

The New Criterion

January 2023

A monthly review *edited by Roger Kimball*

Notes & Comments, 1

Military history *by Victor Davis Hanson*, 4

Federal foes *by Glenn Ellmers*, 13

Dostoevsky's realism *by Jacob Howland*, 19

The House of Morgenthau *by Myron Magnet*, 25

New poems *by Brian Brodeur*, 35

Letter from Florence *by Marco Grassi*, 38; **Letter from Fontevraud**

by Sean McGlynn, 41; **Reflections** *by Anthony Daniels*, 44; **Theater** *by Kyle*

Smith, 49; **Art** *by James Panero, Franklin Einspruch & Mario Naves*, 53;

Music *by Jay Nordlinger*, 59; **The media** *by James Bowman*, 63

Books: *Rosemarie Bodenheimer Samuel Beckett & Philip Davis William*

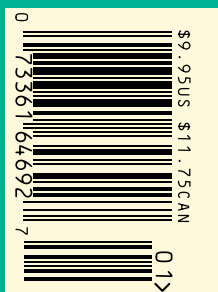
James reviewed by Paul Dean, 67; *Tim Cornwell, editor A private spy reviewed*

by David Pryce-Jones, 70; *Giles Tremlett España reviewed by Gerald Frost*, 72;

Jonathan Parry Promised lands reviewed by Jeremy Black, 74; *Katharina Volk*

The Roman republic of letters reviewed by Michael Fontaine, 75;

Notebook: *Paeans to the potables by R. Eric Tippin*, 78



Volume 41, Number 5, \$9.95 / £9.50

The New Criterion *January 2023*

Editor & Publisher *Roger Kimball*

Executive Editor *James Panero*

Managing Editor *Benjamin Riley*

Associate Editors *Robert S. Erickson & Isaac Sligh*

Poetry Editor *Adam Kirsch*

Visiting Critics *Victor Davis Hanson & Joshua T. Katz*

Hilton Kramer Fellow *John M. Wisdom*

Office Manager *Caetlynn Booth*

Assistant to the Editors *Jayne Allison*

Editorial Intern *Luke Lyman*

Founding Editor *Hilton Kramer*

Founding Publisher *Samuel Lipman*

Contributors to this issue

Jeremy Black is the author of *The Geographies of War* (Pen and Sword Military).

James Bowman is a Resident Scholar at the Ethics and Public Policy Center and the author of *Honor: A History* (Encounter).

Brian Brodeur is the author of four poetry books, most recently *Some Problems with Autobiography*, winner of the 2022 New Criterion Poetry Prize.

Anthony Daniels is a contributing editor at *City Journal*.

Paul Dean is a freelance critic living in Oxford, U.K.

Franklin Einspruch is an artist in New Hampshire. He is the editor of *Aphorisms for Artists: 100 Ways Toward Better Art* by Walter Darby Bannard (Letter16 Press).

Glenn Ellmers is the author of *The Soul of Politics: Harry V. Jaffa and the Fight for America* (Encounter).

Michael Fontaine teaches Latin at Cornell University.

Gerald Frost is a London-based author and journalist.

Marco Grassi is a private paintings conservator and dealer in New York.

Jacob Howland is Chief Academic Officer and Director of the Intellectual Foundations Program at UATX.

Myron Magnet, a National Humanities Medalist, was the 2020–21 Visiting Critic at *The New Criterion*. His latest book is *Clarence Thomas and the Lost Constitution* (Encounter).

Sean McGlynn teaches history at the University of Plymouth at Strode College.

Mario Naves is an artist, critic, and teacher who lives in New York City.

Jay Nordlinger is a senior editor at *National Review*.

David Pryce-Jones is the author, most recently, of *Openings & Outings: An Anthology* (Criterion Books).

Kyle Smith is the film critic for *The Wall Street Journal*.

R. Eric Tippin is Assistant Professor of English at Palm Beach Atlantic University.

The New Criterion. ISSN 0734-0222. January 2023, Volume 41, Number 5. Published monthly except July and August by The Foundation for Cultural Review, Inc., 900 Broadway, New York, NY 10003, a nonprofit public charity as described in Section 501 (c) (3) of the Internal Revenue code, which solicits and accepts contributions from a wide range of sources, including public and private foundations, corporations, and the general public. Subscriptions: \$58 for one year. For Canada, add \$14 per year. For all other foreign subscriptions, add \$22 per year. Periodicals postage paid at New York, NY, and at additional mailing offices. Postmaster and subscribers: send change of address, all remittances, and subscription inquiries to The New Criterion, P.O. Box 3000, Denville, NJ 07834. Notice of nonreceipt must be sent to this address within three months of the issue date. All other correspondence should be addressed to The New Criterion, 900 Broadway, Suite 602, New York, NY 10003. (212) 247-6980. Copyright © 2023 by The Foundation for Cultural Review, Inc. Newsstand distribution by CMG, 155 Village Blvd., Princeton, NJ 08540. Internet: www.newcriterion.com; Email: letters@newcriterion.com

Newsstand & bookstore sales: JM Cappello Associates. Telephone: (610) 525-6236; Email: john@jmcappello.com.

Advertising: Telephone: (212) 247-6980; Email: advertising@newcriterion.com.

Subscriptions: To subscribe, renew, or report a problem please call (800) 783-4903.

Notes & Comments: January 2023

The mob comes for Madison

If chattel slavery hadn't existed in the United States, the Left would have had to invent it. What we mean is that the idea of slavery has become so dear to the disciples of identity politics that without its moral sanction they would be lost. Absent the original sin of slavery, the entire racist racket that holds our society hostage would sputter to an inglorious halt. The race hustlers promoting "affirmative action" (i.e., race- or sex-based discrimination) would be out of business, as would the real-estate magnates and firebugs of Black Lives Matter. Ditto the angry historical fantasists behind The 1619 Project. Forget that most societies practiced slavery throughout history. Is anyone asking for "reparations" because their ancestors may have been enslaved by the Egyptians, the Persians, the Greeks, or the Romans? Forget that slavery ended in the United States more than one hundred and fifty years ago because Abraham Lincoln prosecuted a brutal civil war to keep the country together and end the "peculiar institution," which was not peculiar at all. (When, by the way, will slavery end in Islamic society, or India, or China?) The world has had numerous long-distance trades in slaves of different phenotypes. Most of the West African slaves who made their way to America were sold into servitude by black African slavers.

Those impolitic facts are what the Bolsheviks of old called "counterrevolutionary." That is, they

are politically "false" even if empirically true. The wardens of wokeness tell us that they hate slavery and its legacy. Doubtless in one sense they do. But they are divided in their minds. They also cherish the historical fact of slavery. For one thing, they understand that it is their irrevocable meal ticket. They also perceive that it is an imperishable source of emotional power. Because it is a wound that can never heal, it is also a sin that white society can never expiate—which is why they tell the world that the legacy of slavery is ubiquitous and ineradicable. But if that were true, why should anyone have ever bothered to campaign against it? It would be like campaigning against the onset of night.

We understand that to ask such questions is to be guilty of "racism," the cardinal tort of our age whose almost aphrodisiac power is ultimately guaranteed by the inexhaustible well of victimhood that slavery, or the exploitation of the idea of slavery, has dug. Martin Luther King Jr. famously dreamed that people would be judged by the content of their character, not the color of their skin. That is now regarded as a reactionary, indeed a racist sentiment. After all, to judge people by their character, by what they actually *do*, would upset the entire racist concession. From now on, race is everything, character a dispensable epiphenomenon. And the ultimate power source, the inexhaustible kernel of animus that fuels the racist requisition, is the historical accident of chattel slavery in the United States.

We see the operation of this charade everywhere in our society: in our colleges, of course, which for decades have acted the prime incubators of bad ideas. It is also increasingly prominent in lower schools, in the media and other cultural institutions, in the business world, and even in the military and other government bureaucracies. An entire cottage industry has sprung up to delegitimize the past and taint the present through a process of anachronistic virtue-mongering.

It is a thriving concern, and its latest victim is James Madison, the coauthor of *The Federalist*, principal drafter of the U.S. Constitution, and fourth president of the United States. Madison, you see, like many of America's founders, owned slaves. He disapproved of the institution of slavery, but he never freed his own slaves, not during his lifetime nor in his will. Moreover, he acquiesced to its recognition in the Constitution because (as he put it in 1788) "Great as the evil [of slavery] is, a dismemberment of the union would be worse." This, by the way, is essentially the same position Lincoln maintained in the run-up to the Civil War.

The professional race-mongers have had their innings with Jefferson, Washington, and other founders who have been weighed and found wanting. Now it is Madison's turn. The occasion is the takeover of Madison's Virginia home, Montpelier, by the revisionist race lobby. Madison died practically bankrupt, and his widow had to sell Montpelier soon after his death in 1836. The property was acquired by the National Trust for Historical Preservation in 1984 and restored to its original lineaments as a "monument to the Father of the Constitution."

That was the initial idea, anyway. As Eric Felten shows in "Whose Montpelier Is It Anyway?," an essay written for RealClearPolitics, Madison's home has been enlisted as a synecdoche in the game of racialist delegitimization. It's been going on for some years. Already in 2017, a permanent exhibition called "The Mere Distinction of Colour" opened in the basement galleries of Montpelier as well as the South Yard of the

campus. The exhibition draws on testimony from descendants of those enslaved at Montpelier to "explore how the legacy of slavery impacts today's conversations about race, identity, and human rights." The title of the exhibition comes from Madison himself, who mournfully observed that "the mere distinction of colour" had provided "the most oppressive dominion ever exercised by man over man."

In other words, Madison understood the evil of slavery. He also understood that its perpetuation stood in stark contradiction to the ideals of individual liberty he outlined in the Constitution. That he nevertheless held slaves himself is a fact that should be frankly acknowledged. But should it be given pride of place in Madison's biography?

Increasingly, that seems to be the goal of the Montpelier Foundation, which oversees the property. Last year, William Lewis, the co-founder of the Montpelier Foundation, published a book called *Montpelier Transformed: A Monument to James Madison and Its Enslaved Community*. A separate nonprofit called the Montpelier Descendants Committee was created to represent those descended from Montpelier's slaves. It was led by the businessman James French, who is himself descended from slaves in Virginia. French was soon granted a place on the board of the Montpelier Foundation. Now, in what some observers describe as a "coup," he chairs it.

French is avid about pursuing the new standards for the teaching of slavery set forth at "The National Summit on Teaching Slavery," an event cohosted by the Montpelier Foundation and the National Trust's African-American Cultural Heritage Action Fund. The 2018 dispensation insists that it "is not enough simply to discuss the humanity and contributions of the enslaved. It is imperative that these institutions also unpack and interrogate white privilege and supremacy and systemic racism."

Ah, our old friends "white privilege" and "systemic racism." Don't leave home without them! James Madison, meet Critical Race

Theory. Henceforth, anyone charged with teaching about the founders must undergo “significant and ongoing anti-racist training (which includes interpreting difficult history, deconstructing and interrogating white privilege, white supremacy, and systemic racism, and engaging visitors on these subjects).”

Moreover, “these subjects” are everywhere. Not only are “slavery, race, and racism . . . complex concepts,” but also they are lurking in the most unlikely places. Perhaps you are reading about a document or event that ostensibly has nothing to do with slavery. Try harder. For even if the things you are studying “are not on the surface ‘about’ slavery or enslaved people,” you should “read between the lines” to discover the grisly truth. It’s the sort of hermeneutical practice that Sigmund Freud specialized in.

Apparently, the board of the Montpelier Foundation at first celebrated this sort of racial aggrandizement. It seemed so chic, so up-to-date, and it won plaudits from the media. But then the awful truth set in. It turned out that James French did not just want a place at the table. He wanted the entire dining room for his approved ideological interpretation. “Currently, museums such as Montpelier are dominated by people who look like Madison,” French warned. Henceforth, he demanded, the Montpelier Descendants Committee should be authorized to appoint half the members of the board of the Foundation. Wagging tail, meet your dog.

Perhaps the most preposterous aspect of French’s putsch is his claim that Madison relied on his slaves “for everything, *including his ideas*, his sustenance, his wealth, his power, and everything” (our emphasis, his repetition). As Felten reports, under French’s leadership, scholarship at Montpelier is moving away from its focus on what French calls the “big house” in order to advance his contention that “James Madison essentially lived in an African American community,” from which the founder derived his ideas. And here you thought that Madison garnered his ideas from

ancient political historians like Polybius and teachers like John Witherspoon, his mentor at Princeton and a major conduit for the ideas of the Scottish Enlightenment to the founders.

French’s gambit is not new. Though gussied up in the shabby rhetorical dress of “white privilege,” “systemic racism,” etc., French’s contention is no less absurd than the idea, promulgated by the so-called Afrocentrists in the 1980s and ’90s, that Western culture is largely a bastardization of African culture. According to the Afrocentrists, Greek philosophy, science, and political theory were mostly pilfered from African sources. Indeed, according to them, the African contribution to world history has been systematically suppressed by a white conspiracy to deny the black race its place in the sun, as it were. As far as we have been able to discover, French and his likeminded colleagues have not yet declared that Madison was himself a black African, as the Afrocentrists claimed of Socrates and Cleopatra, but he is well down that road.

On the issue of slavery, James Madison was not a moral paragon. But he was an enlightened and humane man who was fondly remembered by at least some of his former slaves. Paul Jennings, one such figure, called Madison “one of the best men that ever lived” and went out of his way to help Dolley, Madison’s widow, in her impoverished last years. Madison objected to using the word “slave” in the Constitution because he “thought it wrong to admit in the Constitution the idea that there could be property in men.” Accordingly, he resorted to euphemisms, a practice that, as Lynne Cheney notes in *James Madison: A Life Reconsidered* (2014), had two purposes. On the one hand, it was “a way of avoiding the terrible truth that slavery existed.” On the other, it “also allowed the delegates to create a document suitable for a time when it would not.” Citing the political scientist Robert Goldwin, Cheney notes that the founders thus “created a constitution for a society that would offer more justice than their own.” That approach, it seems to us, betokens a farsightedness and generosity of spirit sadly lacking among the race-obsessed vigilantes who are despoiling our history.

Uses & abuses of military history

by Victor Davis Hanson

War accelerates and intensifies the human experience. The story of dramatic scientific discoveries, technological breakthroughs, and political, economic, and cultural upheavals, as well as radical changes in art and literature, is so often inseparable from the wartime conditions that birthed them, whether atomic bombs or combustion engines.

More practically, military history rests on the hallowed notion that human nature is unchanging over the centuries. The study of wars of the past, then, can offer timeless lessons about why wars in the present and future start, how they proceed and end, and what, if anything, they accomplish. Clausewitz was right about the immutable essential nature of war when he remarked that “War is in no way changed or modified through the progress of civilization.”

Yet for a discipline that is both ancient and relevant, military history is relatively little studied these days. Over the last quarter century, military historians have rued declining college course offerings, and the titles of their lamentations usually are self-explanatory in periodic articles: “Our Elite Schools Have Abandoned Military History” (Peter Berkowitz), “Don’t Let Academia Destroy Military History” (James Carafano and Tom Spoehr), “The Course of Military History in the United States Since World War II” (Edward Coffman), “American Universities Declare War on Military History” (Max Hastings), “The Embattled Future of Academic Military History” (John Lynn), “Why Military History

Matters” (Fred Kagan), “The Current State of Military History” (Mark Moyar), “Reimagining Military History in the Classroom” (Carol Reardon), “Military History and the Academic World” (Ron Spector), and “Why Study War?” (my own).

