ones yellow Plexiglas. The interiors of the boxes glow with that color and the overhead illumination passing through them projects a huge wash of yellow onto the back wall down the entire length of the piece. Looking at it, I kept thinking of the Greek myth of Danaë and the shower of gold, and wondering whether Judd, who did graduate work in art history at Columbia with Meyer Schapiro and Rudolph Wittkower, had Titian's painting (or some other version) in mind when he made it. Almost as potent is the contrast between the warmth of the yellow and the icy silver hue of the polished stainless steel. Elsewhere the Plexiglas will trap light, as it does in a large work from 1969 composed of large boxes, each open at the sides, whose interior surfaces are lined with blue Plexiglas whose edges fairly glow. Judd never mentions this aspect of his art—one looks in vain for the word "light" in the indexes of both books—yet it is an indispensable component of it.

"I'm a painter," Judd told an interviewer in 1987, after some three decades of making three-dimensional work. It was a rare moment of self-revelation, and the more powerful for being so. It provides the key to his aesthetic and explains not only his obdurate refusal to hew to the standard descriptive language in discussing what people called his "sculpture," but also his reluctance to parse it. ("You're asking me what the work's all about, and I can't answer just like that," he said in 1967). For he created a hybrid idiom that is almost beyond the reach of words. In Judd's work, three-dimensional form is the platform, like the canvas shape, narrative schema, and figure groupings in the art of the European tradition he was so determined to leave behind. Yet the painterly impulse persisted, even as he worked in three dimensions. Of course, in the most literal sense, this work *is* "sculpture," for it is solid, space-displacing form. Aesthetically speaking, however, it is, to paraphrase Clausewitz, painting by other means. Form, the province of sculpture, serves to harness, contain, shape, and structure emotion, then to release it through the means particular to painting: color and light. Q.E.D.

Monumental madness

by James Panero

Just down the street from my apartment, on the West Side of Manhattan, is a memorial of memorials. The Soldiers' and Sailors' Monument, at Riverside Drive and Eighty-ninth Street, is one of those veterans of the city landscape that has waged a long war against the forces of ruin. Now, once again, the monument finds itself in a pitched battle over its own survival. The mortar of the structure has eroded away. Rainwater runs through its marble interior. Metal flashing dangles off its cornices. Weeds grow out of its cracked façade. A chain-link fence surrounds the memorial tower and invites further mischief. Young men dash around the enclosure to deface the stonework—something I saw firsthand walking by the other afternoon. They know they have it to themselves.

Some fifteen years ago, in the city's previous administration, the then–Parks Commissioner Adrian Benepe elevated this monument's aging public promenade from an overgrown asphalt jungle into an appropriate civic space. Yet the monument's tower has not undergone a major overhaul since 1961. Those repairs may cost $35 million. The city says it has other priorities.

You might think that such a monument, a city and state landmark of national historical importance, would take top priority. Since its dedication on Memorial Day in 1902, this Greek Revival temple has honored the Union sacrifices of the Civil War. It has also served as a focus for all of New York's wartime remembrances. President Theodore Roosevelt officiated over its opening day as veterans of the Civil War paraded up Riverside Drive, thirty-seven years after Lee's surrender at Appomattox. A seventy-four-foot-long American flag, the largest to that date, covered the ten-story tower before it was unveiled. "The memories that hover around it," Mayor Seth Low declared at its opening ceremony, "already clothe it with a light that makes it sacred to the eye."

The same light still shines over it today. On a promontory overlooking the Hudson River, even in its neglected state the monument can glow like a rocket as the western sun sets behind it. Twelve Corinthian columns, thirty-six feet high and arranged around an inner marble drum, give its finialed crown of eagles and cartouches a sense of lift. Its ringed base, in smooth stone, adds a compressive and centripetal force.

Surrounded by a complex series of terraces, stairs, benches, and plazas, the monument provides various precincts for gathering and ceremony. To the west, centered on a flagpole nearly as tall as the monument itself, a stairway leads in the direction of the river. At one time, these stairs were meant to connect this sailors' shrine to the waterline. To the north, a lower platform that follows the contours of the natural plateau provides a tight perspective for more personal remembrance. To the south, the semicircular arms of an open and low-stepped quadrangle draw in observants who arrive up the Drive—a curving road that straightens to provide an unobstructed approach to this battery-like promontory, which includes the silenced cannon and cannonballs of 1865.

The monument stands as one of the finest examples of the City Beautiful movement, which populated New York with statues and memorials at the turn of the last century. Charles and Arthur Stoughton, brothers who trained at the École des Beaux-Arts, won the competition with the white marble design, called the "temple of fame," to serve as the southern bookend for the General Grant National Memorial, completed five years earlier at 122nd Street and based on the Mausoleum at Halicarnassus and the Dôme des Invalides. For the Soldiers' and Sailors' Monument, Stoughton & Stoughton adapted the Choragic Monument of Lysicrates in Athens, a sort of music trophy featuring the myth of Dionysus and the first to use free-standing outdoor Corinthian columns, for a new sober purpose. Paul E. M. DuBoy, the architect of the Ansonia apartment building at Seventy-third Street, designed its sculptural program.

The monument's public precincts pay tribute to the Civil War service of New York's volunteer regiments, with the names of battles and generals listed on the surrounding plinths. Its monumental tower honors the memory of their fallen brothers in arms. A single bronze doorway, topped with an eagle and the words IN MEMORIAM, leads into a tall inner sanctum of sculptural niches and ethereal light.

A few years ago, I may have been one of the final people to enter this solemn and spectral space. For decades the Soldiers' and Sailors' Monument Association, a volunteer group working with the Riverside Park Conservancy, has organized the monument's Memorial Day tribute and opened its door to the public for that one day of the year. This community group is among many organizations that has quietly restored and championed Riverside Park's monuments, memorials, and gardens (see my "Gallery chronicle" of January 2016 for the history of the nearby Joan of Arc Memorial).

Yet for recent tributes, the chain-link fence has had to serve as the backdrop. Without urgent repairs, the monument is now at risk of demolition. As the Riverside Park Conservancy again presses its case, City Hall indeed has had other priorities. As historical structures have been left to ruin, the administration of Bill de Blasio, fresh off his stumblebum presidential run, has pursued an extensive program of cultural grievance and redress. In part this has meant denigrating the city's past and even toppling memorials in public displays of desecration. In this space in September 2018, I wrote about the removal of one Central Park monument, of J. Marion Sims, a doctor who revolutionized gynecology by developing a surgical cure for a serious complication of birth, but whose practice in the antebellum South has caused his reputation to be denounced by racial activists. For the mayor, such removals, motivated by political bullying rather than historical nuance, were but the pretext for the next campaign: the installation of new leftist monuments throughout the city. At the center of this radical initiative is not just the mayor himself but also his wife, Chirlane McCray, a Madame Mao of New York politics with her own designs on city-wide office.

Our fractious times have not been kind to even the most seemingly innocuous efforts at new memorialization. A well-funded private initiative to mark the centenary of the Nineteenth Amendment saw fit to attack what it called the "bronze patriarchy" of city monuments to get out the vote for its monument to women's suffrage. The rhetoric at monumentalwomen.org ridiculed Central Park's historical markers and played the gender card, only to be trumped by the race card. After the classical sculptor Meredith Bergmann worked up a depiction of Susan B. Anthony and Elizabeth Cady Stanton, *The New York Times* asked in a headline, "Is a Planned Monument to Women's Rights Racist?" A columnist denounced the "explicit prejudices" of the two historical figures "that erased the participation of black women in the movement." Then, when a depiction of Sojourner Truth was added to the tableau, twenty academics objected in a letter that the new arrangement whitewashed the racist politics of the white suffragists, who "treated black intelligence and capability in a manner that Truth opposed."

A similar circus has surrounded efforts to replace the toppled statue of Sims, at Fifth Avenue and 103rd Street, with a new counter-

monument. After a seven-hour meeting last fall at the Museum of the City of New York, a city panel selected the sculptor Simone Leigh, an artist whose work has appeared at the Guggenheim and Whitney museums and along the High Line, for a racial riff on Manet's *Olympia* called *After Anarcha, Lucy, Betsey, Henrietta, Laure, and Anonymous*—so named for Sims's enslaved patients. At the announcement, community activists shouted down this selection over the work of Vinnie Bagwell, a local favorite, whose *Victory Beyond Sims* proposed a less avant-garde sculptural figure. Tom Finkelpearl, the city's then–Cultural Commissioner, scrambled to address the protest, and Leigh withdrew her design.

The next figure to go down was Finkelpearl himself. Last fall the city put out a public ballot asking for women who should be memorialized as part of its "She Built NYC" initiative. The popular winner, by a wide margin, was Frances Xavier Cabrini (1850–1917). Known to New Yorkers as Mother Cabrini, this heroic nun fought for immigrant health, founded the Missionary Sisters of the Sacred Heart of Jesus, and became the first American citizen to be canonized in the Roman Catholic Church.