The consensus is that the decline of military history has not been caused by the American people’s innate lack of interest in studying the nature of war, and especially not by the American experience with armed conflict. Rather, the fault is found in the interests and prejudices of our educated civilian elites in higher education, politics, and the media. The degreed classes have deprecated military history, even as they are largely the demographic that has adjudicated when and where the United States goes to war, and the degree to which Americans should aid or oppose other nations that do.

More recently there has been a parallel decline in the historical education of our military elites themselves at the academies. Our highest-ranking officers seem to have few historical referents to ground their policies other than contemporary trends and pressures. In June 2021, Gen. Mark Milley, the chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, testified before Congress and talked grandly about the revised “recommended reading list” in the military academies and training programs, praising especially the “anti-racist” work of Ibram X. Kendi. Under cross-examination, Milley seemed unable to explain how Kendi’s work would make America’s enlisted soldiers

more lethal to its enemies or valuable to its allies—or why these latter aims would even be important.

At about the same time, Secretary of Defense Lloyd Austin testified before Congress, promising to root from the armed forces supposed cadres of white supremacists driven by “white rage.” Yet neither he nor Gen. Milley ever supplied data or evidence that such cells or movements exist in the U.S. military.

That the Pentagon should foster such ungrounded suspicions of white males—one of its most important sources of recruits—is as if the British war ministers had questioned whether there were too many sexist British Gurkhas in the ranks, or Russian generals had wondered whether there were Cossacks that seemed clanish, or the Indian government had fixated on Sikh recruits as religious chauvinists.

Implying that white males collectively are intrinsically suspect of improper behavior seems a near-suicidal U.S. Army policy, given that the group died at a rate double its percentages in the general population in both Afghanistan and Iraq.

In response to woke pressures, the U.S. military was properly to be envisioned more as a social-justice institution, in which progressive racial and gender agendas could be fast-tracked through the chain of command without the *Sturm und Drang* of congressional haggling. Of course, military history is replete with examples of the advantages of military forces enhanced by emphasis on a cohesive and common national identity, whether in the agrarian and largely middle-class hoplite armies of ancient Greece or with the rise of broad-based people’s armies and nations-in-arms in revolutionary France, Russia, and China.

But such fetishization of ethnic and racial identity in a multiracial, multiethnic modern democracy is dangerous business for a military. Historically, the accentuation of difference more often tends to erode battlefield efficacy. Racial and ethnic chauvinism and diversity were no advantage to nineteenth-century Ottoman, Habsburg, and Russian armies, as well as those in modern Lebanon, the former Yugoslavia, and Iraq.

What was not ambiguous was that a subsequent U.S. Army failure to meet recruiting goals, especially among young men of families that traditionally had joined combat units, followed within months of the new agenda’s implementation. Apparently few in the military, despite their recommended lists of authors to be read, had realized that all armed forces historically draw all sorts of soldiers asymmetrically from regions, ethnicities, and classes—and for particular reasons, ranging from patriotism and regional pride to family traditions and economic opportunity.

All these recent symptoms of the decline of military history among our elites reflect in part the lack of cohesive university programs and academic departments. A variety of historians cite the paradoxical absence of institutional support for faculty hiring and graduate-degree offerings by pointing to a huge—and growing—course demand for the few military history classes that are still offered.

Nevertheless, the argument that the status and direction of military history are even in decline remains hotly disputed by a small number of hardworking and prominent military historians. They argue that the health of military history as a discipline is underrated, as shown by the survival of classes on strategy or wars. They are reminiscent of dedicated classicists who cite small but vestigial enrollments in Greek as proof of a robust field of classics.

The real disagreement perhaps rests on the notion that military history should be a *major* field of university study rather than a current minor one in a survival mode. After all, history itself was born in ancient Greece as the study of war in general, and the Persian and Peloponnesian Wars in particular.

The data of decline can be interpreted in a variety of ways, especially as a departure from what the “normal” role of military history once was or should have been before its present state. For example, the military historians William Hitchcock and Meghan Herwig, in a glass-half-full argument, recently reminded pessimists that military history courses still represent on average some 7 percent of all history course offerings at major universities. And they are taught mostly by tenured and tenure-track professors.

Both, however, concede that military-themed classes—and especially those focused on military history *per se*—suffered among the greatest decline in history course offerings between 2015 and 2021. So how can military history be declining while at the same time ascendant or at least vigorous? The most likely answer is found in contested definitions arising over what constitutes “military history.”

Many current military history classes emphasize quite narrow social, economic, and cultural themes that only touch tangentially on operational, logistical, tactical, or strategic aspects of armed forces on the battlefield—or for that matter on particular wars at all.

Hitchcock and Herwig note the sort of questions posed by the new, wider military history: “What impact does war have upon social movements, civil liberties, race and gender relations, the environment, and humanitarian attitudes? What ethical questions must the student of war confront?” My own general impression is that such questions are of course important. But to resonate meaningfully in the context of military history, these interests must be grounded in some factual familiarity with war and battle and discussed in the landscape of particular conflicts. For example, to appreciate properly the critical role in World War II of over a thousand American female pilots, in dangerous conditions, ferrying new bombers to forward bases, one would need familiarity with American strategic bombing campaigns, the wartime mobilization of the U.S. aircraft industry, recruitment, the draft, manpower pools, the nature of the B-17, B-24, and B-29 heavy bombers, and the combat-loss and replacement figures for male pilots and their planes.

Again, to use the example of classics, efforts to expand the discipline to include issues of theory, race, class, and gender may enrich the field, as long as the core that grounds all such discussion—instruction in and knowledge of the classical languages and literatures—remains vibrant. By contrast, as the military historian Fred Kagan put it of the new military history,

“War and society,” also sometimes called “new military history” (although it is by now decades old), normally studies everything about war ex-

cept for war itself: how soldiers are recruited or conscripted, how they feel about war, how they and others write about it, how war affects society, politics and economics, gender and war, and so on.

Perhaps recent military historians rightly have been sensitive to the fact that the discipline is caricatured as too conservative. Thus, they seek to widen its boundaries to encompass more popular contemporary fields of instruction. They have also been careful to emphasize that the study of war reflects no ideological aim other than to ensure that a democratic citizenry is informed about why or why not it should make war. Nearly twenty years ago, at the height of public dissatisfaction with the stalemated Iraq War, Kagan also properly noted,

This problem [of the decline of military history] should not be a partisan issue or even an ideological one. Solving it is simply an essential precondition to maintaining a healthy democratic process in a time of danger and conflict.

Again, there are many ways of measuring the decline of “traditional” military history: in the erosion of faculty numbers and course offerings within higher education; in the waning attention of the elite media; in static, government-directed military outreach and training; or, in contrast, in the growth of films and podcasts on military subjects in popular culture. The last point underscores a striking paradox. The more U.S. officials and the foreign-policy elite have resorted to arms, the less they seem to know about historical patterns and innate tendencies of war. But the more the general public has been turned off by seemingly endless armed interventions abroad, the more it has become interested in wars of the past and the rules of conflict.

In a democratic republic, civilians declare wars. Americans are supposed to instruct and audit the military about when and where—and sometimes how—to fight them. Yet such civilian guidance and oversight require some civic awareness of what the responsibility entails. The people’s representatives

often order the military to do things it does not wish to do or reject what the military insists a democratic government must do. For example, polls say that Americans wish to protect Taiwan from a Chinese takeover. But to what degree are they first made aware that such commitment involves risks in the nuclear age, such as the likely sinking of a \$13 billion, five-thousand-person aircraft carrier (or two) and the loss of a dozen huge C-5 or fifty C-17 transport jets? A Chinese nuclear threat against the West Coast? Tokyo, Seoul, or Melbourne?

Popular knowledge of military affairs can be inculcated by elementary and higher education, the media, and public rituals and commemorations, as well as by members of the military themselves. Only that way, in the modern era of all-volunteer armed forces, can voting citizens—over 90 percent of whom have never served in the military—know something about what wars are and how and why they start, are fought, and end. Yet since World War II, a series of popular ideologies and historical events have discouraged informed civilian oversight of American war-making.

Five years after the bombs on Hiroshima and Nagasaki were dropped, and with theories of ending conventional armed forces coming into vogue, the United States was shocked by the North Korean invasion of the south. We quickly rediscovered the need to rearm and rebuild conventional forces and to revisit classical military strategy that was not made obsolete even by terrible new weapons.

In part, the contrast of a prior clear-cut American success in World War II, the indisputable moral need to stop global Nazism, fascism, and militarism, and the dispatch with which the United States helped win the war left as their legacy a nearly impossible ideal for all subsequent American wars, even in the decolonial nuclear age when the rules of intervention and expeditions abroad had vastly changed.

In part, the Vietnam decade of 1965–75—fifty-eight thousand American combat troops dead, massive anti-war protests, draft resistance, and eventual defeat—birthed a wide-

spread antipathy to the idea of any war in general, and in particular to the U.S. military.

As military history struggled in the university throughout the late 1970s, conflict-resolution and peace-studies curricula spread on campuses. By 2022, there were over eighty-seven colleges and universities offering peace-studies and conflict-resolution degrees. (About 1,200 such degrees were completed per year.) In contrast, there were less than half that number of schools that offered either a BA, MA, or Ph.D. in military history. The British military historian Max Hastings recently summed up the scarcity of military history on university and college campuses. “The revulsion from war history may derive not so much from students’ unwillingness to explore the violent past,” he suggested, “but from academics’ reluctance to teach, or even allow their universities to host, such courses.”

Stubborn historians of war and their students naturally became dubious of all conflict. The general anxiety is akin to the suspicion that oncologists who study cancer are *ipso facto* fond of malignancy, or those who insist on fixed human nature across time and space are faith-based denialists of modern neuroscience, biology, or social science.

Yet it is hard to argue that the United Nations has prevented any more wars than did the short-lived League of Nations, which collapsed on the eve of World War II. What prevented the Soviet Red Army from entering Western Europe after 1949 was not a UN commission but the armed NATO alliance and U.S. nuclear deterrence. What saved South Korea was the U.S. military and a rare moment when the United Nations authorized a multilateral armed force to resist Chinese and North Korean aggression.

Deductive peace-studies programs have little record of being more valuable than inductive military history in preparing the citizen to evaluate ongoing wars, prevent future ones, or achieve lasting peace. After the 1960s, certainly, the rise of peace-studies programs did not coincide either with an American avoidance of war or increased success in it. Nonetheless, social science and therapeutic approaches to war insidiously replaced the

ancient Thucydidean idea that studying prior conflicts can instruct those in the present to avoid the strategic errors and military fallacies of the past.

In the post–Cold War era, a second series of wars followed, mostly marked by voluntary U.S. interventions in Iraq, Afghanistan, Syria, and Libya. And most ended either in chaos, stalemate, or American defeat. Over seven thousand American soldiers died in wars in Afghanistan and the second war in Iraq—to say nothing of the hundreds of thousands of dead Iraqis and Afghans—without victory or much clear strategic success in Western nation-building.

All these expeditionary wars, some of them decades long, were optional. They only occasionally proved successful in meeting their stated goals. For the most part they were waged within the oil- and terrorist-rich Islamic Middle East. As a result, war itself grew synonymous among American cultural elites with supposed Western chauvinism, neocolonialism, and oil-driven imperialism. It is a truism that when a nation wages optional, costly, and ineffective wars, support for military-history studies usually declines—either due to an instinctual recoil from the very mention of war or from a practical sense that strategists were not aided by their formal studies. And, of course, this causes a vicious cycle as the decline in military-history studies then leads to more poorly thought-out wars.

For the Left, “No blood for oil” was a common anti-war cry during the Iraqi wars, along with “Islamophobia.” To the American Right, such wars did not pencil out in cost-benefit analyses—or they were deemed extraneous to the real American strategic interests in supporting NATO against renewed Russian expansionism and in creating a circle of Pacific allies to resist encroaching Chinese power.

The net result was that by 2016, a growing number in the United States believed that a decade and a half of war-making in the Middle East had not made the United States more secure and certainly had not gained it allies, deterrence, or prestige. Contemporary events, recast by elites as further reason to be suspicious of formal military history, helped mas-

sage attitudes. The entire idea of “experts” versed in military history and strategic analysis obviously suffered, as if the new generation of the Best and Brightest had learned nothing from Vietnam but simply repeated its mistakes on a smaller scale in the Middle East.

When strategic objectives in Iraq were either poorly spelled out or not met, and as casualties mounted, the public was told repeatedly that the supposed *casus belli* of “weapons of mass destruction” was a *deliberate* lie (“Bush lied, thousands died”). Ubiquitous cultural figures openly cheered on the enemy. The documentary filmmaker Michael Moore spouted unhinged historical comparisons: “The Iraqis who have revolted against the occupation are not ‘insurgents’ or ‘terrorists’ or ‘The Enemy.’ They are the revolution, the Minutemen, and their numbers will grow—and they will win.” As in the Vietnam era, this second suite of mostly stalemated or stalled operations was seen not as an argument for renewed study of the origins, causes, conduct, and end of wars, but one for general renunciation or rejection of war, as if the enlightened had such unilateral power.

A third stage in the decline, the so-called woke movement from 2015 to the present, is marked by a fixation on matters of race, often manifesting in mandates for diversity, inclusion, and equity of result. In this regard, prior American or indeed Western wars in general were redefined and reduced to racist-driven exploitation, usually waged by white Europeans and Americans against indigenous peoples or the largely innocent nonwhite abroad.

Melodrama, not tragedy, became the operative methodology of studying the past. “Unfortunately,” the historians Tami Davis Biddle and Robert Citino note, “many in the academic community assume that military history is simply about powerful men—mainly white men—fighting each other and/or oppressing vulnerable groups.” Ironically, the most destructive wars of the twentieth century were intra-ethnic: Asian Japanese against Asian Chinese, Africans against Africans, and, most notably, Europeans fighting each other. It is hard to see any predictive racial patterns among the twentieth century’s

most prominent genocidal killers, whether Mao Zedong, Hideki Tojo, Adolf Hitler, Joseph Stalin, Enver Pasha (the architect of the Armenian genocide), Pol Pot, Kim Il-Sung, Mengistu Haile Mariam, or Yakubu Gowon (the brutal Nigerian dictator during the Biafra War). In any case, the result of the melodramatic, racist approach was the same: a further erosion of the study of and interest in formal military history.

Yet as has been regularly observed, this half-century-long deprecation of military history coincided with a steadily growing popular interest in wars of the past, both narrative histories and tactical and strategic analyses. Bookstores enlarged their military-history sections. Podcasts on war, ancient and modern, grew. Cable television channels welcomed war documentaries.

As formal elite study has withered, there has grown over the last fifty years a significant popular interest in America's wars of the past, and especially in the Civil War and World War II. Despite their horrific carnage, perhaps these conventional wars were felt to have solved the problems on account of which they began, since they had seen the entire male population subject to the draft and had ended in victory for the good guys.

Tellingly, studying these wars did not necessarily involve deprecation of ancient ideas of honor, bravery, courage, and patriotism. In the popular culture, successful documentaries such as Ken Burns's *Civil War* or blockbuster films such as Steven Spielberg's *Saving Private Ryan* reflected popular interest in these themes. And even the scattered conflagrations in the post-Cold War era were sometimes presented without overt editorialization.