Mother Cabrini was indeed a woman who "built NYC," just not the right kind of woman for Chirlane McCray, the unelected executive of her husband's $10 million sculptural initiative. In the political storm that followed, the actor Chazz Palminteri accused McCray of racism for ignoring a worthy white candidate, de Blasio demanded an apology from the Bronx actor, Governor Cuomo stepped in to say he would memorialize Cabrini himself, and Finkelpearl lost his job in the kerfuffle with the mayor's family.

The "nomination process was never intended to be a popularity contest," McCray said in response. It turns out it was never exclusively meant to memorialize women at all, as the First Lady advanced two transvestite figures to take Mother Cabrini's place. Marsha P. Johnson and Sylvia Rivera were individuals on the outer fringes of the city's cultural life. Both started out as prostitutes on Forty-second Street. After founding a group called Street Transvestite Action Revolutionaries, each descended into mental illness and substance abuse. Johnson's body was pulled from the Hudson River near Christopher Street, while Rivera succumbed to liver cancer living at a shelter called Transy House.

The extremis of these sad individuals is precisely what appeals to the ever more absurdist politics of identity and representation. Mother Cabrini will have to wait as McCray pushes for a $750,000 memorial to the two drag queen activists. "The LGBTQ movement was portrayed very much as a white, gay male movement," she declares. "This monument counters that trend of whitewashing the history."

The *she* of She Built NYC is ultimately New York's current First Lady, who will not stop at using city funds to memorialize her own political hubris. Her sculptural initiative is but a small representation of her mismanagement of city affairs. For example, as she now organizes her fourth exhibition at Gracie Mansion, this one called "Catalyst: Art and Social Justice," which opened in February, the city has seen little justice done to a $1 billion mental health initiative, called ThriveNYC, that has languished under her stewardship.

Such machinations will do little to save a monument that, one might say, memorializes our country's greatest act of "social justice." America's deadliest conflict, after all, was the war that ended the country's acceptance of chattel slavery. This historical reality is what makes the Soldiers' and Sailors' Monument so problematic in today's political climate. In a culture obsessed over America's "structural racism" through such initiatives as the *New York Times*'s bogus "1619 Project," a monument that memorializes the nation's most anti-racist struggle complicates facile politicized narratives. Rather than remembering, the point now is forgetting, and neglecting, our history in metal and stone.

Music

New York chronicle

by Jay Nordlinger

Out trooped Jaap van Zweden, the music director of the New York Philharmonic, in the company of another person. Both had microphones in their hands. The other person was the composer who had written the concert's opening piece. We saw this a lot during the tenure of Alan Gilbert, who led the Philharmonic from 2009 to 2017. But I had not seen it in the time of Van Zweden. The tradition continues.

Van Zweden explained to the audience that the orchestra was embarking on "Project 19," the "19" having two meanings. This year marks the centennial of the Nineteenth Amendment to the U.S. Constitution, which gave women the right to vote. The Philharmonic has commissioned nineteen female composers to write pieces for the orchestra.

In recent years, people in the music business have grumbled that female composers have not been programmed enough. So Project 19 looks like redress. I could not help thinking how *I* would feel, however, if I were one of the composers approached. How would *you* feel? Would you be glad of the commission, no matter what? Would you feel entitled? Would you feel slightly insulted, knowing that sex (or "gender," as we say today) played a role? Would your feelings be mixed?

I am not judging those who have accepted the commissions—for one thing, I haven't walked in their moccasins. But I *am* wondering. And as I sat in David Geffen Hall, I thought of Edward MacDowell, the American composer of the late nineteenth century. American classical music was just getting off the ground. And MacDowell was invited to participate in a concert of American music. He declined, refusing to allow any of his music to be performed. The reason? If a piece of his deserved to be performed, the nationality of its composer had nothing to do with it.

That is very far from the spirit of our own age.

In any case, the composer on this Philharmonic evening was Nina C. Young, an American born in 1984. She was charming in her remarks to the audience. Our program notes informed us that she had an extraordinary education, culminating in a Ph.D. in music from Columbia. That is not extraordinary, maybe, and neither is her undergraduate degree in music from MIT. But she earned another undergraduate degree from that institution—in ocean engineering.

Her new piece is called *Tread softly*, and those program notes said the following: "Nina C. Young's official biography states that her current artistic interests focus on 'collaborative, multidisciplinary works that touch on issues of sustainability, climate change, historical narratives, and women's rights.' *Tread softly* represents a clear intersection of a number of these areas . . ." Honestly, I don't understand this at all, much less regard it as "clear." In any event, I will tell you some of what I heard, when listening to Young's piece.

It bears some of the hallmarks of today's music: anxiety, for example. I've often said that our era in composition ought to be called another

"age of anxiety." The piece has plenty of soft percussion, and a "wash," at least for a while. I'm talking about an aural sheen. From the brass section, there are interesting sounds, including shudders, mutings, and slidings. There are some fluttering, Debussyan woodwinds—and an extended violin solo, almost a cadenza. It smacks of the Gypsy, and I wrote in my notes, "Czardas?"

There are many musical ideas in *Tread softly*, and whether they cohere, I'm not sure. The work is about ten minutes long—our program booklet said so—but it sounded longer to me. Then again, many new works do (and not a few old ones, to be sure). I also had the feeling that the music was deeply personal to the composer, in ways a listener could not imagine.

In a composer's note, Ms. Young writes, "One hundred years after the Nineteenth Amendment was ratified, it still seems radical that I can have a voice, that women can be heard, and taken seriously as equal weavers of the tapestry of American culture." Is it really as radical as all that? Whatever our own answer, a person's individual feelings are hard to gainsay.

As you may have gathered, the title of the piece comes from Yeats's poem "The Cloths of Heaven"—whose final line goes, "Tread softly because you tread on my dreams." In that program note, Young writes, "In coming seasons, nineteen women will work with this illustrious orchestra. And so I ask you, as we spread our sounds into your minds, tread softly, because you tread on our dreams." A lovely sentiment. I can say, however, that I will review these works—if I review them—exactly as I do others. Which is what most composers would want, I feel sure, including Ms. Young.

In this same period, Sally Matthews, the British soprano, gave a recital in Weill Recital Hall with Simon Lepper, a British pianist. There was no British music on the program, which disappointed me. I thought, "Maybe she will sing some at encore time." She did indeed, starting with "The Cloths of Heaven," Thomas Dunhill's setting of the Yeats poem. Dunhill is barely known, yet I regard this as one of the most perfect songs in the entire repertory.

On another evening, the Philharmonic began a concert with the Brahms Violin Concerto. The soloist was Janine Jansen, the outstanding Dutchwoman. And the conductor, once more, was Jaap van Zweden, an outstanding Dutchman. Van Zweden, you may remember, is a violinist. In fact, at eighteen, he became a concertmaster of the Concertgebouw Orchestra in Amsterdam. (It was not until 1988 that the name of the orchestra acquired a "Royal.") So, in a sense, you had two Dutch violinists, traversing the Brahms.

Years ago, a violinist gave me a clue about orchestral life. After a concerto, string players in the orchestra often tap their stands with their bows, in approval of the soloist. If they put down their instruments and clap with their hands—they really approve. When Janine Jansen took the stage to play the Brahms, many, many of the string players were clapping with their hands. Already. Before Jansen had played a note. I had never seen this before, in a lifetime of concertgoing.

Looking back on it, I thought, "These players obviously knew what we were about to get."

With his baton, Van Zweden shaped the opening of the concerto superbly. He did not smother the music, at all, but his shaping was clear. The orchestra's sound was full and rich. The music was positively exciting. When Jansen came in, you could tell that she was excited to be playing the concerto. It was not a tired warhorse to her—another Brahms, another dollar (or whatever her fee is).

She was "involving," to use a cliché. Neither she nor we, in the audience, were ever bored. She often played with a "melting tone," to use another cliché. Soloist and orchestra were firing on all cylinders. They rode the contours of the music, with every climax right. There was always passion, whether quiet or louder. Jansen played the cadenza—Joachim's—with interpretive imagination. The overall quality of this first movement was warm-heroic. That is Brahms, isn't it?

After the movement, many in the audience applauded, and quite rightly. The soloist did not ignore or scowl at them. She smiled and nodded as she tuned her instrument—which was classy.

Brahms gives the oboe a melody to sing, in his Adagio. The Philharmonic's Sherry Sylar sang it ably. When it was Jansen's turn, she sang ably herself. This whole movement, shown to best effect, is enrapturing—and so it was from the forces onstage this evening.

In the final movement, the rondo, Jansen gave almost a definition of *con slancio*. She played with dash, flair, enthusiasm. There was some imperfect coordination between soloist and orchestra, but this mattered little. The coda began on little cat feet—it tingled with anticipatory excitement. Then it roared on big cat feet.

When the concerto was over, the entire orchestra, it seemed to me, clapped with their hands. I had never seen this. And seldom have I ever heard a violin-and-orchestra performance so good.

Two seasons ago, Janine Jansen played with Jean-Yves Thibaudet, the French pianist, in Carnegie Hall. Here in my chronicle, I used the P-word. "Ladies and gentlemen," I said, "the Debussy Sonata was perfect. . . . I'm sorry I missed Thibaud and Cortot (that famed duo from the first half of the twentieth century). But, honestly, I would not trade what I heard from Jansen and Thibaudet for any other pairing." In like fashion, I would not be eager to trade for another Brahms concerto. Sometimes, the good ol' days are now.

Having played a D-major concerto, Jansen played some D-minor Bach for an encore: the sarabande of the relevant partita. It had purity and soul, those Bach requirements.

This concert did not have an OOMP, i.e., an obligatory opening modern piece—but the second half opened with an entry in Project 19. Van Zweden, microphone in hand, talked to the audience. He said that the orchestra had enlisted the services of "nineteen phenomenal female composers." Phenomenal, every one of them? There is PR in music, even when conductors speak. The composer on this evening was Tania León, who also had a microphone in hand. I had seen her on New York stages before, speaking about her pieces. She is a lovely and gracious presence.

She also has a highly interesting biography. Ms. León was born in Havana in 1943. She was able to come to American shores as a refugee in 1967. In Cuba, she had earned bachelor's and master's degrees in music (plus a certification in accounting, by which I am especially impressed). In New York, she did it all over again—earning a bachelor's and a master's from NYU. In the mid-1990s, she had the position of "new-music adviser" at the Philharmonic.

Her entry for Project 19 is called *Stride*. As she explained to the audience, she was inspired by Susan B. Anthony, whose two hundredth birthday happens to be this year. León imagined her "striding forward," unstoppably. Of course, "stride" has a musical meaning too, as in "stride piano" (exemplified by James P. Johnson and Fats Waller, among others). Perhaps the composer had this in mind as well. She intends her piece to be a tribute to American music.

It is Bernsteinian in parts, reminiscent of *West Side Story*. Listening, I thought of the term "jazz-tinged modernism." There are clarinet licks and the like—riffing and noodling. There is also a great deal of percussion. Obviously, the piece is composed with fondness. Fondness counts for a lot, and so does sincerity. But did *Stride* seem long to me? I'm afraid it did, as my regular readers would expect.

In our program notes, there was a marvelous anecdote, told by Tania León.

> When I came here, the only composers I knew anything about were Leonard Bernstein and George Gershwin. . . . The night I arrived at Kennedy, I was picked up by a Cuban couple from the Bronx, who allowed me to stay on their sofa. I looked at the stairs outside of their building, and I started crying "Maria!" They were confused, and I explained that in Cuba I'd heard the song by Bernstein.

This concert by the Philharmonic ended with Richard Strauss, namely the *Rosenkavalier* Suite. How do you want it? Stylish, sexy, strange, virtuosic, Viennesey—thrilling. It was. Yes, the good ol' days are now, and I hope Jaap van Zweden stays for a bit.

Sir John Eliot Gardiner is one of the outstanding musicians of the world. Like Tania León, he was born in 1943. Known for the Baroque—and Bach in particular—he is a conductor for all

seasons, or most seasons. Sir John is a combination of English scholarship and musical vitality. (The second is rarer than the first, I would say.) He is also an institution-builder—founding the Monteverdi Choir, the English Baroque Soloists, and the Orchestre Révolutionnaire et Romantique. Why he gave this third group a French name, I don't know.

With this very ORR, Sir John conducted the nine Beethoven symphonies in Carnegie Hall. We are in a "Beethoven year," as the composer was born 250 years ago. Isn't every year a Beethoven year? Yes, but the music world is addicted to anniversaries. I looked greatly forward to the concert I was attending. It would present the Fourth and Fifth symphonies.

The Fourth began in frightful fashion—with a botched entrance. The orchestra was not a model of precision in subsequent measures either. This surprised me, because Sir John is a disciplinarian. Worse, this opening Adagio lacked tension. The transition to the fast part of the first movement (Allegro vivace) is one of the great moments in music: Beethoven breaks out into mirth and smiles. The transition was nothing special on this occasion. And that "happy" music sounded more angry than happy, frankly.

In the second movement, I wanted to ask for more beauty. There was whininess from the winds. The ORR sounded all too period-bandy, if I may put it that way. But the principal clarinet contributed some first-class playing. As for the third movement, it was nicely accented, although you have heard more incisive. And the fourth movement, I'm glad to report, was Gardiner-like. It had his vitality and musicality, and Beethoven's as well.

At intermission, I thought of a phrase—a lyric, I thought: "no better than okay." In my judgment, the Fourth, overall, had been no better than okay. The lyric I was thinking of is from *West Side Story*, and I got the wording a little wrong: "no better than all right," Mr. Sondheim wrote (because he had to rhyme with "tonight").

How about the Fifth? Better than okay, better than all right? Yes, I suppose. I will provide just a few details. From the beginning, the string players stood. (I mean, all who could, which would except the cellos.) I had not seen this since Teodor Currentzis's band, from Russia. In the final movement, everyone stood. (Again, all who could.) I thought this was slightly stunt-like, but it was kind of nice, regardless.

In the second movement, the woodwinds as a group were shaky. And the third movement was so fast, I thought it was somewhat graceless. The finale, for me, did not have its pomp and majesty. It did have some scary horn glitches. Did I hear singing, from this orchestra? I mean, real singing, from throats? I believe I did, yes, for a spell.

I can tell you, with confidence, that the audience adored this Fifth. They cheered for Sir John and the ORR as though for rock stars. Your critic was crabby. Concert life, like so much of life, is an expectations game. I have sky-high expectations for Sir John; I know the heights he can reach. At any rate, it was thrilling to hear the Fifth (whatever one thought of the performance). "The thing about Shakespeare," said Robert Graves, "is that he really is good." Likewise, the Fifth is famous for a reason. There is no better piece of music, and not many as good.

Eric Simpson is an alumnus of *The New Criterion*. He was an editor of these pages for five years. He is a man of parts: a writer and editor, of course; a music critic, specifically; a classics scholar; an actor; and a violinist. At a church—St. John's in the Village—he gave a recital, unaccompanied. The program consisted of two Bach partitas and two sonatas of Ysaÿe. One of the partitas was the D-minor, from which Janine Jansen played the sarabande, and which ends in the monumental, transcendent Chaconne. For dessert—for an encore—Eric played Heinrich Wilhelm Ernst's *Last Rose of Summer* variations, a fiendish exercise. A critic does not review friends, of course. But I will not refrain from saying that Eric played with understanding, agility, and heart. He held the room in his hand. We were all rapt. (Let me add that the guy's program notes were perfectly—perfectly—written.)

I would not have thought that I could be more impressed by my multi-talented friend. But, as I left the church, I was.

The media

Incredible times

by James Bowman

It was very far from being the first time that I had nearly suffered a whiplash injury from reading a *New York Times* headline early in the morning. "Trump Has a Problem as the Coronavirus Threatens the U.S.: His Credibility." So read the big type at the head of the paper's big story on the morning after the President had sought to reassure the nation about the likely severity and extent of the outbreak. His *credibility*? What about the *Times*'s credibility? Was there no one up or down the editorial chain of command capable of seeing that headline in the context of two-and-a-half years of relentless media attacks on the President over allegations of Russian "collusion" that, as a matter of fact, never happened? Who was *The New York Times* to question anybody's credibility, let alone that of someone who had proven, in this not-insignificant instance, to have been a lot more credible than it had been? How can all this, less than a year after the disappointment of the Mueller report, be so completely forgotten?

But the world begins anew each morning at 242 West Forty-first Street, and the denizens of the paper's plush headquarters there must expect it to do the same at breakfast tables from the mountains to the prairies to the oceans white with foam. Now, according to Annie Kami, Michael Crowley, and Maggie Haberman, writing for the *Times*, it seems that the loss of Mr. Trump's credibility dates only from last September (just at the time, coincidentally, when the media had finally given up on their hopes of Mr. Mueller) and the approach of Hurricane Dorian to the East Coast, after its devastation of the Bahamas:

> President Trump assumed a take-charge role in response. But he undermined his own effectiveness after it became apparent that before displaying a map in front of the television cameras in the Oval Office, he had altered it with a Sharpie pen to match his inaccurate forecast of where the storm was headed. For years, experts have warned that Mr. Trump has been squandering the credibility he could need in a moment of national emergency, like a terrorist attack or a public health crisis.