For every critical film such as Oliver Stone's *Platoon* or Stanley Kubrick's *Full Metal Jacket* that focused on disastrous American tactics and strategy, there appeared a Ridley Scott *Black Hawk Down*, a Peter Berg *Lone Survivor*, and a Clint Eastwood *American Sniper*, which all took a tragic rather than a melodramatic approach to America's more unpopular wars. Such movies recognized the courage and heroism of the American armed forces, often in the most trying of circumstances and amid

strategic and operational command stupidity. In popular culture, a full-throated celebration of war such as *300* can score at the box office, in part because its cartoonish characters are unapologetic and, as defenders, felt to occupy the superior moral high ground at the last stand at Thermopylae.

Again, the problem with the decline of military history has not been the American people's lack of interest in studying the nature of war, which emerged unscathed from the American experience with armed conflict. The fault is found in the interests and prejudices of our educated civilian elites in higher education, politics, and the media.

There are consequences to this ignorance of our officials, in terms of referencing or ignoring history as a benchmark to ground present policy. What follows is a potpourri of current policies and assumptions that might have been enriched or corrected by even a rudimentary knowledge of past wars.

When Russia invaded Ukraine on February 24, 2022, most expert observers predicted a quick Russian victory. Moscow was a nuclear power with a huge, sophisticated arsenal of conventional weapons. Russia enjoyed over three times the population, thirty times the area, and fifteen times the gross national production of Ukraine. Accordingly, in the first hours of the Russian invasion, a shocked U.S. government offered to airlift the president of Ukraine, Volodymyr Zelensky, out of Kyiv—a move that would have effectively ended the heroic Ukrainian resistance and given Russia an immediate victory by default.

Yet the initial Russian shock-and-awe effort at decapitating the Ukrainian government in Kyiv proved an utter failure before a stunned global televised audience. The Russian setback eventually led to a more historically typical reboot, one of massive artillery and missile pounding of borderlands and rocket attacks on civilian infrastructure in western Ukraine, which rendered the Ukraine war more a World War I battlefield than a blitzkrieg.

By late 2022, those who had initially gone wild in praising the unexpected and ongoing success of the Ukrainian resistance, and

urging more billions of dollars in aid, were growing somewhat troubled about the eventual endgame of the conflict. Some cautioned that the war of attrition on Ukraine's borders was lowering the threshold of confrontation between a nuclear Russia and United States—especially as Vladimir Putin deliberately raised the issue of tactical nuclear weapons. All began to see that Russia's blunt use of indiscriminate firepower was designed to grind down a smaller Ukraine before its far larger aggressor would run out of steam. Ukraine's survival depended on whether its allies could match Russian resupply, bomb and shell for bomb and shell—and how many losses in men and matériel an increasingly isolated Putin would be willing to suffer for dubious strategic advantages.

Those familiar with military history, however, might have foreseen just such a transformation of the battlefield. The Russian military, whether Czarist, Soviet, or post-Cold War, has rarely done well in expeditionary efforts beyond its Russian-speaking borders. The Russian wars with Japan (1904–05), the Baltic States (1918–20), Poland (1921–22), Finland (1939–40), and Afghanistan (1979–89)—like the Kyiv shock-and-awe campaign—proved fiascoes. They variously exposed the sloppy logistics, poorly integrated arms, weakness in maritime and air forces, inferior weaponry, faulty reconnaissance of enemy capabilities, and poor morale that has often plagued the Russian military abroad.

Yet the Western giddiness of late February and March at videos of stalled and destroyed Russian expeditionary armored columns, stranded in central Ukraine, erroneously led to the opposite extreme, the belief that the Russian military was incompetent and would shortly lose the war—as if it did not matter where and how the Russian military was deployed to fight.

Again, study of military history likewise suggests that if the Russian military is inept in expeditionary roles, despite these initial setbacks, it has usually proved formidable on its home soil, or at least when operating close to its borders, benefitting from interior lines and the propaganda of foreign violations of

Mother Russia. Invaders as diverse as the once-confident Charles XII, Napoleon, the Japanese on the Mongolian border, and the Wehrmacht eventually learned that to their despair. Russians have repeatedly fought and defeated large armies of invasion, or against armies on their immediate borders, when such conflicts became seen as existential crises or invoked patriotism that transcended politics among the general population. For all the Ukrainians' foreign arms and impressive resistance, it may prove quite difficult for even these heroic and ascendent resisters to expel all Russian forces from majority-Russian-speaking borderlands.

Americans were often shocked as to why Putin chose to invade Ukraine in 2022—or for that matter why at all. Military history, however, might also have reminded us that deterrence or its absence so often proves decisive when threatened hostilities break out into war. Remarks or gestures deemed trivial at the time can send unintended signals that indifference rather than deterrence will meet aggressors. We remember that the Chinese and North Koreans took note of Secretary of State Dean Acheson's nonchalant remark to the National Press Club in January 1950 that South Korea was outside the American "defensive perimeter," and they soon acted accordingly. The much-studied remarks of April Glaspie, the American ambassador to Iraq, to Saddam Hussein in 1990 that the United States did not especially concern itself with internal border disputes within the Arab world may have encouraged Saddam's invasion of Kuwait.

Putin predictably entertains irredentist dreams of emulating Catherine the Great or Peter the Great in his imperial ambitions, especially of reconstituting the former Soviet Empire. What has kept him inside the borders of the Russian Federation is not his politics or agendas, but rather his careful assessments in cost-benefit analyses of when it was profitable or at least possible to invade a former republic and when not.

The Russian expeditionary operations in Georgia (2008), eastern Ukraine and Crimea (2014), and central Ukraine (2022) all met certain Russian criteria. One, Russia was flush with

petrodollars from high oil prices; in contrast, the West was vulnerable to oil shortages and price spikes. Two, Russia felt that a current U.S. administration was so encumbered by domestic or overseas burdens that it would not likely respond. The United States talked loudly while carrying only a twig, as it agitated Russia by hinting at Ukrainian NATO membership or boasted openly about interfering within the internal politics of Ukraine at the expense of Russian interests.

That paradigm held true for America during the latter Bush administration in 2008, the second-term Obama administration in 2014, and the early Biden administration in 2022. In contrast, periods of petroleum surfeit and low oil prices helped the fuel-hungry West and hurt oil-exporting countries. An administration that seemed unencumbered by foreign wars, had recently raised defense spending, and was deemed unpredictable and even dangerous in its responses seemed to deter Putin. So it was with America in 2017–20 when Putin talked provocatively but stayed quiet within his borders.

Historically, a sudden loss of deterrence vis-à-vis a particular adversary can ignite similar aggressions from a host of belligerents. The flight from Afghanistan and the publicly aired problems in the U.S. military, coupled with the poor deterrent reputation of the Biden administration, did not encourage just Vladimir Putin. China also opportunistically became blunt in its threats to the United States over the visit to Taiwan of House Speaker Nancy Pelosi and began sending missiles over the island. Iran announced it would shortly possess a nuclear bomb. North Korea then began launching missiles in any direction it wished. Such aggression was similar to even an ossified Soviet Union invading Czechoslovakia in 1968 and Afghanistan in 1979—at a time of perceived American hesitation and internal economic and cultural upheaval.

Deterrence rests on the certainty of some sort of unpleasant reaction to perceived unwarranted aggression. Even weaker powers become adventurous when stronger ones signal, albeit inadvertently, that they are indifferent or will offer concessions to ensure

peace rather than strike back forcefully at any such perceived aggression.

Lack of knowledge about prior wars, their generals, and the nature of command can also mislead presidents. Donald Trump came under intense criticism, often for sounding unduly militaristic, when he nominated at least four army and marine generals as cabinet secretaries or cabinet-level appointments: Gen. Michael Flynn (National Security Advisor), Gen. John Kelly (Homeland Security), Gen. James Mattis (Defense), and Lt. Gen. H. R. McMaster (National Security Advisor).

Trump repeatedly defended his penchant for inviting retired generals into his administration with references to his World War II heroes Douglas MacArthur and George S. Patton. He was explicit in his assumptions that modern generals, like those of an earlier generation, are can-do operators. He apparently thought generals were apolitical, or at least nonpartisan men of action—highly patriotic, conservative, traditional, and intensely loyal to their commander-in-chief. Still, in less than two years, all four either resigned, were fired, or had their nominations withdrawn. And in at least two of the four cases, the generals publicly blasted their commander-in-chief in the strongest terms of personal disparagement.

Trump apparently had romanticized the military leadership of World War II and had little idea that since the Civil War, or even since antiquity, top-ranking generals have often been highly political. His appointees were not necessarily conservative, often outspoken rather than reserved, and constantly in the news rather than reticent—precisely those most likely to collide with a controversial president.

Trump's favorite, Patton, at the pinnacle of his fame and military success, was relieved of his command and humiliatingly reassigned for openly questioning the American–Soviet post-war protocols. MacArthur was fired from his command in Korea for publicly blasting the war policies of his president Harry S. Truman.

Ironically, military history might have reminded Trump that the outspoken generals he admired would have been the most likely to

be fired by him, while those who were more administrators than battlefield commanders, such as George S. Marshall and Dwight D. Eisenhower, became extremely effective political operators.

Another misconception insists that military history became sclerotic at the dawn of the nuclear age, and that classical deterrence, balance of power, and doctrines such as preemption and alliances have not applied since Hiroshima and Nagasaki. In fact, all that changed for a few generations were the levels of destruction, not the principles of war. We can be assured that the eternal cycle of challenge and counterresponse survives, and thus eras of the offensive giving way to the defensive will follow, as one day lasers or space-based systems will knock down even sophisticated nuclear missiles—that in turn eventually become ever more sophisticated to avoid them.

Military history reminds us of the need for humility, or at least the perspective that no generation is the end of history, but simply a phase, extended or brief, in an endless and un-

changing sequence of new weapons and ideologies birthing counter-weapons and antithetical belief systems. And the effort to remind the public of those truths continues. At the Hoover Institution, the Working Group on the Role of Military History in Contemporary Conflict, with over forty affiliated scholars (of which I am one), has met for over a decade and continues to publish historical analyses of current wars and threats to peace in its online journal *Strategika* (now in its eighty-first issue). In addition, Hillsdale College just announced the creation of a new Center for Military History and Grand Strategy to bring the light of the past to strategic decision-making in the present.

In the decades ahead, we will likely see frightening new weapons, revolutionary and unstable foreign aggressors, and ideologies that profess to change the rules of history. But these will all be transport systems—pumps, if you will—that merely accelerate the delivery, but do not alter the essence, of the timeless water of military history, based as it is on unchanging human nature.

Federal foes

by Glenn Ellmers

Beverly Gage's new biography of J. Edgar Hoover, *G-Man*, perceptively situates him within "the rise of the administrative state" that "came of age alongside Hoover," in the author's words.¹ Indeed, partly because of the FBI's own self-understanding, arising from its "crucial origins in the Progressive Era," the current attempts to bring the Bureau to heel are unlikely to produce any meaningful change. The real problems with the FBI are difficult to grasp, and while it appears the Republican voter base would support radical restructuring or even abolition of the agency, powerful incentives in Congress will likely prevent anything more than cosmetic reforms. Gage, an academic historian, does not quite say all this, but her comprehensive treatment of Hoover—who formed the FBI's character and political identity over forty-eight years as its director—provides significant evidence to support these suspicions.

The FBI has suffered popular disapproval before in its 114-year history, yet never has the Bureau been so distrusted by *the Right* as it is today. It is playing a central role in the attempt to criminalize Donald Trump and his supporters, with heavy-handed tactics deployed against the January 6 "insurrectionists" and a raid on Trump's Mar-a-Lago home reminiscent of what occurs in a banana republic. In addition, its aggressive targeting of "right-wing extremists," including pro-life activists, indi-

cates a surprising willingness by the Bureau to become identified as a partisan police force for the Democratic Party.

This apparent ideological shift is noteworthy but misleading. The world's most famous law enforcement agency, with its buttoned-down, by-the-book reputation, had long been one of the few arms of the federal behemoth that earned conservatives' unqualified support. This confidence proved to be a case of holding the tiger by the tail, on the assumption that the claws would always be aimed primarily at mobsters and left-wing subversives. But secret police forces have a way of getting out of control, which is an old story. The Roman historian Ammianus Marcellinus reports that under the tyrant Gallus Caesar people were afraid to discuss their dreams lest they be overheard and accused of treason. The danger is far greater in a democracy.

Gage recounts that Hoover joined the Justice Department in 1917, just as the United States was entering World War I. The prosecution of the war under Woodrow Wilson, she writes, spurred

the birth of a vast new experiment in federal surveillance of political dissidents and "alien enemies," so that was where Hoover got his start. World War I marked a turning point in the history of civil liberties, the moment that the federal government began to watch its citizens and residents on a mass scale, and to keep files on their political activities. Hoover happened to be present at the creation, an accident of tim-

¹ *G-Man: J. Edgar Hoover and the Making of the American Century*, by Beverly Gage; Viking, 864 pages, \$45.

ing that forever altered his ambitions and his professional path.

The potential for the FBI to turn against conservatives, pro-lifers, and MAGA voters—treating them as enemies of the regime—was present from the beginning. How this happened, however, is not essentially a story about partisanship or due process. It concerns the nature of republican government and whether the FBI’s anti-constitutional foundations even *can* be reformed.

G-Man: J. Edgar Hoover and the Making of the American Century is an impressive achievement: clearly written, appropriately detailed, and meticulously sourced. It makes extensive use of newly released archival material, including previously classified documents. Gage was the Brady-Johnson Professor of Grand Strategy in Yale’s history department and is the author of a previous book about the 1920 bombing of Wall Street (suspected, but never proved, to have been perpetrated by Italian-immigrant anarchists).

The individual depicted in *G-Man* is the fascinating and troubled Hoover we are generally familiar with: vain, stubborn, and rigid, but also shrewd, disciplined, patriotic, and deeply committed to his own peculiar but sincerely held ideal of professional integrity. If not exactly a paragon of civil liberties, he was more respectful of the law and its restraints (even obdurately so at the end) than many of his critics admit. His vigorous anti-communism was unswerving and almost entirely justified, based on what we now know about Soviet active measures against the United States. Hoover’s racism was equally consistent, about average for a white man of his generation (certainly no worse than Lyndon Johnson’s), yet no hindrance to his contempt for and prosecution of the Ku Klux Klan and its enablers among Southern law enforcement.

The book judges Hoover a bit too harshly (in my view) with regard to the FBI’s aggressive and sometimes unethical actions against the Black Panthers, a violent terrorist organization responsible for numerous bombings and murders in the 1960s and ’70s—crimes that the book does not quite minimize but

treats somewhat matter-of-factly. Interestingly, Gage devotes more attention to, yet seems somewhat less appalled by, Hoover’s visceral animus toward Martin Luther King Jr., who comes across in many ways as the liar, hypocrite, and sexual libertine Hoover thought him to be. The book even relates that when the FBI bugged King’s Las Vegas hotel room in 1964, the summary of the transcript shows that King’s companion, a Baptist minister, raped a woman while King stood by and laughed.

Regarding Hoover’s own sexual inclinations, the evidence offered by Gage indicates that the never-married director found a life partner in Clyde Tolson, the FBI’s longtime number-two official. The men were near-constant companions, both professionally and socially, for most of their adult lives, and generally acknowledged as a couple in official Washington. This “don’t ask, don’t tell” attitude on the cocktail circuit did not preclude a steady stream of gossip and innuendo about Hoover’s alleged homosexuality, which he vehemently denied and used official FBI resources to suppress, sometimes with intimidation and threats. *G-Man* recounts, but downplays as implausible, the famous allegation of Hoover’s cross-dressing, which Gage finds was based on a single unreliable witness.

The book also makes little of Hoover’s “secret files,” which loom so large in the popular imagination and which he allegedly used for extensive blackmail. *G-Man* devotes only three paragraphs to this material in the context of Hoover’s aides reacting to his death in May 1972. “There were, in fact, two major sets of files in Hoover’s office”; one consisted mostly of personal letters, which were destroyed by Hoover’s devoted secretary, Helen Gandy. The second “was the Official & Confidential file . . . mostly a hodgepodge of reports and rumors, some dating as far back as the investigation in the 1920 Wall Street bombing.” These were not destroyed, but in order to “shield them from any outside query,” the aged and ailing Clyde Tolson ordered the files to be transferred to his next-in-command, Hoover’s second deputy, Mark Felt.

Some readers may recognize the name, though Felt is better known by his *Washington Post* alias: Deep Throat. As the next in line

behind the almost incapacitated Tolson, Felt assumed he would be promoted to director. When President Richard Nixon instead named an outsider (Patrick Gray, an assistant attorney general), Felt was shocked and dismayed. What he did with the secret files is almost inconsequential compared with his actions during the Watergate investigation, which had an effect on American government and society far beyond the disposition of some disorganized old reports.

Gage explored the dramatic two years that followed Hoover's death in a scholarly essay published in 2012, "Deep Throat, Watergate, and the Bureaucratic Politics of the FBI," in which she notes that the conditions for the Watergate crisis had already been established by Hoover before his death. Though Hoover and Nixon were close personal friends, "Hoover believed in the administrative state—in the power of independent bureaucrats. . . . Nixon, by contrast, was a man of parties, someone who hated the bureaucracy and believed that . . . voter control offered the best hope for effective government." From this perspective, Watergate emerges as "an institutional struggle between political allies, contained within the executive branch and locked in conflict over the proper use of the state."

How did the Bureau get to that point? Despite Hoover's conservatism and anti-communism, *G-Man* observes, "New Deal liberalism—professionalization, centralization, administrative expansion—are what enabled his rise":

Popular legend suggests that Hoover held on to power as long as he did through blackmail and intimidation—and it is true that he was skilled in such arts. But no public servant could survive for forty-eight years without support from both above and below. The truth is that Hoover stayed in office for so long because many people, from the highest reaches of government down to the grassroots, wanted him there and supported what he was doing.

This goes a long way toward explaining many of Hoover's apparent inconsistencies. The FBI

was useful to different people, in different ways, at different times—and Hoover in turn made many decisions on the same utilitarian grounds, which often appeared to conflict with his personal opinions and even the Bureau's short-term priorities. What persisted were two things: a near obsession with the FBI's "apolitical professionalism" (an idea with far-reaching implications, well beyond ethical standards of law enforcement) and the steady transfer of institutional patronage from the presidency to Congress. That shift took a major step in the 1968 crime bill—giving the Senate the authority to confirm the FBI director—and was solidified after Watergate, when Congress fully embraced our current post-constitutional regime built around a centralized bureaucracy operating on modern rational or scientific principles.

As early as the 1940s, the FBI began asserting its autonomy from the executive branch. Hoover considered Harry Truman an unreliable Cold Warrior, and when Republicans swept the 1946 midterm congressional elections, Hoover "stopped worrying quite so much about the man in the White House. Instead, he turned to his friends in Congress, who were eager to talk more about communism." Many conservatives cheered Hoover's tough stance, but in the urgent fight against Soviet imperialism and espionage they overlooked the danger of executive-branch policy being made independent of the chief executive. Old-fashioned constitutionalists have long understood that if the government "gives" us our rights, it can just as easily take them away. But they often missed a corresponding truth: if the FBI can decide, in open contradiction of the president, that *it* will determine how to fight communism, then the agency can just as well decide what it will *not* do, about communism or anything else. (Indeed, it might very well decide that alleged white nationalists, or even the president himself, represent the greatest threat to national security.)

In other circumstances, Hoover was more than happy to work with Democratic presidents. He got along well with Lyndon Johnson—they had been neighbors for several years in Northwest D.C.—though he hardly shared the latter's Great Society enthusiasms. Yet friendly feel-

ings cannot fully explain the lengths to which Hoover went to accommodate Johnson's outrageous requests for FBI subterfuge. Fearing a fight over his nomination at the 1964 Democratic National Convention, Johnson wanted to keep tabs on a possible floor challenge and forestall any disruption by the all-black Freedom Summer delegation. *G-Man* records that Johnson called on the FBI to infiltrate the convention; he "wanted bugs, taps, and confidential informants." Hoover obliged. One senior agent complained that the director "should have held the line at such blatant political use of his men." (Hoover *would* finally hold the line, firmly . . . with Richard Nixon.) Even as late as October 1968 Johnson requested "that the FBI surveil and wiretap the South Vietnamese embassy, for fear that Nixon was secretly negotiating to delay a peace settlement." *G-Man* observes laconically that "Hoover did as the president requested," in no small part, we may assume, because Hoover found Johnson useful. (It was LBJ who waived the federal retirement rule for Hoover shortly before the latter's seventieth birthday.)

After Nixon's election, however, "the liberals and Democrats who had held their tongues throughout the Johnson years began to come for Hoover, decrying him as a dangerous reactionary." And by 1970, Gage relates,

Hoover seemed strangely hesitant to use certain other techniques that had long been staples of the domestic intelligence systems. . . . [The] public and the courts were in no mood to tolerate, much less applaud, clandestine techniques that had once been routine. To Nixon, though, his decisions look like a puzzling unwillingness to do what needed to be done in the midst of a national crisis. After all this time—and despite many public words to the contrary—Nixon thought that Hoover was losing his nerve.

G-Man even includes the astounding revelation that "Nixon would later become convinced that the FBI had bugged his campaign plane at Johnson's behest, a misunderstanding that Hoover would alternately encourage and dismiss." The book doesn't elaborate on why Hoover might encourage this "misunderstanding" on the part of his good friend.

Despite her interest in the administrative state and the battles within the executive branch over control of the bureaucracy, Gage never addresses the central importance of Nixon's "New American Revolution"—his second-term agenda for dispersing government power back to the states and bringing federal agencies more directly under the authority of the White House. It was this overt assault on centralized administration, and the defensive reaction by the congressional-bureaucratic nexus (including the FBI), that some scholars see as the real story of Watergate.

The political scientist John Marini has written extensively on the theoretical origins of bureaucratic government and the rational state. He notes what Richard Nixon recorded in his diary after the 1972 election:

This is . . . probably the last time, that we can get government under control before it gets so big that it submerges the individual completely and destroys the dynamism which makes the American system what it is.

Nixon was reelected in what is still one of the biggest landslides in American history. One can read the results as a referendum on whether the president or Congress should control the permanent government in the executive branch. The people supported Nixon's plan; the administrative state did not. The final outcome of that battle has not yet been determined.

In Marini's view, the regime of centralized bureaucracy solidified its hold on American politics during this period, when it joined with Congress to neutralize the threat posed by Nixon's second-term platform. "The equivalent of a Watergate," Marini writes "was an absolute necessity for the defenders of the New Deal order." What "made consensus impossible was a disagreement over what constituted a fundamentally good or just regime." For Marini, Watergate, which established the precedent for Donald Trump, was the attempt to neutralize a political event (an unacceptable election) through nonpolitical means, including the media and especially the investigative and prosecutorial powers of the Justice Department. Accusing political adversaries of lawbreaking

and threatening criminal indictment has become the new form of waging political warfare. Thus, the FBI is an indispensable weapon for the permanent government, which now constitutes the most powerful faction in American society.

The bureaucracy can, of course, mobilize other agencies in highly effective ways. Anthony Fauci has deployed the NIAID, part of the NIH, on behalf of what some have called the “biosecurity state.” Yet the genuinely compulsory aspects of the COVID restrictions were legal: arresting people for violating social-distancing rules and imposing (or threatening) fines and jail time for obstreperous business owners. Even with the great power of medical propaganda, the surgical glove of public health often contained an iron fist of criminal sanctions to enforce the pandemic mandates.

Fauci’s arrogance, like that of FBI directors James Comey and Christopher Wray—and Hoover before them—is no accident. These officials often feel unappreciated and even put-upon by a lackadaisical public that fails to acknowledge their efforts. They certainly don’t see themselves as oppressive, let alone despotic. So far from being malicious, the typical administrative functionary sees himself as reasonable and helpful. Above all, the bureaucratic professional understands his authority as legitimate and rational. This is not quite what C. S. Lewis had in mind with his memorable lines about those who tyrannize over us for our own good; that’s a bit too selflessly high-minded. Our experts view themselves as doing a job; they work. But that work is methodical and nonpolitical precisely because there are no longer any politically or morally meaningful questions outside the bureaucracy. There is nothing to be political *about*. The question of popular consent is not so much objectionable as irrelevant: on what grounds would the people grant or withhold their consent? No rational person is in favor of disease, or crime, or pollution, or racism—thus no one can reasonably object to the experts utilizing modern medicine, criminology, and other empirical sciences to fight such evils.

From this perspective, the FBI’s “conservatism” can be understood as a defense of its

respectability and prerogatives. The Bureau uses its expert professionalism to uphold the law—and thus a modern, morally progressive society—largely as *it* determines. As Marini notes, the FBI, and the Justice Department more broadly, “see themselves as defenders of institutional rationality, as a part of the social intelligence that establishes the legitimacy of rule within the administrative state.”

To guarantee both its authority and funding, the bureaucracy operates with the support of, and in consultation with, the senior leadership in Congress—which has in key respects ceased to be a partisan institution. Leaders of both parties are deeply attached to their power to supervise the administrative state. Of course, it is the Democrats who have long been the party of big government, and they are truly in charge over the long term. Nominal Republicans in Congress send out spirited fundraising letters invoking the Constitution, but in practice the GOP leadership remains firmly within the bounds of establishment opinion. (May we wonder, based on the evidence, whether Senator Mitch McConnell even wanted a Republican majority in November? Might he be entirely content, and even find it preferable, to remain in the minority—retaining his perks without the burden of accountability?)

With regard to the congressional–bureaucratic nexus, consider the remarkable statement made by Mark Felt in a speech at Rutgers in October 1973, in which he called for FBI oversight by a congressional watchdog group comprising six senior legislators. Any disputes, Felt urged, “would be laid out on the table and [a] decision would be made between the FBI director and the committee members.” He added, “that type of political control would be better than political control from the White House.” This is a fairly good description of what has come to pass. (Gage refers to this speech in her 2012 essay but doesn’t quote these arresting lines, which I tracked down and, as far as I can tell, have been ignored by scholars and journalists for fifty years.)

Thus, when Donald Trump fired the FBI director James Comey in 2017, prominent law professors responded on cue to declare a “constitutional crisis” because the president

was interfering in the FBI's investigation of alleged White House misconduct. The entire spectacle would have been baffling to James Madison. How could a crisis arise from the chief executive interfering with the executive branch? And why is one of the president's ostensible subordinates investigating him in the first place? It isn't as if Madison hadn't contemplated a president exceeding his constitutional authority. In fact, the framers *assumed* this would be a constant danger and went to considerable pains to establish the separation of powers, with various checks and balances, precisely in anticipation of this contingency. Madison's plan provided a *political* solution for a political problem—which was intended to secure the common good. The modern FBI, the Justice Department, and the leak-addicted intelligence community, by contrast, represent an insular *administrative* apparatus that undermines, at its own discretion, the elected head of the government in order to protect its own interests.

Today, the last vestige of partisanship, and the last expression of popular sovereignty, is limited to presidential elections, which alone can reflect the deliberative will and consent of the people at large. Richard Nixon, Ronald Reagan, and Donald Trump have been the only serious threats to the half century of growth in the administrative state, and they were assailed accordingly. (Why Reagan managed to finish his second term without the total annihilation inflicted on Nixon and Trump is beyond the scope of this review, but it largely concerns his focus on victory in the Cold War, which made him less successful, and thus less threatening, domestically.)

Though she doesn't make the point herself, Gage helps us see that Trump's ordeals are in many ways the second act of Watergate. Trump has sometimes compared himself to Nixon, but one wonders if he privately regards Nixon as a "loser." That would not be entirely wrong. Nixon was more politically sophisticated in the sense of having a more intimate understanding of how Washington worked and a thoughtful plan for curtailing the bureaucracy. Yet, as *G-Man* shows, when he was engulfed by the Watergate scandal, he didn't quite understand

what was happening and—as he did in his 1960 bid for the presidency, with John F. Kennedy's controversial victory—bowed out for the good of the country. But it isn't clear that surrender *was* better for the country.

Trump stubbornly insists on continuing to challenge the 2020 election. He does so despite the outrage of the ruling class and the condemnation of all respectable opinion leaders. In fact, Trump's great political virtue may be that he does so *because* of their outrage and condemnation. If Trumpism represents the last political defense of the sovereignty of the people, he *must* deny the authority of the establishment—in the bureaucracy, media, and academia—to define political legitimacy. The superficial view of Trump's apolitical approach to his presidency is that all politics is now show business. The deeper truth is that Trump seems to intuit, without quite articulating, that America has descended into post-constitutionalism. He knows there is an existential war over the future of the American regime, as well as the meaning of its past, hence *Make America Great Again*.

Only a major realigning election, with a Republican president and large Republican majorities in the House and Senate—including a substantial number of new members loyal to the president's agenda and not the congressional leadership—can hope to break the overwhelming power of what Gage calls "the U.S. security state." The possibility that this will succeed is remote. Yet unlikely events have happened in politics before. Consider how unlikely it is that, after fifty years of consolidating its power and indoctrinating generations of students, the ruling class remains insecure; indeed it feels deeply threatened. Despite everything, the American people have never fully consented to this post-constitutional regime.

It is fitting then that the citizens of the United States may yet be "the last, best hope" for freedom in the world. "The fiery trial through which we pass," Lincoln said in 1862, "will light us down, in honor or dishonor, to the latest generation. . . . The way is plain, peaceful, generous, just—a way which, if followed, the world will forever applaud, and God must forever bless."

A realist in the higher sense

by Jacob Howland

Seeking some heavenly nourishment, Goethe's Faust turns to the holy Greek original of the Gospel of John. "In the beginning was the Word," the scholar reads, but he cannot understand this mystery. "In the beginning was the Meaning," he entertains, but he finds little creative potency in the mere content of a thought. "In the beginning was the Power," while briefly attractive, won't do either. Finally *der Geist*—Spirit, human or divine—inspires him to write, "In the beginning was the Deed."

Dostoevsky incorporates all of these Faustian variations in his own raw and vital formulation: *In the beginning was Fyodor Karamazov*. God's Gift (*theo + doron*), Fyodor is a man of primordial energies and seemingly insatiable appetites. Although he is impoverished when he comes of age as a nobleman, he is a scrappy climber of considerable intelligence. His shrewd investments in taverns fuel a riotous life of aristocratic decadence. A hubristic *farceur* who speaks French and relishes Voltairean mockery, Fyodor spends his days gratifying his sensual impulses and performing outrageous stunts. But he is sometimes deeply shaken by existential loneliness, and he is capable of uttering the name of the Lord in sincere blessing, as he does in his very last words to Ivan: "God be with you! God be with you! . . . Christ be with you!" Broad, muddled, ironic, and generally intoxicated, he is Hamlet's debauched Russian cousin, a man of gushing sap but "too too solid [or sullied] flesh." And, Dostoevsky implies, we are all his abandoned children.