No, that's not quite what the "experts" have been warning, at least not the ones whose opinions have been routinely cited in the same newspaper. I think if there had been such a warning—temperate, wise, full of concern both for the country and for the success of Mr. Trump's presidency—I would have remembered it, if only because it would have been so much at odds with the tone of all the other warnings that have appeared since August of 2016, when Jim Rutenberg laid down the new rules for the paper's relentlessly critical coverage of the presidential candidate Trump, as a "demagogue playing to the nation's worst racist and nationalistic tendencies." What stock of "credibility" could such a man as that ever have had to squander in the first place?

Only a few days earlier, the *Times* had given me another head-snapping moment when,

its slate wiped clean of the Mueller fiasco as if it had never been, it attempted to recur to the old theme of Russo-centric "meddling" to wreck "the integrity of our elections" by splashing that "Lawmakers Are Warned That Russia Is Meddling to Re-elect Trump." Had I slipped through a wormhole and woken up back in 2017? But because the briefing in question, by our impartial and non-partisan intelligence services, had taken place a week before and only now leaked out, there had been time for the *Times* to refresh the old narrative with some news: that the President had sacked his acting Director of National Intelligence for going first with this delicate intelligence to the congressional committee headed by Adam Schiff, and that he was complaining, accordingly, of Mr. Schiff's and the Democrats' "weaponizing" of the report against himself. As if they ever would!

This time around, however, there was a new twist to the Russian meddling story. Not only were those perfidious Russkies meddling on Mr. Trump's behalf, they were also meddling on that of none other than Bernie Sanders! With Bernie's long history of sympathy (to put it mildly) for the erstwhile Soviet Union, this report not only freshened up the old, old story but also must have given it a renewed credibility, at least among the Democratic establishment that remains almost as hostile to Mr. Sanders as it is to Mr. Trump. Yet there was nothing new about the "meddling" itself, which still consisted, so far as even our crack spy agencies could tell, of nothing more than Russian trolls posting pro-Trump messages on social media—except that this time they were also said to be posting pro-Bernie messages. If the "integrity of our elections" is so fragile as to be endangered by this kind of "disinformation"—as the media have lately got into the habit of calling anything they don't agree with—there can be no hope for it in any case. Yet the *Times*'s credibility in once again sounding the alarm is apparently to be considered still unsquandered—at least in the paper's own conceit.

Perhaps some sense of the threadbare quality of this shocking revelation contributed to the enthusiasm, and the haste, with which the media pounced on Mr. Trump's attempts to reassure the American people that there was no reason to panic about the COVID-19 virus as a further and presumably final discrediting of his whole presidency. Across the internet amateur meddlers of all nationalities were calling this Mr. Trump's "Katrina moment," while my old friend Ambrose Evans-Pritchard of the London *Daily Telegraph* was already upping the ante to say that "COVID-19 is more likely to be the Chernobyl moment for Donald Trump" than for China. Of course, he may be right, but neither he nor any other of the doom-mongers appear to have considered that such fears might be just a little premature. You could even say that they're not very credible.

For the media's track record of credibility on issues pertaining to Mr. Trump, as I have frequently noticed in this space, is not of the best. Their own shortage of credibility stems from the fact that Mr. Trump's lack of the same has all along been axiomatic with them, if only as the corollary of the supposed infallibility of the media's Trump-narrative which relies on it. They, of course, never mention this, but I would like to believe that most people outside the media bubble have no difficulty in supplying the necessary context of the dud scandals and outrages of the past three years to appraise any further attacks on the President's credibility—always supposing that such audiences are still paying attention to them, which is unlikely. After so many repeated efforts by the authors of this latest *New York Times* article and others like them to create a wave of moral revulsion against the President in order to drive him from office, who that is not already of one mind with them will see this latest such attempt as any different from all the others?

By the following day it was *The Washington Post* that had gone all-in to politicize the epidemic. Its angle on the biggest news story of the year was so dominated by its potential for political damage to Mr. Trump as to leave little or no room for any attention to the virus itself and those who were by then suffering from it. A quick look at a selection of headlines gleaned from the *Post*'s website on the Friday after the

President's address to the nation on Wednesday turned up the following:

> "Trump says he can bring in coronavirus experts quickly. The experts say it is not that simple"
>
> "Coronavirus pushes Trump to rely on experts he has long maligned"
>
> "Pence seizes control of coronavirus response amid criticism of his qualifications"
>
> "U.S. workers without protective gear assisted coronavirus evacuees, HHS whistleblower says"
>
> "The Trump administration's mixed messages are sowing coronavirus confusion"

The last of these heads an unsigned editorial under the rubric of "The Post's View"—though such a label can hardly be necessary given that it is also the view of nine out of ten of the paper's roster of opinion columnists and cartoonists. For example:

> Catherine Rampell: "With coronavirus, Trump's lies and his reassurances backfire"
>
> Jennifer Rubin: "Trump's news conference will likely intensify panic over coronavirus"
>
> Jennifer Rubin part deux: "Trump has no clue what to do in a disaster"
>
> Jennifer Rubin part trois: "It's the incompetence that may bring Trump down"
>
> Max Boot: "Coronavirus lays bare all the pathologies of the Trump administration"
>
> Alexandra Petri: "No matter what happens with the coronavirus, I'm sure Trump has it under control"
>
> Greg Sargent: "New coronavirus revelations make Trump's 'deep state' rage look worse"

In addition, we find David Ignatius helpfully advising on "How Trump can avoid being his own worst enemy on coronavirus," though without much hope that he will avoid it, while Greg Sargent, part deux, offers up the most spectacularly ironic failure of them all, opining that "Trump just pushed one of his worst conspiracy theories yet"—which "theory" turns out to be that his enemies in the media "are 'weaponizing' the outbreak against him." Now what, I wonder, could have given him that idea?

They were certainly weaponizing his entirely predictable response to the media's premature criticisms. Later that same day, the *Post*'s Anne Gearan, Seung Min Kim, and Erica Werner falsely reported that at a rally in South Carolina the President had said that the "coronavirus is the Democrats' 'new hoax,' likening it to the Russia investigation and the impeachment inquiry." Only someone so credulous as to have swallowed whole the media's line on Mr. Trump could possibly believe anything so preposterous, let alone report it and expect to be believed as the *Post* reporters apparently did. So also did the *Politico* reporters Nancy Cook and Matthew Choi ("Then Trump called the coronavirus 'their new hoax'"), and the charge was taken up uncritically by the confraternity of Trump-haters across the world, including his would-be Democratic rival Joe Biden ("Biden blasts Trump for calling coronavirus a 'hoax,'" headlined *Politico*). Mr. Biden, always a contender in the pot-and-kettle stakes, added: "Some of the stuff he says is so bizarre that you can laugh at it." I'd like to think that he was making a little joke there at his own expense, but I doubt that his limited stock of irony, like that of the media, is quite up to it.

Of course, the "hoax" referred to by the President was not the virus itself but the rush by the Democrats and the media to politicize (or "weaponize") it against himself. The *New York Times* report on the South Carolina speech, by Peter Baker and Annie Karni again, also suggested that that the "hoax" was the virus and not the politicization, but more ambiguously, by writing that Mr. Trump had "denounced Democrats, describing the concerns they have expressed about the virus as 'their new hoax' after the Russia investigation and then impeachment." Their "concerns" had

not been about the virus, however, nearly so much as they had been about Mr. Trump's capability to deal with it, an essential fact that the *Times* reporters left out. The next day the paper's editorialists were deploring that "a coming general election has politicized what should be a clear public health priority." Nothing to do with them, you see. It was the general election that did it.

Here and there an honorable leftie, like Will Saletan of Slate, took to Twitter to try to correct this media *topos*, writing that Mr. Trump "was saying the hoax is that he's handled it badly. Not the virus itself." But then he had to defend his Trump-hating *bona fides* on Twitter against an inundation of followers writing that he did too say that the virus was the hoax, or as good as. And anyway, as Mr. Saletan readily acknowledged, he is "a liar, a terrible president, and a terrible human being." If that's true, why do people like Mr. Saletan feel they have to keep saying it? Why does the *Post* jump at any pretext to announce further black marks against the President on the mere expectation of his failure to deal competently with the crisis? Wouldn't waiting until he actually does fail and then criticizing him for it add to the paper's credibility and forestall dismissal by Trump supporters, who can hardly be gainsaid for complaining that their newsroom never has a good word to say for him anyway?

The answer, I'm afraid, is that the editors and reporters at the *Post*, as elsewhere in the media, know that nothing they can say against Mr. Trump, no matter how far-fetched, will damage their credibility with the Trump-haters who, however many of them there be, are now virtually their only audience—just as anything they might say suggesting tolerance, forbearance, or generosity of spirit towards the elected president could only alienate that audience. One supposes that the *Post* is left with few regrets for the absence of former subscribers whose Trump-hatred is somewhat less than obsessive, but it's hard to see how even the remaining sufferers from Trump Derangement Syndrome don't weary of such terminal monotony. They can't all have the energy of Jennifer Rubin, who writes the same column in slightly different words every day of her life, if not oftener.

The threat from the coronavirus may indeed be much greater than Mr. Trump believes, but it is the credibility of the media in saying so, so soon, that has been lost—as much if not more than his own.

They have assumed not only their power but also their right to "cancel" those they dislike or disagree with—a power and a right which must both be immeasurably strengthened by their standing in immovable opposition to the unique awfulness of that "terrible human being" in the White House—and yet all their attempts to cancel him have so far failed. Or, as they perhaps see it, he has been canceled again and again, but he won't *stay* canceled. He's like one of those cunningly crafted movie monsters who can't be killed by any method known to science—at least not until someone accidentally stumbles on the silver bullet that will guarantee the inevitable happy ending. Increasingly frustrated by the continual deferral of that happy ending, they rush at every new prospective weapon as soon as it appears on the horizon, because their narrative tells them that sooner or later one of them must do the trick. Those of us who don't share their touchingly undiminished faith in the narrative aren't holding our breath.

Books

Peter Fleming's pathology

by D. J. Taylor

The funniest, and by some way most characteristic, story about Peter Fleming (1907–71) has our man turning up at the Garrick Club in central London sometime in the 1950s clad in full evening dress: white tie, tailcoat, and row of miniature medals. What was he doing togged up like that, an acquaintance duly inquired. "Got to help a friend give a hot meal to the Queen," the middle-aged exquisite calmly returned. In strict demographic terms, Fleming was an extreme version of a very common type of mid-twentieth-century upper-class Englishman, the type who takes one of the behavioral stanchions of his caste—in this case personal reserve—and converts it into a kind of supercharged variant of the original. To his membership of every top-grade national institution worth the name—Eton; Christ Church, Oxford; the Brigade of Guards; the Country Landowner's Association—could be added a taciturnity so paralyzing that even similarly buttoned-up *convives* reeled despairingly in its wake.

Anthony Powell, whose war-era novels Fleming read in proof to corroborate abstruse points of military detail, left a judicious paragraph or two in *Faces in My Time* (1980) about his friend's obsession with not being seen to "show off," a fixation so profound, Powell thought, that it might almost have been a form of ostentation in itself. The diary-compiling Powell of the later 1980s was a bit less charitable. "What a pompous ass Peter was, tho' I liked him." In a world of silent pipe-chewers, studious chit-chat avoiders, and solitary non-conversationalists, Fleming, it seems clear, was in a class of his own.

As you might imagine, the reek of class hangs heavy over any account of Peter's career. Though nothing could have been more aristocratic than the circumstances of his early life, the Flemings were essentially parvenus, one of those no-nonsense, go-getting Victorian families in which the grandfather makes the money, the son consolidates the social position, and the grandchildren strike out into newfangled cultural territory from which their forebears would have instantly recoiled. Robert Fleming was a self-made businessman from Dundee whose activities in the late-Victorian City of London were so successful that he was able to present his heir, Valentine, with the twenty-first birthday gift of a quarter of a million pounds. Val, a Tory MP and friend of Winston Churchill, died in the Great War (Churchill wrote an admiring *Times* obituary invoking the figurative spectacle of "a well-loved city whose lights, which burn so bright, which burn so true, are extinguished in the distance, one by one"), leaving four sons to be brought up by his rackety and flamboyant widow, Eve. In *Peter Fleming* (1974), the only full-length biography to date, Duff Hart-Davis preserves the polite fiction that Eve had adopted the baby girl named Amaryllis who arrived unexpectedly in the family in 1926, but the reality was that Mrs. Fleming had tumbled into bed with her serial portraitist Augustus John.

The fraternal quartet included Robert, who joined the family bank, Michael, who was to die in World War II, and Ian, who went on to write the James Bond books. Peter, the oldest, acquired fame as a traveler in exotic climes. *Bra-*

zilian Adventure (1933), *One's Company* (1934), which was an account of a trip to China, and *News from Tartary* (1936), the record of a seven-month forced march across Central Asia, were not only prodigious best-sellers but also managed to establish their author's reputation on cross-generational lines. If younger readers approved of the glamour and the modestly conveyed fortitude of his travelogues, then their parents relished the sense of a throwback to a bygone era: a straight-jawed, clean-living gentleman-explorer out of G. A. Henty or H. Rider Haggard. There is a faint echo of him in Powell's *What's Become of Waring* (1939) as the intrepid travel writer "T. T. Waring" ("He was compared with everyone who had ever written a successful travel book, Burton, Doughty, Hudson, and the rest of them"), although Waring, unlike Fleming, is exposed as a stay-at-home fraud. By 1938, married to the actress Celia Johnson—later to be nominated for an Oscar for her role in *Brief Encounter* (1946)—and hotly tipped as next-but-one editor of the *Times*, Fleming was installed in Merrimoles House on a two-thousand-acre estate in Oxfordshire given to him by his uncle Phil. As well as furnishing him with a home and the occupation of a country squire, the locale also gave him the chance to indulge the great hobby of his life. This, it seems fair to say, was killing things.

Even Alan Ogden's *Master of Deception*, a punctilious and notably well-researched account of Fleming's military career, can't quite ignore the altogether exceptional havoc that its subject wreaked on the fauna of the United Kingdom (and other places) during his five decades or so behind a rifle sight.[1] For all the talk of foreign travel, "it was the countryside of the British Isles with its many rural delights that continued to captivate him," Ogden writes,

> whether shooting pheasants at Merrimoles on misty late autumn days or grouse on Scottish hillsides in the height of summer. This was the landscape where he found the freedom he so loved, the land of the rook rifle, a place where nature held no truck with his pet hates of cant, red tape and hypocrisy.

Similarly, Hart-Davis's *Peter Fleming*, on one level a conventional enough literary biography, is, on another, simply a catalogue of carnage: the 547 pheasants, for example, that a team of seven guns (including King George VI) brought down at St Paul's Walden in November 1947, or the 1,400 birds dispatched in a pre-war shoot at Bromsden Farm. When the King died, in February 1952, Fleming's diary tribute was merely that of the admiring fellow hobbyist: "I think he was a very good, but probably not a great, shot. He absolutely loved shooting."

In fairness to Fleming, he was aware of what to anyone beyond the somewhat sequestered world of field sports might seem an incongruity: that a man who devotes large parts of his existence to conserving the countryside—no developer was allowed anywhere near the Nettlebed estate on which Merrimoles sat—and often talks with more enthusiasm about individual breeds of birds than his own closest friends (the "charming and mysterious" woodcock and so on) should spend so much of it slaughtering the non-human inhabitants. Hart-Davis quotes a paragraph from an unpublished essay that touches on this faint unease—it was never anything so definite as guilt—where Fleming notes that "the surroundings in which the hunter plays his part cannot alter the fact that his purpose is primitive and cruel; but they lend, as they have always lent, a redeeming touch of the aesthetic to a basically barbarous activity." That said, shooting may also have allowed him to satisfy one of his most basic requirements, which was the need for non-human companionship. As Hart-Davis remarks, he found it far easier to achieve satisfactory relationships with dogs: they were loyal and attentive and didn't answer back.

Fleming's war travels were every bit as far-flung and hair-raising as his pre-war tours of China. They began with a role in the disastrous Norway campaign of 1940: the dispatches he brought back are thought to have hastened Prime Minister Chamberlain's resignation. Significantly, Fleming disliked Chamberlain, whom

1 *Master of Deception: The Wartime Adventures of Peter Fleming*, by Alan Ogden; Bloomsbury Academic, 352 pages, $27.

he had met at a house party in the early months of the war, not only for his lackluster military strategy but also for being a feeble shot and not looking the part. ("He is slow and tends to let birds pass before him before he fires. He looks every inch the townsman in his rusty tweeds, handling his gun a trifle gawkishly.") Subsequently, he trained a team of guerrilla fighters in Kent with the aim of delaying a possible post-invasion Nazi advance. A visiting dignitary described the hollowed-out badger's sett beneath the forest floor that made do as an operational base as "pure *Boy's Own Paper* stuff." There were later missions to mainland Greece, Crete, Cairo, India, Burma, and China. While always happy to risk his neck at moments of crisis—he was lucky to escape when the ship in which he was retreating from Greece suffered a direct hit—Fleming made a speciality of intelligence work, specifically deception: the burned-out jeep with the bundle of forged plans in the front seat designed to frustrate the Japanese advance; the carefully abandoned haversack full of misleading information; the Women's Auxiliary Air Force member in the Allied Commander Lord Mountbatten's HQ in Ceylon instructed to write letters about spurious troop movements to a non-existent boyfriend in the hope that they would be steamed open by enemy agents.