Dostoevsky knew his Goethe and Shakespeare, and much else. *The Brothers Karamazov*, Richard Pevear writes in the introduction to his and Larissa Volokhonsky's 1990 North Point Press translation (on which I rely in this essay), "seems to have swallowed a small library." The primal father of the Blacksmears (from the Turkish and Tartar *kara* and the Russian *maz*), Fyodor is an earthly Saturn who smothers his wives and eats his sons in ways that strain the limits of metaphor. But the Karamazov myth is biblical as well as pagan. Fyodor's depravity is palpably enfolded in his "repulsively sensual" physiognomy: plump lips; the thin, hooked nose of a Roman patrician; and an Adam's apple that hangs "fleshy and oblong like a purse," as though the fruit of the tree of knowledge had gotten stuck in his throat.

This old Adam lords over others on matters of good and evil. He considers himself a creditor to his wives and sons and collects his debts—with usurious interest—in moral currency as well as hard cash. Having rescued his second wife Sofia from poverty and the tyranny of an old widow, Fyodor regards her as, "so to speak, 'guilty' before him" and proceeds to gather women in his house for orgies. Yet he is manifestly troubled by his own depravity.

When Alyosha asks his father's permission to enter the local monastery as a novice, Fyodor remarks that there is probably no ceiling in Hell, much less hooks from which to hang immaterial souls. "Who will drag me down with hooks," he worries, "because if

they don't drag me down, what then, and where is there any justice in the world?" Later, when he opens his soul (as people do) to Alyosha's spiritual mentor, the Elder Zosima, demons pour forth. He behaves outrageously ("Blessed is the womb that bare thee and the paps which thou hast sucked—the paps especially!" he tells Zosima) but admits that "there's maybe an unclean spirit living in me." And in the "last act" of his memorable performance at the monastery, he rouses himself to a pitch of fatherly indignation concerning the imperilment of Alyosha's soul by Zosima's rumored abuse of the sacrament of confession. "With us, once a thing falls, it can lie there forever," he observes with stunning honesty; "I won't have it, sirs! I want to rise!"

That longing to rise is discernible even when Fyodor sinks to his lowest and foulest deed, the rape of Lizaveta. Mute, seemingly idiotic, savagely beaten by her alcoholic father, and now orphaned, the twenty-year-old Lizaveta is mythically primitive and wholesome—a distinctly Russian, Christian–pagan fusion of earthly and heavenly women. Arrestingly carnal and creaturely, she wears a hempen shift, has matted "sheep's wool" hair flecked with twigs and dirt, begs "all over town," and goes barefoot in all seasons and sleeps on the ground (like mortal Poverty and her daimonic son Eros in Plato's *Symposium*). Yet she has a place in the hearts of the townspeople as a "holy fool of God," so much so that even schoolboys do not tease or insult her. She immediately gives away the alms that come her way (rolls and buns to children and women, kopecks to churches and prisons) and subsists only on black bread and water.

Lizaveta's nature seems both to attract and repel Fyodor, as does her lusty but stinking body. Admitting to Zosima that in his youth he made his living "by sponging," Fyodor remarks that he is "a natural-born buffoon . . . just like a holy fool." Like a man falling backwards off a mountain, he has a view of spiritual heights, however blurred, even as he plunges to the basest depths. Fyodor claims that "even in the whole of my life there has never been an ugly woman, that's my rule!" One senses in his rape of Lizaveta a confused

attraction to beauty and goodness that would be recognizable as inchoate Platonic eros if it could be disentangled from his cruel thumotic impulses. Little wonder that this monstrous act of violence, which issues in the birth of Smerdyakov in a bathhouse, perversely recalls the conception of Jesus and his delivery in a manger. For the Karamazov nature is such as to hold the "ideal of the Madonna," in Dmitri's words, together with the "ideal of Sodom."

Robert Louis Jackson observes that the ideal of Sodom is reflected in the impulse to disfigure what is beautiful and good, as when Fyodor spits on Sofia's icon of the Madonna. The pleasure man finds in the ideal of Sodom, Jackson writes, "coexists in lacerating contact with his higher ideal" and is necessarily connected with an impression of that ideal. The rape of Lizaveta is from this perspective a twisted acknowledgment of her inner beauty, the divine image that shines within her. But Fyodor is merely wicked, not irredeemably evil. "Here [in the Karamazov nature] the devil is struggling with God, and the battlefield is the human heart," Dmitri tells Alyosha; "man is broad, even too broad." In the murky depths of Fyodor's soul, a longing for decorous order and harmony flashes like a silvery fish. The profoundly muddled *paterfamilias* wants both to destroy the divine image and to be saved by it. Is that not all too human?

The epigraph of *The Brothers Karamazov* is drawn from the Gospel of John: "Verily, Verily, I say unto you, except a corn of wheat fall into the ground and die, it abideth alone: but if it die, it bringeth forth much fruit." Dostoevsky's entire book is a commentary on this biblical verse, which contrasts the sterility of isolation with the fecundity of communion and links the suffering of the Cross with the joy of resurrection. Heraclitus taught that the way up and the way down are one and the same—a thought that dawns on Oedipus when, at the center of Sophocles' *Oedipus Rex*, he recalls killing an old man at the crossroads. In reversing that tragic formula, Christianity transforms it into a message of redemption. All the main characters of the novel are bound together in a spiritual drama of falling as a

necessary prelude for rising—but not, in all cases, a sufficient one.

“There were some among our gentry who said she [Lizaveta] did it all out of pride,” the narrator relates. Led by Zosima’s adversary Ferapont, some level the same charge against the elder, who exemplifies the saving power of joyful and active love and who dies in the days before Easter “kissing the earth and praying (as he himself taught).” The elder’s connection to the earth and to Lizaveta becomes explicit when his corpse scandalously begins to stink just hours after his death—a sign of God’s condemnation, according to the malicious and the lightheaded alike. (Kindly Madame Khokhlakov absurdly remarks that she would not have expected “such conduct” from him.) Ferapont—whose envy and indignation at the widespread love the elder elicited in life pours forth when his stench becomes impossible to ignore—is lifted up in society’s opinion as Zosima is taken down: “It is he [Ferapont] who is holy! It is he who is righteous!” voices exclaimed.” Like Lizaveta, Ferapont is a keeper of silence who does not bathe, takes only bread and water, and is regarded as a holy fool. But his holiness is fundamentally adversarial—he claims that the monastery is swarming with devils—and literally diabolical, in that it feeds on slander. And while he dwells in almost total isolation and strains under the weight of his chain-mail asceticism, Lizaveta lives in joyful communion with all the people of Skotoprigonyevsk, rich and poor, young and old alike. It is she who deserves the humble and hallowed name of Ferapont, from the Greek *therapōn*: servant, healer, caregiver.

Having denounced Zosima for the “desire to be worshipped like an idol,” Ferapont “went to his cell without looking back, still uttering exclamations, but now quite incoherently.” This is our last image of the man, who exits the novel in a sobbing frenzy of self-exaltation and spite. His madness is self-consuming, as empty and sterile as a hot desert wind.

Such convulsions are common in *The Brothers Karamazov*. Ferapont’s apoplexy recalls the alarming transformation of Captain Sne-

giryov when, having joyfully bared his soul to Alyosha upon receiving Katerina Ivanovna’s gift of two hundred rubles (“Lord, but this is a dream!”), he is suddenly overcome by a fit of “inexplicable pride” that contorts his face, twists his lips, and renders him speechless. In a similar delirium of pride, a shrieking and sobbing Katerina destroys Dmitri in court. Other spiritual and psychological disorders cannot easily be traced to *amour propre*. Lise Khokhlakov, who crushes her finger in a door in an act of self-mortification, replicates her mother’s comic hysteria in a demonic register. Then there are the exhausted and abused women called “shriekers.” These include Fyodor’s second wife, Sofia, terrorized by the old widow and then by her husband, and the peasant who, brought before Zosima, “began somehow absurdly screeching, hiccuping, and shaking all over.” Finally, there is Smerdyakov’s epilepsy—which, like the fate of a tragic protagonist, is somehow partly within his control. Might it, too, be the physical manifestation of profound moral suffering?

Lizaveta’s child is marked by the strange circumstances of his birth almost as much as by his bastardy and low parentage, which are stamped onto his soul when Fyodor takes to calling him Smerdyakov, that is, Son of the Stinking One. Why did Lizaveta, already in labor, scale the high fence of Fyodor’s garden? What does it mean that the injured and dying woman delivered her baby in his bathhouse? Or that she did so on the very day Fyodor’s devout servant Grigory buried his own infant son, born with six fingers, whom he calls a “dragon” and a “monster”—and that Grigory and his wife raised the changeling? Dragons and monsters (from the Latin *monstrum*, a divine portent) are the stuff of *Beowulf*, in which Grendel of the exiled clan of Cain prowls the bog outside the barred and bolted mead hall. Grigory later refers to Smerdyakov, too, as a monster. “You are not a human being,” he tells him after catching him burying a cat he killed in a mock religious ceremony; “you were begotten of bathhouse slime”—words the boy “never could forgive him.” We are well-prepared for the Oedipal return of the unwanted son and the revenge of the outcast brother.

Rich with mythical and biblical associations, Fyodor's garden is a primal scene of longing and labor, damnation and potential salvation. There, in the dark of night, Dmitri fells Grigory with a blow from a brass pestle, and Fyodor, fearful but trembling with erotic expectation, looks in vain for the temptress Grushenka. Most suggestive is the apple tree, hollow with age and decay, in which Smerdyakov hides the money he steals from his father immediately after murdering him. His crimes combine the sins of the father with those of the son, the metaphorical parricide of violating God's prohibition concerning the Tree of Knowledge with the murder of Abel.

While the expulsion from Eden deprives Adam and Eve of God's intimate presence, it is Cain who most acutely feels the pain of divine rejection and exile. Unbearably embittered by the regard that God bestows exclusively on his brother, he commits a murder that turns him into a homeless wanderer on sterile soil. So it is, more or less, with Smerdyakov, whose birth both entitles him to and disqualifies him from full inclusion in the family Karamazov. Despised by his brothers and habitually derided by his father, he cannot understand that Fyodor, with whom he lives longer and more closely than any of his siblings do, has nevertheless come to care for him and "for some reason even loved him." Perversely, he is attracted to Ivan not least because he shares his disgust at being associated with the Karamazovs. This is like Groucho Marx's joke about never joining any club that would have him for a member. The garden whose gate Smerdyakov forces by stealth and violence, knowing not how to enter by love, must for that reason alone remain nothing more than a blood-polluted patch marked by a rotting apple tree. Little wonder that his patricide ends in suicide.

In fact, all of Fyodor's children are patricidal and suicidal. These tendencies, Dostoevsky implies, are conjoined: like plants, we wither and die when we sever the roots of our being. Dmitri beats his biological father, nearly kills his adoptive one, and plans to shoot himself at dawn after his spree in Mokroye. Alyosha,

who despairs of "higher justice" when slander engulfs Zosima after his death, murmurs against his Heavenly Father and, in the Lenten lead-up to Easter, prepares to commit spiritual suicide with the aid of vodka, sausage, and Grushenka. As for Ivan, his as yet untested assertion that "everything is permitted"—the poisoned fruit of Enlightenment atheism and revolutionary radicalism—deeply impresses Smerdyakov and, to Alyosha's dismay, licenses Ivan's intention by the age of thirty to "drop the cup [of life], even if I haven't emptied it, and walk away." With similar intellectual detachment—one could say that Ivan ironically inhabits sincere positions while the role-playing Fyodor sincerely inhabits ironic ones—he maintains that he will always protect his father according to conventions of filial duty but claims total freedom to wish for his death. Yet Smerdyakov's accusation that "the chief murderer is you alone" moves him to confess to the deed in court, a confession whose sincerity is ironically attributed to his obvious insanity.

Of the Karamazov brothers, only Dmitri and Alyosha are by novel's end saved from self-destruction. Their salvation involves a purification through suffering of raw romantic sensuality or spiritual ardor—of eros—and comes with unexpected grace from the quarter where Fyodor instinctively sought it: from Grushenka. Neither man is free of self-love—that is a given for all human beings—but both are capable of actively loving and receiving love from another, and this reciprocated love wrings meaning out of otherwise meaningless suffering.

Ivan and Smerdyakov, however, abide in the solitude of a suffering that bears no fruit. Both at some point echo Cain's question, "Am I my brother's keeper?" Alyosha urges Ivan to "love life more than its meaning," to "love it before logic," but the barren rock of logic seems to him to offer surer footing than love's uneven ground. Adults, Ivan says, "are disgusting and do not deserve love"—note that love is for him conditional on reason's judgment—but "one can love children even up close" because they "are not yet guilty of anything." Yet while he is tormented by children's suffering,

he does nothing that might help a single one of them. Characteristically, he shoves others away—some furiously, like Maximov at the monastery and the drunken peasant he encounters on the way to see Smerdyakov; others, including Alyosha, whom he wrongly accuses of having no place for him in his heart, in a surge of self-pity.

Ivan's situation is critical, but Smerdyakov's is hopeless. Crushed by massive insult to his being, he is utterly incapable of love, yet he longs for a fraternal embrace that never arrives. His deepest wish is to prove to Ivan that he is his equal and brother in critical intelligence and boldness. Rejected by this "former brave man," he ends his life in a way that is notable more for its pusillanimity and vengefulness than for intrepidity of thought and action.

In Roman and Old Catholic churches, the consecrated Eucharistic host is sometimes displayed in a vessel called a monstrance. The tragedy of the "monster" Smerdyakov is a kind of negative Eucharist, a literary demonstration or admonition that points, by way of warning, to the human necessity of community or of the communion achieved through love—the spiritual bread without which man cannot live.

In *The Brothers Karamazov* it is Zosima who embodies the promise of salvation through love. A capacious soul who contains all of the fundamental human potentialities realized in Fyodor's sons, he is a "Brother" as well as a "Father," and not just among monks. Alyosha's spiritual father, Zosima is a double or antipodal twin of his biological one. As broad, vital, and intelligent as Fyodor, he is by nature no less susceptible to Karamazovian derangements of heart and mind, including cruel and violent expressions of pride. Rescued from these afflictions in early manhood by the joyful suffering of active love, he comes to exemplify spiritual health and integrity.

The novel's central spiritual drama plays out in the charged middle ground between Fyodor and Zosima, the old Adam and the new. On the day both men die—a day whose events the narrator begins to relate at the cen-

ter and dramatic hinge of the book—Alyosha and Dmitri descend to the depths of despair only to rise with new strength and purpose.

Zosima had instructed Alyosha to leave the monastery after his death and "sojourn in the world like a monk." Alyosha is twenty and will soon lose the elder's guidance; yet on the verge of this rite of passage into adulthood he remains spiritually immature. The narrator shrewdly observes that Alyosha "revered" and "adored" Zosima, in whom the whole of his love was "concentrated, perhaps even incorrectly." For this reason, he immediately expected miracles "from the remains of his former adored teacher," but the slander of Zosima awakens him from his childish dreams. Father Paissy rebukes the gloating Ferapont by noting that the elder's stink may be "such a 'sign' as neither I, nor you, nor any man is capable of understanding." Together with Grushenka's equally unexpected consideration for Alyosha's grief, it is in any case just what Alyosha most needs at this pregnant moment, in which eternity and time seem to touch.