As for the military environment that Fleming found himself in between his re-enlistment in the Grenadier Guards in 1939 and his eventual demobilization seven years later, it takes only a chapter of *Master of Deception* to establish that, if conducted at a stratospherically higher level, this was a version of Crouchback's war—as in the hero of Evelyn Waugh's *Sword of Honour* trilogy. The foreign trips invariably begin with sit-downs in gentlemen's clubs where the *vis-à-vis* is urged to "come to Norway," the officer's messes are full of people remembered from college or professional life, and scarcely a rock on the Cretan mountainside fails to conceal a chap one messed with at Eton. There is a literal connection, too, for in the Norwegian campaign Fleming served as aide-de-camp to the legendary one-eyed, one-armed, death-defying General Adrian Carton de Wiart, the model for Waugh's Brigadier Ben Ritchie-Hook, who returns from a raid on the African coast with a sentry's severed head. Here the real-life de Wiart confines himself to marching off with unimaginable *sangfroid* through a village being obliterated by Heinkel bombers in search of rations. "Better get rid of those egg-shells," he instructs Fleming on his return; "Don't want the place in a mess."

Fleming admired de Wiart, whose biography he mysteriously failed to complete, and was admired by him in return. Meanwhile, Ogden's account of Fleming's time in Greece emphasizes just how closely he and his fellow soldiers share some of the attitudes quietly on display in *Men at Arms*, *Officers and Gentlemen*, and *Unconditional Surrender*. There is, for example, the undisguised contempt for foreigners. General de Wiart complains of "Damn Frogs—they're all the same. One bang and they're off." "The retreat of the Greek Army was greatly retarded by the universal custom of jumping out of your lorry and running 300 yards if you or one of your friends heard an aeroplane," Fleming adds to the charge sheet. Like Waugh, he is no fan of the Royal Air Force, routinely describing its representatives as "mongrels" and remarking of the RAF men attached to the party during the retreat from Greece that "they all flap and gas and give a sorry exhibition." As for our allies in the Far East, South West Pacific Command offered a nasty shock:

> It was purely American. Such diplomatic qualities as broadminded and urban outlook, tolerance and sense of compromise are rare outside a few carefully selected and highly trained public servants and statesmen. Military commanders and staff officers are in general somewhat nationalistic, narrow and bigoted.

And, the implication goes, not gentlemen.

On his demob from the army, Fleming declined the offer of a safe Conservative seat in parliament, detached himself from the *Times* hierarchy, and spent the last quarter century of his life managing his estate and, after a slow start, writing best-selling works of popular history. It was almost as if a part of him realized that the world he had strode through so blithely in the 1930s was dead. "You're the flower of England's youth," one of Crouchback's friends

observes in *Men at Arms*, "and it just won't do." Come the 1960s the books dried up and the silences grew louder. According to Hart-Davis, who as Fleming's godson had plenty of opportunities to observe him in action, visitors to Merrimoles "could not help noticing how the house appeared to be inhabited by a collection of total strangers who scarcely spoke to each other." While it confines itself to the war years, with several diversions into wider military strategy, *Master of Deception* is, like *Peter Fleming* before it, a study in pathology.

The business of history

D. W. Hayton
Conservative Revolutionary:
The Lives of Lewis Namier.
Manchester University Press,
472 pages, $37.50

reviewed by Mark Falcoff

A half century ago students at American and British universities were well acquainted with the work of Lewis Namier, since two of his books—*The Structure of Politics at the Accession of George III* (1929) and its sequel, *England in the Age of the American Revolution* (1930)—were indispensable primers in how to study history, illuminating the crucial role of elites in shaping events. To say that nowadays his works are out of fashion is a drastic understatement; we are now told that the really important players in the past were "marginalized peoples"—racial minorities, women, illiterate laborers, and so forth. Why, then, a biography of a historian, and a major one at that, widely regarded as passé? The answer is that the man himself was every bit as interesting as his works. His life sheds much light not only on British academic life but also on high politics in Europe, where he occasionally played a crucial role behind the scenes.

Born Ludwik Bernstein Niemirowski in 1888 in Galicia, the most ethnically diverse province of the Austro-Hungarian empire, the historian was the son of a manorial landowner. An accident of geography meant that he was fluent in Polish, Czech, and German, adding later French, English, and, thanks to two subsequent marriages, Russian as well. Educated at first in Lemburg (Lviv) and subsequently at Lausanne, he immigrated to England in 1907 and enrolled at the London School of Economics. The following year he entered Balliol College, Oxford, where Arnold Toynbee and A. J. P. Taylor were fellow students. Around this time he changed his name in an attempt to make it sound more English. He became a naturalized British subject in 1913.

In spite of distinguished academic work, he did not upon graduation win a fellowship to All Souls, possibly because of anti-Semitism, and instead took a job with a publishing company in New York, returning to England to enlist at the outbreak of the First World War. He was discharged the following year to work in the newly formed War Propaganda Bureau, where his linguistic competence attracted the attention of British authorities. He was in Paris during the drafting of the Treaty of Versailles, where he later claimed partial responsibility for the breakup of the Austro-Hungarian Empire.

Following the war, having failed to find an academic job, he became a foreign correspondent based in Prague and Vienna for the *Manchester Guardian*. Returning to London in 1925, he survived by cobbling together occasional writing assignments, a grant from the Rhodes Trust, and financial assistance from Jewish philanthropists in the United States. About this time he began to work with the Zionist movement, which then envisioned Palestine becoming a dominion of the British Empire.

Balancing all of these jobs, he somehow found time to produce his two groundbreaking historical works. Their aim was "to understand the political culture of the English governing class," or, as he called it, the "political nation." These books were an early attempt to apply sociological categories to historical study, and they also benefited from Namier's industrious cultivation of grand British families, who still held much of the crucial documentation privately. As D. W. Hayton writes in his new biography of Namier, "it was the quality of Namier's evidence and the way it was deployed that most impressed reviewers:

the dense texture of detail, the extraordinary mastery of a whole range of new, or at least unfamiliar sources." In the process Namier was able "to conjure up the reality of the past." In spite of this, there was no academic preferment offered; once again he was rejected for a fellowship at All Souls. Between 1928 and 1931, he made do by working as a secretary of a Zionist organization. Finally, in 1932 he was offered a professorship at the University of Manchester. (Hayton's account of the politics involved in this appointment will seem painfully familiar to anyone who has ever served on an academic search committee.)

To say that Namier had no interest in Manchester as a place is putting it mildly. He spent as little time there as possible, keeping a flat in London and commuting by rail for two or three days a week. Though proposed for Regius chairs at both Cambridge and Oxford, he was rejected for both, quite possibly because of his acerbic published critiques of the work of other historians, or his lack of social skills, or maybe both. Even so, in 1944 he was elected to the British Academy and received honorary degrees from Cambridge, Durham, Oxford, and Rome. He was knighted in 1952.

In the survey of his subject's various hobbyhorses, Professor Hayton—through no fault of his own—leaves us a bit confused. "Namier's character was an assortment of contradictory impulses," he writes:

> He was a pan-Slavist who idealized the integrity of the Russian and Ukrainian peasantry while at the same time despising their philistinism and their inefficient agriculture. He denounced nationalism as a disruptive and dangerous force in Poland, yet consistently espoused the rights of the Czechs to self-determination.

He regarded religion as the prime marker of national identity and was an ardent Zionist who nonetheless converted to the Anglican faith late in life. He also shifted ideological boundaries towards the end, opposing African independence and favoring what today we would call ethnic cleansing in Palestine. The one obsession which never left him was the notion of Germany and Germans.

What strikes the reader about the subject of this dense and well-documented biography is how a man without any of the appropriate antecedents to get on in British society managed, in spite of social prejudices and his own occasional tactlessness, to achieve so much under difficult financial and personal circumstances. This was long before foundation grants and well-funded research institutes. Much of Namier's work was done on the fly while balancing family and financial obligations, although reading his books one would never guess as much.

State of play

Robert Spencer
The Palestinian Delusion:
The Catastrophic History of the
Middle East Peace Process.
Bombardier Books, 304 pages, $28

reviewed by David Pryce-Jones

The Palestinian Delusion is a discussion of one of the more troubling issues of international politics, and that is the refusal of the Palestinians to make peace with Israel. Two relatively small populations are at different stages of nation-building, and they quarrel over territory and sovereignty, the factors on which their futures depend.

European nations have long been accustomed to a procedure for settling contested territories and sovereignties. Warfare is of course a human failure, but, fairly or unfairly, it may bring about the end of a dispute. Victor and vanquished then meet in some neutral city, each party proposing rewards and punishments to the other in pursuit of their interests. A stark example would be the willingness of the French government to assent to the Germans occupying the country after the national collapse of 1940.