The probability or necessity of physical and moral corruption in the monastery and Grushenka's rescue of Alyosha from the same are easily grasped by reason (Grushenka was, after all, the daughter of a clergyman). That goes also for Dmitri's depression and mania on the same fateful night, which culminates in a drunken revelry at which his love is "crowned" and "heaven was open to [him] again"—a Bacchic version of the wedding of Cana of which Alyosha dreams just as his brother is rushing off to Mokroye. Yet one is unable to dismiss the impression that these events, and Dmitri's arrest and subsequent spiritual trials, are also miracles of love.

Dostoevsky claimed to be "a realist in the higher sense; that is, I depict all the depths of the human soul." He therefore acknowledged divine mystery and miracle, without which one can depict neither the soul's depths nor its heights. His realism, the realism of active love, is furthermore more substantial and practically capable, more *realistic*, than any Karamazovian politics, poetry, or philosophy. Compared with Zosima's example

of brotherhood—his love of the neighbor, expressed as non-judgmental openness and moral availability—the political ideal of *fraternité* embraced by Smerdyakov (who dates events according to the French revolutionary calendar) and the romantic one of *Brüderschaft* that inspires the Schiller-quoting Dmitri reveal themselves to be empty delusions. And if realism means the ability to contend with reality, Ivan is even less realistic than his brothers. For he willfully rejects the entire existing world because it does not measure up to his “Euclidean” moral reason. In this he directly opposes Zosima’s example.

The question of moral measure stands at the heart of *The Brothers Karamazov*. Dostoevsky indicates the priority of this question in a curious locution that appears repeatedly in the novel: “X is guilty before Y.” Fyodor’s topsy-turvy judgment that his second wife is “guilty before” him licenses his debauchery. Less perversely, Alyosha regards Dmitri as “guilty before” Katerina. Grushenka considers her “former and indisputable one” (the Polish *pan*) to be “guilty before” her, while the kindhearted police commissioner Markov, who repents of indignantly accusing Grushenka “most of all” in Fyodor’s murder, passes the same judgment on himself.

In each of these instances, guilt is understood to exist in relation to a particular person in a particular respect. It is well-defined and calculable within the framework of a specific moral economy. Ivan, however, identifies a guilt—a moral debt—that is beyond all measure: the debt incurred by the torture and suffering of innocent children. For Ivan, this humanly pervasive, incalculable, and therefore unpayable debt explodes the fundamental moral and theological economy—the theodicy—of Christianity itself. Like Johannes de Silentio, who proclaims in Kierkegaard’s *Fear and Trembling* that “God’s love, both in a

direct and inverse sense, is incommensurable with the whole of actuality,” Ivan accepts God but not the world of God’s creation. With Silentio, he presumes to stand outside the whole of actuality and to judge it. And his solution, as he tells Alyosha, is to “return my ticket”—as though life were a show and he a spectator.

Although Zosima stands inside of, and actively participates in, the whole, his thinking is even more explosive of ordinary moral reckoning than Ivan’s. Zosima teaches that “each of us is guilty in everything before everyone”—that each is responsible for all. His formulation involves a radical expansion of the idea that X is guilty before Y, one that seemingly involves an infinite regress: I am guilty before and for everyone in everything, including everyone’s guilt before and for me, including my guilt . . . *ad infinitum*. But if this claim does not pass the test of rational analysis, that is no measure of its practical moral adequacy. Ivan’s assertion of Euclidean reason is in any case incoherent even on its own terms. He is unable to understand that “two parallel lines, which according to Euclid cannot possibly meet on earth, may perhaps meet somewhere in infinity.” In fact, longitudinal lines are parallel at the equator but do meet on earth, at the poles.

Zosima’s sole and overriding purpose in life is to advance active love—the only power available to man that can make the parallel throughlines of otherwise isolated human existence meet, not at infinity but here on earth. The positive and negative demonstrations of his teaching by the characters of *The Brothers Karamazov* are not theoretical but dramatic. Wittgenstein wrote that “if a man could write a book on Ethics that was really a book on Ethics, this book would, with an explosion, destroy all of the other books in the world.” Dostoevsky accomplishes this explosion by the highest literary means. This may be the crowning achievement of his greatest novel.

The House of Morgenthau

by Myron Magnet

As family sagas go, the tale of the high-flying Morgenthau is hard to top. How many American clans can boast an ambassador in one generation, a Treasury secretary in the next, and, in the third, a legendary prosecutor of four decades' tenure? Their story, as Andrew Meier tells it in *Morgenthau: Power, Privilege, and the Rise of an American Dynasty*, offers a rarefied vista of a century's worth of U.S. history, with family members rubbing shoulders with Woodrow Wilson, Franklin Roosevelt, and the Kennedys.¹ Meier toiled for twelve years to make his thousand-page epic definitive, interviewing all the surviving characters and digesting countless pages of the letters and journals of these compulsive diarists dating back to 1842. At its best, the narrative is fast-paced and utterly absorbing. But too often the focus blurs, the narrative line tangles, punch lines don't track, and the authorial judgment is merely conventional, its shopworn Democratic Party assumptions unexamined. The tale is great—but greater than the teller.

So let me summarize it for you.

A failure in Germany set the family's American success story going. Enconced in his Mannheim mansion, the self-made cigar magnate Lazarus Morgenthau viewed with dismay President Abraham Lincoln's push for tariffs to protect U.S. tobacco growers, effectively closing the market Morgenthau's costly stogies

had won in California. One last giant shipment scheduled to beat the new levy landed a day late in 1862, turning an expected profit into a crushing loss. Nearly broke, Lazarus and his young family sailed for New York in 1866.

As one after another of his entrepreneurial schemes flopped in Gotham, Lazarus grew more grandiose and less sane, triggering a separation from his long-suffering wife and spells in an asylum. But while he floundered, his ten-year-old son Heinrich, now Henry, began to push upward, mastering English, shining in school, and starting New York's City College at fourteen in 1870 before having to quit to help support his big family.

He scrambled as an errand boy, a bookkeeper, and a law-firm gofer, improving his mind with library books, his muscles with weight lifting, and his character with Ben Franklin's *Autobiography* and a weekly relay of trendy Protestant preachers, all in the same self-help vein as his own "avant-garde Judaism." He became a model self-made American, whose credo was "Be your own engineer," forging your own fate. By 1874, clerking for a top lawyer and teaching English at an immigrant night-school, he could afford tuition at Columbia Law, graduating in 1877 and opening a law firm two years later. In 1883, this embodiment of self-reliance married a rich clothier's daughter he'd met at an "Emersonian evening," as a group of friends called their philosophical soirées—as much a career move as an affair of the heart.

Henry made his first real-estate investment even before his marriage, pocketing a

¹ *Morgenthau: Power, Privilege, and the Rise of an American Dynasty*, by Andrew Meier; Random House, 1,072 pages, \$45.

quick profit in 1880 that set his course. He saw that Gilded Age New York, so charged with opportunity that any industrious man “can rise to as high a position as he chooses,” was expanding unstoppably into undeveloped areas. Seizing the moment, he bought a Harlem square block in 1887 and, four years later, four square blocks of Washington Heights for \$1 million with a group of partners—land auctioned off two months later for a half-million-dollar profit in what the press dubbed “the great Morgenthau sale.”

This was a moment when a thousand hard-working immigrants a week were pouring into Gotham, all needing housing. Subway construction was supercharging the city’s outward expansion, and the steel frame and electric safety elevator were propelling it upward. Henry quit his law firm and founded the Central Realty, Bond & Trust Company, whose stock price doubled within three months of its listing in 1899. By 1904, having spanned Manhattan and covered the Bronx with elevator apartment buildings, Henry, at forty-eight, was one of New York’s biggest taxpayers and a member of half a dozen corporate boards, including Thomas Edison’s. Now rich enough to attend to status and meaning, he bought his way onto the Metropolitan Opera board and was the founding president of the new Free Synagogue, which preached a truly avant-garde Judaism in “progressive” sermons and lectures by the muckraker Jacob Riis and the settlement-house founder Lillian Wald.

That mix of progressivism and Judaism made the Free Synagogue an ideal venue for New Jersey Governor Woodrow Wilson, the speaker at a gala dinner in April 1911. With Henry presiding, Wilson emphasized his radical “progressivism,” as he called his top-down statism, stressing the moral obligations of businessmen to serve the common good, under government regulation and the threat of being shut down—or jailed. In December, now campaigning for the presidency and mindful of the new electoral power of America’s ethnic and religious minorities, to whom he was one of the first candidates to make a direct identity-politics appeal, Wilson accentuated the Judaism. Addressing some 3,300 leaders of New York’s seven hundred thousand Jews on “The

Rights of the Jews,” he electrified his hearers by asserting his shared identity with them as citizens “who have become part of the very stuff of America” and by praising the Jewish “men of genius in every walk of our varied life” who have played “a particularly conspicuous part in building up [our] prosperity.” If you wonder why Jews have been Democrats for more than a century, here’s one reason.

Smitten, Henry offered Wilson a huge contribution and became his campaign finance chief. When the long-shot candidate won, Henry expected a cabinet seat—as Treasury secretary, he hoped—and he bridled at the lesser offer of the ambassadorship to Constantinople, considered a Jewish post out of respect for Ottoman anti-Christian bigotry. He accepted grudgingly and arrived in late 1913, in time to watch the unfolding of a tragedy within a tragedy.

Steaming across the Ionian Sea to meet him in August 1914, his second daughter and her family—including his two-year-old granddaughter, the future historian Barbara Tuchman—had passed a skirmish between British and German naval vessels, exchanging the first salvoes of those guns of August that marked the opening of World War I. In late October, when Turkey joined the war on the German side and the allied ambassadors decamped, Henry, representing neutral America, was left in charge of the affairs of the European nations.

In that capacity, he delivered a scathing note in May 1915 from Britain, France, and Russia to the grand vizier, condemning Turkey’s “crimes against humanity” in its ongoing massacres of its Armenian subjects. A month earlier, having heard rumors of intensifying outrages, Henry had questioned Talaat Pasha, one of the Young Turk trio that really ruled the country, over after-dinner cigars at the embassy. Talaat purred that the Armenians were merely being moved—on the very night that the massacres began. But as ever-more-graphic reports of torture, starvation, rape, and murder of people tied together and shot, burned, or drowned came to Henry, he grasped that “a campaign of race extermination is in progress under a

pretext of reprisal against rebellion,” the Muslim Turks only half believing that the talented and long-oppressed Christian Armenians were rising against them in the war.

From afar, Henry had organized an American committee to rescue the Armenians and resettle them in the Western states, ultimately raising \$10 million, and he made the genocide front-page news. But as Theodore Roosevelt wrote, the mass meetings and newspaper headlines were “sentimental but ineffective”; only military force would work. Henry knew this was true and that neutral America would not intervene. Nor would Turkey let the Armenians go. Of the perhaps 1.5 million Armenians who lived in the Ottoman Empire, more than half—and perhaps many more—were slaughtered. Dispirited, Henry came home in early 1916 and resigned soon after.

Though the ambassador’s son ultimately won the Treasury post his father had once coveted—and held it for twelve years—Henry Morgenthau Jr. had none of his father’s Emersonian self-sufficiency. He always seemed to anchor himself to someone else, as if otherwise he’d be adrift in his own life. Meier thinks he suffered from dyslexia before that condition had a name. Certainly that would explain why he floundered at prep school and, though he enrolled at Cornell twice, was a college as well as a high-school dropout. In his youth, he anxiously hung on the approval of his loving but hard-to-please father. As an adult, he was Dr. Watson to Franklin Delano Roosevelt’s Sherlock Holmes.

Machiavelli counsels us to prepare dikes and ditches to direct fortune’s streams should they flood upon us, but more often—like Henry Jr.—we are the playthings, not the masters, of chance. Yet luck favored Henry. To recuperate from an illness, his father sent him to a friend’s vast Texas ranch, where the twenty-year-old Jew from West Eighty-first Street fell in love with . . . farming. Accordingly, this child of privilege set off on a ten-thousand-mile cross-country odyssey to study farm methods and conditions, with an assistant to the secretary of agriculture for a guide. This was his real education.

At twenty-two, with money from his father, he bought a thousand-acre Hudson Valley farm and began planting orchards. A neighboring gentleman-farmer soon became, as Henry said, his “best friend.”

That was Franklin Roosevelt. What was chance for Henry was calculation on FDR’s part. The assistant secretary of the Navy, nearly nine years the young man’s senior, well knew Henry’s father as a lavish Democratic donor, and he immediately began wondering what use he could make of the son, a new recruit to the thin ranks of Dutchess County Democrats. Run him for sheriff? Make him a county committeeman? FDR was a tireless political operator, his Hyde Park house always bustling with cronies, and Henry Jr. became a regular.

So did the bride Henry brought home to the Fishkill farmhouse in 1916—Elinor Fatman, a granddaughter of one of the founding Lehman brothers. The two couples became inseparable—so close that when FDR struggled through his recovery from the polio he contracted in 1921, hidden from the public eye, his Morgenthau neighbors became almost a second family, sharing dinners, birthdays, and holidays. FDR trusted Henry to help carry him up the front stairs of Fishkill Farms, the paralyzed man joking as best he could to dispel the humiliation. Over six years, Roosevelt remade himself, coming out of the ordeal, Henry judged, “a completely new person,” stronger, braver, more compassionate.

Only just recovered, FDR ran for New York governor in 1928, with Henry handling his upstate campaign. Surprised to win, Roosevelt named his friend head of the Agricultural Commission and promoted him, after his 1930 reelection, to conservation commissioner. With the Great Depression weighing heavily, Henry started a work-relief program both figuratively and literally groundbreaking: he bused jobless young men from Gotham to Bear Mountain and paid them to build roads and plant trees—the rough draft of the New Deal’s Civilian Conservation Corps.

FDR began eyeing the White House almost as soon as he became governor, and, upon his 1932 presidential victory, he named his friend head of the Farm Credit Board. With a swift

efficiency the self-doubting Henry didn't realize he possessed, he reorganized the nation's credit system for capital-starved farmers. His old closeness with the president remained: the two had a standing Monday lunch, the envy of the cabinet, and FDR used Henry as a back-channel go-between in matters ranging from mistress management to the off-the-record negotiations that led to U.S. recognition of the Soviet Union, over the State Department's protests. The two Eleanors—Eleanor Roosevelt and Elinor Morgenthau—remained inseparable, too, riding their horses in Rock Creek Park and crisscrossing the country on social-justice tours of schools, prisons, and even mines.

After FDR took America off the gold standard early in his presidency, Henry pressed him to try the crackpot Depression cure of the Cornell agronomist George Warren, who held that Washington could raise battered commodity prices by daily gold purchases that would steadily boost the metal's price, a confusion of cause and effect. Every morning as the president ate his eggs, Henry and Warren would stand by his bed and set the price of gold with him, picking numbers at random—and once, famously, raising the price by twenty-one cents because FDR thought three times seven a doubly lucky number.

Convinced of Henry's financial and administrative skill, the president, to his insecure friend's astonishment, named him Treasury secretary at the end of 1933. He came to that office with two conflicting core beliefs. He swore by the New Deal's myriad relief programs, yet he also favored a balanced budget and wasn't sure America could spend its way out of the Depression. One tool he devised to help finance the New Deal was the U.S. Savings Bond, "baby bonds," which let Washington borrow billions of dollars from ordinary citizens. But later, looking back over the whole New Deal enterprise, he ruefully concluded,

We have tried spending money. We are spending more than we have ever spent before and it does not work. . . . I say after eight years of this Administration we have just as much unemployment as when we started. . . . And an enormous debt to boot.