Ahead for the time being in the process of nation-building, Israel has had its way on the battlefield. Following European precedent, Israel has then met Palestinian spokesmen in places of good will such as Camp David

and Oslo. On one occasion after another, the state of Israel since its foundation has made six separate proposals for settling territory and sovereignty, all of which have been rejected. In this respect, President Trump's recently touted "deal of the century" is merely a repeat. The Palestinians have made no counter-proposals.

There is an obvious bargain that would lay to rest this whole long-running drama. Israelis are in a position to give land to the Palestinians, and the Palestinians are in a position to give peace to the Israelis. Robert Spencer makes the forceful point that the bargain always fails to materialize because land is tangible, a real asset, whereas peace is abstract, a matter of promises that might or might not be kept. Trust is impossible when there are no means of guaranteeing the delivery of peace and also no means of holding back those who prefer war. The passing of time has therefore left the asset of land in Israeli hands. Palestinians are right to protest that each Israeli proposal for partition diminishes what remains to be handed over, but the Palestinians themselves are to blame for this because they keep on ensuring that they are losers. The parties then charge one another with bad faith and prepare for the next round. The repetition is exhausting and damaging. If this continues, a day appears to be arriving when the Palestinians will have nothing more to lose. Militant Palestinians evidently convince themselves that war serves their purpose. Motivated by the anti-imperial spirit spreading throughout the Middle East, they mislead whole generations by promoting a false stereotype of Israelis as settlers and colonizers without ties to the country and therefore bound to run away from it as soon as they face resistance.

After a careful study of the sources, Spencer makes the case that the Palestinians live with cultural and religious values that are incompatible with those of the West. In his view, the Koran and the supporting commentaries known as the Hadith are instruments which deliberately generate hatred of Jews. He writes for instance, "There is a strong native strain of anti-Semitism in Islam, rooted in the Qur'an." Or again: "The Qur'an puts forward a clear, consistent image of the Jews: they are scheming, treacherous liars and the most dangerous enemies of the Muslims." Educated imams preach with conviction that Jews are descendants of apes and pigs. To a committed Muslim, bargaining about territory and sovereignty would be a sinful surrender in the devotional and eschatological struggle against great spiritual enemies. Islamic theology and law make it unmistakably clear that the proper response of Muslims to Jews is jihad, the term for war against unbelievers. Nothing else will do. The exhortation to kill Jews occurs three times in the Koran.

Islamic society furthermore has a secular values system that locks behavior in so tightly that reform is impossible. The high and mighty in Palestine, as well as the poor and humble, have to act in ways that gain honor and avoid whatever might bring shame down on them. That is how all-important public opinion is determined. Repeated defeat at the hands of the despised Jews is a shame so absolute that only military success is able to wipe it away. Supremacy is the desired end. In the circumstances, bargaining is out of the question. Any Palestinian who conducted himself according to the Israeli value system of compromise would become a self-declared loser, disgraced and humiliated by the shame of it and immediately rejected by his society. Any normalization of the relationship with Israel is considered a crime. In his day, Yasser Arafat exploited peacemaking as an opportunity to deceive. The assassinations of King Abdullah I of Jordan and President Anwar Sadat of Egypt serve as a warning to anyone tempted to act outside the traditional values system.

Madness, we have been told by some wise fellow, consists in doing the same thing over and over again in the expectation of getting a different outcome. Spencer rightly deplores the Islamic prejudices that he describes. But outsiders have no means of knowing if Muslims secretly repudiate jihad and would make the same sacrifices for peace as Israelis but are too intimidated to say so aloud. The real moral of this polemic is that those with responsibility for the good order of the world give priority to Islamic codes of behavior, and this doesn't work out.

Playing by the rules

Nadia E. Nedzel & Nicholas Capaldi
The Anglo-American Conception of the Rule of Law.
Palgrave Macmillan, 297 pages, $119.99

reviewed by Timothy Fuller

The status of the liberal tradition has occasioned much heated controversy of late, including the accusation that it has failed—that its very success is its nemesis. But the liberal tradition, like any living tradition, comprises a wide range of elements, and attempts to define it in the service of an argument—in support or in opposition—risk oversimplification. Nadia E. Nedzel (Southern University Law Center) and Nicholas Capaldi (College of Business, Loyola University New Orleans) avoid such abstract definitions. They focus specifically on the "rule of law" as a cultural practice in the Anglo-American tradition, and as a great achievement in modern politics.

Any comprehensive treatment of the liberal tradition must include certain features, such as individual liberty, limited government, the rule of law, and the historic transformation in the Western world from political orders based on command and obedience to those based on authority and acknowledgment, which is to say, government based on consent. This book offers a detailed exposition of the idea of the rule of law as it emerges in Anglo-American history, and as it appears in the living practice of the English-speaking world. The role of law, they say, "is to define the rules that enable individuals, who have their own ends and commitments, to live in peace and voluntary cooperation with their fellows." They elaborate on this basic idea to illustrate what the rule of law can mean in observable, concrete circumstances.

Nedzel and Capaldi argue that the idea of the rule of law has been indispensable to the promotion of human freedom. They describe in detail what the rule of law has actually meant in the practices of Anglo-American society. Against this, the authors also describe the modern legal theories that are fundamentally threatening individual liberty.

Nedzel and Capaldi oppose what they call "social technology," the sort of social engineering expounded, for instance, by Woodrow Wilson in his 1913 work, *The New Freedom*, which specifically adopted the metaphor of engineering or re-engineering the social order to achieve the orderliness of a "beehive."

Legal positivists like H. L. A. Hart and Hans Kelsen (among the numerous objects of criticism here) were a good deal more subtle than that, and John Rawls, also a target, was more restrained (he did say the first principle is liberty). Our authors, however, think that these and other leading legal theorists see the concept of freedom as participation in a highly integrated social organization requiring the aggregation of governmental power to implement putatively scientific designs. They distinguish between "rule of law"—promoting individual freedom as self-regulation—and "rule through law," which emphasizes "community" and is characteristic of Continental legal theory.

Central to their argument are the works of Friedrich Hayek and Michael Oakeshott. Hayek, defending the idea of the rule of law, expressed concern that the old constitutional structure of separation of powers had failed to contain the growth of minute bureaucratic regulation through administrative law that contradicts the traditional understanding of the rule of law. "Rule through law" has worked its way into the Anglo-American tradition. The authors, in turn, offer extensive commentaries in defense of a crucial aspect of our tradition against a conspicuous intrusion into that tradition. They argue that though the rule through law has become familiar, it is foreign to our tradition.

Oakeshott described the tension between a skeptical attitude towards government as a "necessary evil," on one side, and the desire, on the other, to escape the "ordeal of consciousness"—a longing to transfer responsibility for oneself to leaders armed with blueprints for a fully integrated order. Along with Hayek and Oakeshott, our authors name A. V. Dicey (the distinguished British jurist), Bruno Leoni (the Italian philosopher of classical liberal thought), and Lon Fuller (the noted legal philosopher at Harvard who offers a natural law critique of legal positivism)

as central to their argument that politics cannot be reduced to a science, in the development of which they launch a broad critique of many if not most of the prominent schools of philosophy of the last two centuries.

If individual liberty and the rule of law belong together, resistance to much of the "Enlightenment project" is of central importance. Of course, there is an Enlightenment tradition in England, Scotland, and America. "Enlightenment" itself is part of the liberal tradition, and the rule of law itself has a part in the Enlightenment. Nedzel and Capaldi express an either/or position—there is good and bad Enlightenment—which acknowledges the tension or ambivalence inherent to modernity while posing a moral choice we must make. The strength of their argument is to clarify exactly why we suffer the ambivalences we do. Theirs is a profoundly learned but also unfaltering polemic against the persistent strength of the "rule through law" alternative.

Central to their argument is an exposition and defense of "spontaneous order," a concept also central to Hayek. Basically, "spontaneous order" refers to the capacity of individuals without central direction to work out among themselves over time a more or less coherent pattern of interactions, both political and economic, through trial and error. In this view, human beings want to enjoy peaceful, voluntary interactions and can work out ways to achieve this. Government and law can support and referee this process, but must not control and design it. People committed to the rule of law want limited, not omnicompetent, government.

Social practices emerge independently of central direction and are resistant to utopian plans to "perfect" society:

> Cultures are the institutionalized background in which what we as social agents do is embedded. The glue that holds it together, that makes communication possible, that preserves it from constant breakdown is the grounding in social practice.

This achievement is most clearly instantiated in the English legal tradition. The authors avoid speaking in prescriptive, universal terms—doing so would abridge and abstract what is in reality a long and complex heritage. Our authors oppose "the highest echelons of the intellectual world . . . controlled by a combination of the presuppositions of objectivity, monism, realism, and utopianism, all vouchsafed by various permutations of scientism."