Tellingly, Meier's nine hundred pages of text omit this most famous of Henry's statements.

FDR's first inaugural address had blamed the Depression on the "money changers"—on capitalists in general—and in that vengeful spirit, Henry gladly used the IRS to punish those who weren't paying their rightful share of the New Deal's cost. Less attractively, in his role as FDR's cat's-paw, he weaponized the IRS against the president's political enemies, pursuing Senator Huey Long, an FDR ally turned foe, with the fervor of Inspector Javert, and carrying out Roosevelt's order to "'get' Moe Annenberg," the *Philadelphia Inquirer* publisher, by sending him to prison for three years. Still nastier was his persecution of Andrew Mellon, a Treasury secretary under three former presidents, whose crime seems to have been being a rich, anti-New Deal Republican and who was posthumously exonerated. But the author Meier sees all this as "a defense of American democracy, against the rising tide of fascism and the attacks on the New Deal as no more than a vehicle for the personal fiat of Roosevelt"—as if these were the same, and as if the New Deal succeeded in curing the Depression any better than Secretary Morgenthau thought it did.

It's worth noting that the IRS weaponization that Henry started—which continued through the Obama IRS official Lois Lerner's harassment of conservative think-tanks and now promises to intensify with President Biden's perhaps eighty-seven thousand new T-Men—suggests that the turning of free Americans into a nation of sheep, with government as their shepherd, could come to pass less benignly than Alexis de Tocqueville imagined. It's possible to take away unalienable rights, not by forbidding their exercise but by making citizens afraid to assert them—a soft tyranny, but tyranny still.

It was the rise of hard fascism in Germany after Hitler became absolute ruler in August 1934 that increasingly gripped Henry's attention and led to his finest hour. He had never forgotten his tour of the smoking trenches of Gallipoli when his father was ambassador during World War I or his shudder at the militaristic triumphalism he'd seen visiting the German commander's

headquarters there. Nor had FDR ever lost the distaste for “Kaiserism” and “Prussianism” that he’d developed during his six childhood summers in Germany. Contrary to the isolationist mood of the era, both men foresaw, as the president prophetically put it to the Treasury secretary as early as December 1934, that “If the Nazi inhuman policy should be extended to England because her back was to the wall, . . . the U.S. would, of course, go in and help England.”

After the isolationist Congress began passing a series of Neutrality Acts in 1935, forbidding the export of war matériel to belligerents, Roosevelt charged Henry with figuring out how to circumvent the statutes and the “appeasers” in the State Department to arm Britain and France. By the end of 1938, having learned to transship through Canada or label arms as surplus, he was negotiating with the French over the purchase of a thousand planes. When Congress dropped the prohibition against arms sales in 1939 but required payment in cash, Henry drafted the Lend-Lease statute, premised on the fiction that America was loaning near-bankrupt Britain billions of dollars worth of ships and matériel to be returned . . . someday.

As he was arming the European allies and retooling the nation’s slump-idled factories for war production—which FDR liked for the economic boost it was giving the country, the actual cure for the Depression—Henry also brooded over the plight of Europe’s Jews, especially after the Kristallnacht pogroms in November 1938 made the Nazi menace undeniable. But those few prominent American Jews who tried to persuade the president to relax the ultra-strict immigration quotas to allow a flood of impoverished refugees into unemployment-ravaged America made no headway. Though the flagship *New York Times* was receiving correspondents’ dispatches about Hitler’s planned extermination of the Jews from early 1940 on, the paper’s proprietors, fearful of being labeled too Jewish, cravenly printed no story until two crabbed paragraphs on Page Five in June 1942 reported the “greatest mass slaughter in history,” with seven hundred thousand Polish Jews killed by “machine-gun bullets, hand grenades, gas cham-

bers, concentration camps, whipping, torture instruments and starvation.” But then came regular stories on the German “campaign to exterminate all Jews.”

Under Henry’s aegis, four intense young Treasury lawyers pursued a scheme throughout 1943 to save a remnant of European Jewry from Nazi extermination. Meier recounts their electrifying saga so badly as to make it almost incomprehensible, but its gist is this: In August 1942, Gerhart Riegner, a representative of the small but grandly named World Jewish Congress, asked American and British diplomats in Geneva to pass on to Washington information he had received from a top German industrialist about Hitler’s plan, fleshed out at the Wannsee Conference at the start of the year, for the “Final Solution to the Jewish question,” and indicating that Europe’s Jews were already being transported to Poland for mass slaughter. That part of the message got through, via the British, and by December, the broadcaster Edward R. Murrow told his radio listeners of Jews “being gathered up with ruthless efficiency and murdered . . . in extermination camps.”

But Riegner had a further message: that he could save the remaining Jews of Romania and France and thousands of Jewish kids elsewhere in Europe by paying bribes and ransoms, if only he could get the funds. The Treasury lawyers labored to set up the necessary machinery but found themselves stymied. After much sleuthing, they discovered that anti-Semites in the State Department were purposely stonewalling them, with the assistant secretary of state Breckenridge Long falsifying cables and lying to Congress. Secretary Morgenthau finally confronted Long and got FDR’s permission to act—but not until January 1944, when there were only two hundred thousand saved, compared to the more than six million who perished. Even less successful were the efforts of one of the young Treasury lawyers to get the Pentagon to bomb five key rail lines to halt the transport of Jews from Hungary to the Auschwitz death camp. That would divert resources from decisive operations, replied the assistant secretary of war John McCloy.

As the war ground toward an end, Henry began planning for the new world order. In

July 1944, he hosted the Bretton Woods Conference to help shape the post-war economy. It hammered out a new gold-based exchange-rate system, anchored to the dollar, and it created the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank. As Henry was the Treasury secretary, the reader might expect a few pages of economic analysis, especially given the dramatic policy clash between John Maynard Keynes, the head of the British delegation, and the assistant U.S. Treasury secretary Harry Dexter White. But Meier trivializes the conflict as a personality confrontation between the anti-Semitic Keynes and the “blunt and brazen” White, the son of Lithuanian-Jewish immigrants, originally named Weit and later notoriously and accurately charged with secretly aiding the Communists.

On the future of Germany, Secretary Morgenthau had sharp and vengeful views that sparked a forceful reaction that ended his career in government. The goal of a peace settlement, he thought, should be to “prevent Germany from imposing devastation and terror on a helpless Europe for the third time in a single century.” It wasn’t just the Nazi leaders who were guilty, though perhaps 2,500 of them should be summarily executed. Beyond that, as FDR once put it, “the whole nation has been engaged in a lawless conspiracy against the decencies of modern civilization,” thanks to the culture of militarism and Prussianism that both he and Henry Morgenthau had found so shocking when young. The task, as Henry saw it, was to change the German character, indeed to transform German culture so as not to “raise another generation of Germans who will want to wage war,” he said. And the way to do that, and also to ensure that Germany lacked the physical means of war-making, was to deindustrialize Germany: to close down its factories and mines, move its machinery to nations whose industries the Nazis had destroyed, and turn Germany into a humbled nation of farmers. “People who lived close to the land tended to be tranquil and peace-loving,” Henry wrote.

Opposition to the Morgenthau Plan was ferocious. Winston Churchill, Henry recalled, “turned loose on me the full flood of his rhetoric, sarcasm and violence,” dismissing the plan

as “unnatural, unchristian, and unnecessary.” Secretary of War Henry Stimson deemed the plan “Semitism gone wild for vengeance” and warned that it “would arouse sympathy for Germany all over the world.” The Republican opposition seized on it as an issue, with New York Governor Thomas Dewey saying that it would “terrify the Germans into fanatical resistance” and supercharge their “fighting with the frenzy of despair,” at the cost of still more American lives. In confirmation, the Nazi war criminal Albert Speer later wrote from prison in Germany that “the Morgenthau Plan was made to order for Hitler and the Party.” FDR, exhausted by his final illness, backed away from it, and his successor, Harry Truman, rejected it, quickly maneuvering Henry into resignation in July 1945.

Fittingly, in 1947, Henry opened the final act of his public career by becoming the chairman of the United Jewish Appeal, raising money to help the 1.5 million Holocaust survivors in Europe and funding Zionists, who were settling refugees in Palestine and establishing a Jewish homeland there. As adept a fundraiser as he had proved an administrator, he was also just as realistic about force. When his UJA colleagues squeamishly resisted the pleas of the envoy of the future state, Golda Meyerson (later Golda Meir), for money for weapons, Henry minced no words. “The United Jewish Appeal is here for the purpose of saving the Jewish people,” he said, “and we can’t save the Jewish people unless the Jews in Palestine are able to defend themselves.” He sent Meyerson home with \$50 million for arms, twice what she had requested.

With such celebrated forebears bestriding not just the national but also the world stage, it’s no wonder that Secretary Morgenthau’s second son, Robert, the U.S. attorney for the Southern District of New York from 1962 to 1970 and then the Manhattan district attorney from 1975 to 2009, should have thought that his prosecutorial mandate stretched far beyond Gotham’s borders. This expansiveness is both the strength and the weakness of what Meier judges “a career without precedent in the history of American law enforcement.”

Morgy, as Attorney General Robert Kennedy nicknamed him, may have been born with a silver spoon in his mouth, but he also had steel in his spine and patriot's blood in his veins. Foreseeing, as his third year at Amherst ended in 1940, that America would enter the war in Europe, he rushed to sign up for a new Navy officer-training program open to college juniors. Commissioned in September 1941, just after his college graduation, he reported to a Boston-based destroyer in time to hear the loudspeakers crackle on December 7 that Pearl Harbor had been bombed. He served as an executive officer on destroyers in three seas, with one craft sunk by a torpedo in the Mediterranean and another speared first by a torpedo in the Pacific and then by an armor-piercing bomb dropped by a kamikaze off Okinawa, neither of which detonated. Morgy won a Bronze and then a Gold Star and left the Navy a lieutenant commander. In his later career, he hired veterans. "The military," one of his deputies explained, "takes the whine out of you."

Morgy had known the Kennedys since childhood summer vacations on Cape Cod, and he gladly left the high-powered firm he'd joined after Yale Law to work on John F. Kennedy's 1960 campaign for the White House. The new president named him the chief federal prosecutor for the Southern District of New York, where he oversaw banner-headline investigations, starting with the Italian Connection case, which brought down a giant, Mafia-run heroin-smuggling ring. His anti-Mafia campaign also swept up New York City politicians, with the water commissioner James Marcus and the ex-Tammany chief Carmine De Sapio jailed for kickbacks for steering city contracts to a Mafia-connected construction company.

Following the advice of his father to "make sure you get those thieves on Park Avenue—anybody can get the others," Morgy trained his sights on white-collar crime. Crooked wheeler-dealers and promoters, he believed, were "as dangerous to society, if not more so, than the guys on the street with a gun or a knife." Accordingly, he began investigating one of the 1960s' top corporate raiders, Louis Wolfson. In 1966, he indicted and ultimately convicted Wolfson of selling unregistered stock.

Morgy's investigators had pricked up their ears when Wolfson's finance chief snapped during questioning that he didn't understand why the feds were bothering, since Mr. F. would fix the case. And who was Mr. F.? It took three years and the help of a *Life* magazine reporter to get a full answer: he was Lyndon Johnson's crony and fixer, the Supreme Court Justice Abe Fortas—who had become Wolfson's "consultant" for \$20,000 a year and had discussed the securities case with Wolfson. Morgy warned Attorney General Ramsey Clark of a looming *Life* story on the Fortas-Wolfson connection, but it was the new Nixon Justice Department that dug the details out of Morgenthau's files. Attorney General John Mitchell quietly conveyed them to Chief Justice Earl Warren, and Fortas resigned from the Court a week later.

Perhaps Nixon had gotten wind of Morgy's investigation into whether and why the president himself had a numbered Swiss bank account—the prosecutor allegedly had the number—but Republican White House pressure on the Democratic U.S. attorney to resign grew too strong to resist, and Morgy left at the start of 1970. He became the drug czar in New York Mayor John V. Lindsay's administration, but, as Meier reports, he was "distracted—more eager to play muckraker than bury himself in the drug-policy minutiae." He jumped at the chance to run for Manhattan district attorney in 1974 and won handily.

Looking back on the whole of Morgy's thirty-four years as DA, as Meier's account allows us to do, we can see the signal weakness that dilutes the celebrated success. The emphasis on crime in the suites, as opposed to crime in the streets, is just another face of the DA's distraction from the gritty reality of the ordinary crimes that were exploding in Morgy's city—and destroying it, more than any white-collar crime could possibly do—in precisely the years of his "unprecedented" tenure.

Meier gives us the grim numbers. Murders, which had totaled 390 in 1960, skyrocketed 60 percent between 1970 and 1980—from 1,117 a year to 1,787—while a million New Yorkers fled the mayhem, disproportionately perpetrated by

blacks. A decade later, annual killings hit their high of 2,245, while all crimes of violence averaged 226 instances *a day*. The DA's first Page One case, the Washington Square Riot, provides a disturbing window into just what was happening.

On the evening of September 8, 1976, a gang of neighborhood teenagers, mostly white, poured into Greenwich Village's Washington Square, wielding baseball bats, pipes, and chains. Shouting "Niggers out of the park!" they attacked any black person they met, leaving thirty-five injured and one dead. An ordinary lynching, you'd think. Yes, it was—but with a twist. For many months, the neighbors had been complaining that drug dealers and addicts, mostly black, had taken over the park and turned it into a place threatening to the Villagers accustomed to playing chess, walking their dogs, and taking their kids there. Locals had begged the police to clean up the intimidating disorder, with no effect. So when cops arrested nine local youths for the riot, their parents and neighbors marched on the station house with signs reading CURB YOUR JUNKIES and shouting, "Don't arrest our kids for doing your job!"

When the trial opened in January 1978, the prosecutor conceded that some rioters had participated "for what they thought was the legitimate purpose of driving the dealers out." After all, the flood of drugs and its attendant disorder, which hadn't held Morgy's interest, was supercharging the era's epidemic of violent crime. Nevertheless, said the judge rightly, as he sentenced the six rioters found guilty to prison, "There can never be justification for vigilantes." But there can be explanation—in this case, the failure of law enforcement to do its basic job of protecting the social order, just as is happening today. In such a climate, it's also understandable why, when Bernhard Goetz calmly shot four black teens who tried to mug him on the subway in 1984, New Yorkers acclaimed him as a hero out of *Dirty Harry* or *Death Wish*—an ordinary citizen with the guts to defend himself in a failed polity that forbids citizens to protect themselves against criminals that government refuses to lock up. A disgusted Morgy could convince a jury to convict Goetz only of carrying an unlicensed gun.

True, the social scientists James Q. Wilson and George Kelling had not yet been lauded for their now-famed "broken windows" articles, nor had John DiIulio yet argued that jailing the limited number of "superpredators" who committed the lion's share of violent crime would make cities much safer. But Wilson and Kelling's central insight—that policing to preserve public order discourages potential criminals from major lawbreaking, because they see that the authorities are vigilant—had been policing's first principle ever since the 1829 founding of London's Metropolitan Police. Gotham's police manuals of the nineteenth and early twentieth century likewise emphasized the point that the function of the NYPD is to prevent crime by keeping order.