Whether this wholesale rejection of much of modern intellectual life passes too easily over all these different schools of thought is a question that will naturally occur to readers. Indeed, the authors' critique extends back to Plato, and it follows with a sketch of many canonical figures of the Western philosophic tradition. A significant part of the book is a "syllabus of errors," as if a great deal of Western philosophy has been mistaken. The status of philosophy, they insist, is limited to explicating practices which always precede theory. But a more precise distinction between "philosophy" and "theory" (by which they seem to mean "ideology") is needed.

Next we find a summation of the central features of the "English legal inheritance" and a historical sketch of the development of English common law with reference to England's major legal thinkers from the Middle Ages to the twentieth century. Nedzel and Capaldi offer a detailed chapter on Dicey, whom they show to have described in detail the character of the English legal tradition. At this point, they see that their argument suggests that this tradition is exceptional—apart from and perhaps superior to others. But could ours be the only tradition through which freedom is truly understood? Along this byway of academic blasphemy the authors tread carefully, saying, "our intention is to defend and preserve a rare and precious inheritance." At the same time, they hold up the English tradition as a model which—indirectly, at least—might inspire other cultures to move in the right direction. The tension between defending our particular tradition and elevating it to universal significance shows itself. Their skepticism restrains them from advocating the latter, but the spirit of their argument tempts them in that direction.

There follow accounts of the "vanishing" of the rule of law in our time and its rediscovery

in the work of such thinkers as Fuller and, of course, Oakeshott and Hayek, who are the threads that guide us through the labyrinth of modern legal thought from beginning to end. A final chapter offers a carefully considered, comprehensive guide to the whole of Oakeshott's philosophical oeuvre.

For those deeply versed in the history of legal philosophy, there will be much in this book that is familiar, though it is expressed in an original and intentionally provocative, uncompromising way. The authors' arguments will arouse sharp responses. For those less steeped in the intricacies of the Western legal tradition, the authors regularly provide summary background information. Especially for the latter readers, the discussion of "spontaneous order" is most useful—the idea is not easy to express (and is often caricatured in ordinary political debate). Ultimately, we want clarification of what it means to be free. Nedzel and Capaldi offer a powerful declaration of what freedom means in the context of the many competing ideas that surround us today. This work is a welcome entrant into the debate over our current and future prospects.

A sentiment of beings

Adam Nicolson
The Making of Poetry:
Coleridge, the Wordsworths,
and Their Year of Marvels.
Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 448 pages, $35

reviewed by Robert S. Erickson

A compelling portrait of William Wordsworth and Samuel Taylor Coleridge emerges from Adam Nicolson's *The Making of Poetry: Coleridge, the Wordsworths, and Their Year of Marvels*. To be more precise, the poets themselves emerged from that year in the Quantock Hills, Somerset, July 1797–June 1798, with something they did not have before: two unmistakable and distinct imprints of genius.

Nicolson presents his case in naked terms: the year "has a claim to being the most famous moment in the history of English poetry." Rather than pursue a strictly academic study, he embedded himself for a year in the selfsame Quantocks, to observe the landscape in which each of Wordsworth and Coleridge asserted his own poetic voice. Month by month, even day by day, Nicolson sets the conversations had and poems written against the backdrop of the changing seasons. The result is a half-step toward Wordsworth's advice to a young William Hazlitt:

> Books! 'tis a dull and endless strife:
> Come, hear the woodland linnet,
> How sweet his music! on my life,
> There's more of wisdom in it.

It was a year of walking. In June 1797, Coleridge was marching across the English countryside at a prodigious pace, headed to Racedown, Dorset, to meet Wordsworth and his sister, Dorothy. Coleridge would confess that, on the open road,

> my spirit courses, drives, and eddies, like a Leaf in Autumn; a wild activity . . . rises up from within me. . . . Life seems to me then a universal spirit, that neither has, nor can have, an opposite.

Chattering incessantly, he could scarcely keep to a straight path and careened into nearby companions. Compare that with the stately walk of Wordsworth, always dressed to the nines, never deviating from his line. Dorothy was known to trail a few steps behind, picking up fallen scraps of paper on which he had scribbled bits of verse.

By July, Coleridge had brought the Wordsworths to his home in Nether Stowey, Somerset, and helped them find living arrangements at nearby Alfoxden. The three took regular evening walks into the Quantocks, as Nicolson describes,

> up from the settlements of the valley, through the combes and the oakwoods, on to the sunlit widths of the wide-ranging tops and then back down again, back into the rowan and oakwood, as if into a bath of shade.

The landscape, particularly at dusk, has a saturated, almost plastic quality, ripe for the imagination. Not majestic, but variegated and subtle. The two poets were avid readers of both Milton and Burke, for whom the sublime was a ma-

jor theme. As summer moved to fall and then winter, Coleridge imbued some of his masterstrokes from the year—"Kubla Khan," *The Rime of the Ancient Mariner*, and "Christabel"—with just such an atmosphere. Wordsworth, we understand, internalized that liminal anxiety, and his powers for the time lay gestating, as it were.

Left at home for these walks was Coleridge's wife, Sara. One wonders how Dorothy, whose acute observations left an impression on both men, was able to play such a prominent role in their poetic lives while Sara was almost entirely absent. Still, William was guilty of escapism of a different order. At the end of his travels in France amid the early days of the Revolution, he had abandoned his would-be wife and soon-to-be-born child, Annette and Caroline Vallon.

But the specter of insurgency was not so far off. The cast of characters cycling through Nether Stowey was enough to attract the attention of Whitehall authorities 150 miles away: Thomas Poole, a radical community-organizer type; the unstable Charles Lamb; John Thelwall, the notorious rabble-rouser; Wordsworth's and Coleridge's publisher, John Cottle; and others. They stayed with Coleridge. Wordsworth, at a remove in Alfoxden, had so little interaction with the townspeople that he was briefly thought to have been a French-born agent of insurrection.

In evidence are the journals of the Reverend William Holland, the vicar of Over Stowey and avowed enemy of democrats:

> Saw that Democratic hoyden Mrs. Coleridge, who looked so like a frisky girl or something worse that I was not surprised that a Democratic libertine should choose her for a wife. The husband gone to London suddenly—no one here can tell why.

Nicolson is a thoughtful reader of Coleridge's and Wordsworth's poetry, at his best when identifying cross-pollination between the two poets' thought. He detects a Wordsworthian note in the "ordaining, decreeing, defining, lordly presence" of the eponymous subject of "Kubla Khan," composed in the fall of 1797. That November, the two agreed to write a prose epic centered on Cain in exile, but once Coleridge had composed (poorly) one of the three sections, Wordsworth reneged, hesitant "to pour himself into a Coleridge-shaped mould," in Nicolson's words. Wordsworth similarly hemmed and hawed over *The Rime of the Ancient Mariner*, whose plan he helped conceive but which Coleridge would complete alone. Meanwhile, privately, Wordsworth that winter was attaining a new degree of poetic fluency, scribbling the first few inklings of what would become *The Prelude*. In the spring months of 1798, Coleridge produced "Christabel" and "The Nightingale," but, self-knowing as if woken from a slumber, Wordsworth was composing one after another the poems that would comprise the majority of the Lyrical Ballads: "The Thorn," "The Idiot Boy," and many others. It was hard for Coleridge not to feel overwhelmed.

In late June the Wordsworths left Alfoxden. Walking through the Wye Valley in July, William produced his "Lines Composed a Few Miles above Tintern Abbey." Come September, after the haphazard and anonymous publication of *Lyrical Ballads, with a Few Other Poems*—the record of the year in the Quantocks, and the seminal text in English Romanticism—the trio, again leaving Sara behind, set sail for Germany. They would separate before long.

Near the end of his study, Nicolson writes of Wordsworth's "The Thorn":

> The poem is the archetypal Lyrical Ballad, fringing at its edges into the beautiful and the troubling, but also into the ridiculous, repetitive and loquacious . . . cultivating atmosphere and doubt in the destabilizing context of an over-chatty and gullible narrator. Some truth may lurk here, but in a mist.

The same charges may be fairly leveled against Nicolson. His prose is tirelessly asyndetonic. He dips too often into the superlative, like an "over-chatty and gullible narrator." He unspools winding and prodigal lines of thought. He is, in short, a Romantic. Anyone with a distaste for his kind is unlikely to enjoy this book. But as a practical matter, if Nicolson were not so, he would not have undertaken the project in the first place. He certainly would not have rendered it so vividly, abetted by the inclusion of Tom Hammick's delightful woodcut prints. This study is filled with "the sentiment of being, spread/ O'er all that moves, and all that seemeth still."