Moreover, Morgy's predecessor as DA, Richard Kuh, had lobbied the state legislature to let cops use "stop and frisk"—the tactic of questioning and searching suspicious-looking characters to see if they were carrying guns or had outstanding warrants, later a key crime-prevention tool. So if Morgenthau had listened to the loud public clamor for safety and turned his intelligence and innovative zeal to new ways of fighting crime in the streets based on existing principles, he might have sparked two decades earlier the law-enforcement revolution that Mayor Rudy Giuliani and Police Commissioner William Bratton accomplished in the 1990s. But first he would have had to realize his error in thinking that jailing street drug-pushers is a waste of resources. Rather, it is at least as important as busting such wholesalers as the Italian Connection.

Instead of dealing creatively with what was under his nose, the DA went looking for cases that would let him to clean out criminals from whole industries in one grand swoop. He zeroed in on the trucking companies that served New York's garment industry, moving cloth from the cutters to the Chinatown sweatshops where immigrant seamstresses would sew the shaped pieces together, and then bringing the finished goods to wholesalers. A cartel of Mafia firms forced all manufacturers to use their trucks, at inflated rates. So cowed were the victims that none would talk.

Eliot Spitzer, the assistant DA in charge of the case and later New York's disgraced governor, bought a sweatshop out of bankruptcy with city funds and sent a cop named Ronnie Rivera, posing as its "Jewish Hispanic" owner, to staff and run it. Before long, an enforcer for the Gambinos, one of Gotham's five Mafia families, showed up to explain the trucking rules—and the harsh penalties for breaking them. Spitzer sent operatives to bug the Gambinos' office—a film-worthy caper—and the DA had the evidence to indict. The Gambinos' canny lawyer managed to confuse the "Jewish Hispanic" on the stand so that the case ended in a deal. The Gambinos avoided jail but left the business and partly reimbursed the sweatshop owners for their extortion, to Morgy's entire satisfaction, since he correctly foresaw that no one would take their place now that law enforcement had targeted the racket. With the Mob Tax ended, trucking competition took off and costs fell, and so did wholesale prices.

Reading Meier's account of the 1992–93 Bank of Credit and Commerce International case—"the most ambitious and far-reaching investigation of [Morgy's] career," says the author—you might agree with the DA's critics that "at a time of unchecked violent crime, [he] was merely wasting tax dollars." You might resist the DA's claim that his "jurisdiction is set by any dollar that crosses any bank in New York County" and wonder why he sent investigators to Pakistan, Abu Dhabi, and Saudi Arabia to scrutinize a bank with branches in seventy-three countries, a big presence in Washington, and only three offices in Manhattan. You might join critics in thinking that the case was "a global labyrinth of financial legerdemain so complex—of double- and triple-dealing—no judge or jury could ever make sense of it."

Certainly a Manhattan jury couldn't. They heard that the Pakistani-owned bank was a giant corrupt enterprise, a money-laundering operation for Colombian drug cartels, tyrants, terrorists, even the CIA. They heard of bribes to bank regulators and finance ministers across the globe. They heard of fraud in concealing BCCI's illegal ownership of Washington's big First American Bankshares and of charges that

First American's chairman, the Washington grandee Clark Clifford—a former secretary of defense, presidential advisor, and super-lawyer—and his young law partner, Robert Altman, had facilitated the fraud and made millions off First American over fourteen years. Yet, after all this drama, the jurors acquitted. And readers might find Meier's account as baffling as jurors found the case.

Finally, as fear of seemingly unchecked violent crime sharpened, a savage rape and near-murder that embodied Gotham's worst nightmare filled the headlines, riveted New Yorkers, and led to a spectacular error that has shadowed not just the DA's reputation, but that of the city's entire law-enforcement establishment ever since. At 1:30 on the morning of April 20, 1989, a cop came upon a nearly naked twenty-eight-year-old woman, bound, gagged, and battered, smeared with mud and blood, writhing in a wet hollow in Central Park. With a fractured skull, a temperature of eighty, and three-quarters of her blood drained out, she had lain there near death for some time. A Wall Streeter named Trisha Meili, she became known as the Central Park Jogger. She later made a miraculous, though not a full, recovery.

Between 9 and 10 on the night of the assault, at least seven other people were attacked in the same part of the park by a gang of minority teens, with two victims knocked unconscious. Cops had started rounding up the gang by 10:30, and at dawn on April 20 they began questioning the five main suspects. With the video recorder running early the next morning, the boys, aged from fourteen to sixteen, began confessing that they'd gone "wilding" in the park. They'd robbed and beaten up people, and each claimed to have been an accomplice in the rape, though none admitted to being the rapist.

The newspapers also went wild about the "wolf pack": "RAPE SUSPECT: 'IT WAS FUN,'" said the *Post*; it was "like something out of *A Clockwork Orange*." The *Times* countered that it was a "*Lord of the Flies* rape." The trials, in two batches in the last six months of 1990, were tabloid material, too, with a prosecutor recounting how the boys, after their arrest, were

whistling, screaming, and laughing raucously at the police station, “as though a party was going on.” The accused themselves admitted to kicking, beating, and having sex with the jogger. Jurors convicted all five defendants of the other park attacks, four of them of raping the jogger, and one of sexual assault. All five went to prison. “Justice has been done,” the DA pronounced.

Except that the prosecutors’ timeline of the night’s events out didn’t quite add up, and the semen found in the jogger and on her clothes didn’t match any of the defendants’ DNA. Toward the end of 2001—eleven years after the trial—one of the five got transferred to Auburn State Prison. The sight of him shocked a longtime inmate, Matias Reyes, who told a guard that, while he knew that the recent arrival had been convicted of raping the Central Park Jogger, that man didn’t do it: “That was me.” Indeed, it was. Reyes, the notorious East Side Slasher, had pled guilty to assaulting five women a few weeks after the jogger rape in a psychopathic spree of beating, stabbing, rape, and one murder, all near where the jogger had been attacked. As the DA’s investigators probed Reyes’s claim, they found that he had even committed a sexual assault two days before raping the jogger, with telling similarities between the two crimes. In the earlier attack, for which no one had been arrested, he had lost a cap at the crime scene that the cops still had—with strands of his hair, with his DNA, still on it.

Had jurors known of the earlier incident, the DA concluded, they would not have convicted. So he did not oppose the motion of lawyers for the so-called Central Park Five to set aside their convictions, which the judge agreed to do in December 2002. Still, in light of their confessions, their courtroom testimony, and their clear guilt in the other assaults, not to mention the damage to the reputations of the assistant DAs in the case and the cops connected to the earlier, unsolved assault, many close to the case still wonder if any or all of the five had somehow interfered with and harmed the jogger, either before, during, or after Reyes’s rape of Trisha Meili.

This denouement left a bad odor in the DA’s office, made only more noxious by Morgy’s choice of a successor when he decided to retire, at eighty-nine, in 2009. Instead of endorsing his widely respected deputy, he gave the nod to the outsider Cyrus Vance Jr., partly for the good old Morgenthau reason, said Morgy, that he knew Vance’s famous father, the former secretary of state. In the event, Vance proved a poor choice, one of those permissive DAs unwilling to enforce the law, especially against political rioters. Today, with Alvin Bragg in charge, it’s hard to imagine that the Manhattan DA’s office ever seemed august, as it did when Morgy was in charge.

These Morgenthaus were indeed powerful, privileged men—all that Meier’s title claims. But greatness is quite another thing.

*We mourn the passing of
Thomas E. Engel (1945–2022)
A valued supporter of The New Criterion*

New poems

by *Brian Brodeur*

On not baptizing my daughter

I'd keep her faultless as the winter crow
pecking another crow smeared on the street,
not scaring as each passing car in snow
swerves to avoid it, and she asks me straight
if birds have souls. I laugh. Her face goes tense.
"Maybe," I say, and notice the soft sweep
of drifts has erased a neighbor's wire fence.
Crow-crowded pine boughs where the crows must sleep.
Hard to ignore their cackles or the brittle sound
of claws scraping the bleachers of the tree.
Their nattering in the hoarse-throat tongue of crows—
I could call it a cry, a scold, this caw that echoes
beyond their diet of what can be found,
but they're crows. They don't *behold* a scene. They see.

Distance learning

Her morning work involves a thunderstorm—
a negative and positive charge make
the lightning blink and thunder shake the room.
She spells *cloud* “clod.” He says they need a break.
Why does he look outside each time he speaks?
He’s tired. She still has rocket math to do.
Rain on the window threads thick silken streaks—
she asks him why. Because he told her to.
When gusts buffet their backyard’s rotting fence,
she says she wishes Mondays were Mom’s days.
Lightning burns hotter than the sun, they read,
but how do light and sound have their own speed?
Nothing makes sense. She slaps the page. He says
it’s science—why should it make any sense?

Primer

We'd hoped it would last longer, the last year
she let us hold her sleepy in our arms,
hoist her on our shoulders to swat the air
conducting some mute fugue by Bach or Brahms.

Familiar tune, this plaint (*too soon, too soon*),
this antique ache we've struggled to oppose—
to want the morning back in afternoon
and wish for evening as the late light goes.

Though she still tells us both to tickle her,
our knees creak and our swollen ankles pop
when we tackle her, squeezing her hard to hear
the squeals that stab our eardrums: "Stop! Don't stop!"

On the drive to school, we take the backroads slow—
soon, this will all have happened long ago.

Letter from Florence

Modern detours

by *Marco Grassi*

Tour guides the world over operate in strikingly similar ways: they develop, or are given, a list of topographically sequenced stops, each sight summarily described for its artistic or historical significance. Once hardened into a program, the sequence is endlessly repeated without the slightest variation to this rigidly established timing and progression. Florence, with monuments densely packed in its antique center, is the queen city of walking tours. On every day of every season, one can see platoons of attentive tourists following their leaders' guidons (preferably old umbrellas) doing the canonical rounds: Piazza della Signoria, Orsanmichele, the Duomo, the Uffizi complex, the great conventual churches of Santa Croce and Santa Maria Novella, and so on.

As familiar as the sight has become, it is difficult to imagine an enterprising Florentine tour operator devising an itinerary comprised *only* of post-nineteenth-century sights. It would rest on the somewhat subversive proposition that Florence did, in fact, have a history rich in artistic and architectural accomplishments even *after* 1600—a proposition that might well lead a tour entrepreneur to financial ruin and universal ridicule. And yet, the storied “Renaissance city” holds countless modern surprises, if one only knows where and how to look, particularly when remembering that, of all historic Italian cities, Florence's antique topography has suffered the most devastating losses—and the most radical subsequent reconstructions.

The first and possibly most consequential of these extreme reinventions occurred in the 1860s. It was a wanton demolition of the an-

cient city center with its warren of dark passages and alleyways, including the still-surviving medieval ghetto. Here was a massive project intended to transform the city into the capital of Italy, a nation that had finally achieved political unity after a decades-long struggle against the Habsburgs in the north and the Bourbons in the south. Rome, the ideal—but only imagined—capital, was still very much part of the sovereign Papal States and might remain so indefinitely. As a result, Florence (rather than Turin, home of the House of Savoy, Italy's newly minted monarchs) was chosen as a convenient compromise. It was a decision that spelled disaster for the city. A massive urban-renewal program was undertaken almost immediately. It saw the full, uninterrupted ring of sixteenth-century walls disappear, replaced by mock-Parisian boulevards lined with boring apartment blocks. A huge area, extending from the Duomo to the Piazza della Signoria—essentially the city's heart—was transformed into a sorry panorama of anonymous, rectilinear streets whose focus is an expansive, forlorn plaza rendered even more anodyne when, in the early twentieth century, a garish carousel replaced a handsome equestrian statue of Victor Emanuel II as its central focal point. Florentines of an older generation still refer to this as “Piazza Vittorio” rather than “Piazza della Repubblica.”

Florence suffered even more painful and traumatic wounds during the last year of World War II. The German forces that had occupied Italy after the Fascist collapse and subsequent separate armistice of 1943 were slowly being

pushed northward by the Allies. When the front reached Florence, General Kesselring, the head of the Wehrmacht in Italy, was able to devise no more effective defensive tactic than destroying every bridge spanning the river Arno. At 2200 hours on August 3, 1944, dozens of dynamite charges reduced to rubble not only the bridges but also large areas bordering the venerable Ponte Vecchio—itself spared, evidently, thanks to its postcard fame and picturesque charm (reportedly on the Führer’s express orders). The demolitions were a mindless and ultimately useless act of vandalism. Within hours, Allied engineers had spanned the river with a Bailey bridge over the still-standing pylons of the Ponte Santa Trinita. That lithe and elegant structure, a design masterwork by Bartolomeo Ammannati (1511–92), was the only significant work of art lost in the catastrophe. For the city, the war was over, the task of reconstruction just beginning.

It was obvious that the massive undertaking would raise endless issues of a practical nature (replacing hundreds of residential units) as well as of aesthetic import (what would the new buildings look like?). This latter was the vexed question that sparked the fiercest debate among the intelligentsia of the moment. Generally left-leaning spirits (by far the majority at the time) vigorously lobbied for reimagining the reconstruction in an uncompromisingly contemporary, even futuristic, idiom. This approach adhered, generally, to the thinking of Benedetto Croce, a philosopher whose influence on aesthetics had been pervasive in Italian intellectual circles since the 1920s. By these lights, the worst transgression in art was imitation. Distinguished conservative voices, among them Bernard Berenson, held that considering the abundant and detailed photographic documentation available, the reconstruction could easily proceed by reproducing the preexisting structures with a very high degree of accuracy. So many diverse voices joined the debate and so many layers of bureaucratic review needed to be satisfied that, in the end, the result was the dreadful compromise visible today: all the venerable streets surrounding the Ponte Vecchio, on both sides of the Arno, are now lined by mock-antique semi-*moderne* façades of zero ar-

chitectural merit or character—a sorry pastiche to which the sublime Ponte Santa Trinita stands in proud contrast. It was rebuilt exactly like the original—Croce be damned—and remains a cherished jewel of the Florentine townscape.

The sole event that only slightly mitigated the unfolding urban disaster just described was the inclusion of a previously nonexistent cinema in the reconstruction scheme. Space for it was found on the ground and lower levels of 45 Via de’ Bardi, just opposite the Pitti Palace end of the Ponte Vecchio. It is a five-story residential block, no more or less remarkable than any of its faceless neighbors. The Arlecchino (“harlequin”), as the cinema was called, will be the first stop on this brief tour. The venue’s reception hall, auditorium, and other public spaces turned out to be precious and rare showcases for Florentine artists of the moment. All had struggled through the grim realities of a war-ravaged decade; this new home of make believe was an opportunity to celebrate the gaiety and playfulness of the theater’s namesake. About a dozen local painters, ceramists, and illustrators were invited to participate: the task was to decorate the public space of the theater with wall paintings, tiles, and colored glass celebrating the *commedia dell’arte*. Some of the artists were known, even on the national level (Vinicio Bertì, 1921–91 and Elio Fiore, called Pirzio, 1920–2001). Others, such as Mario Mariotti (1936–97), have only recently been recognized for their talent and inventiveness. The result of this collaborative enterprise perfectly reflects the principal stylistic tendencies prevailing in mid-century European art: loosely composed post-cubist abstraction (Bertì); abbreviated and schematic figurative representation (Pirzio); and dreamy, naïf narrative (Mariotti). Each of these tendencies is recognizable in the work of other better-known artists of the period such as Bernard Buffet, Massimo Campigli, and André Lohte. In this sense, the Arlecchino offers a precious mini-anthology of 1950s taste.

The opening of the Arlecchino cinema on October 14, 1959, was a major civic and social event. Florence’s great and good turned out in force to celebrate, all amply covered by local and national press. The house went on to enjoy a successful run of more than two decades, mostly showing *cinema d’essai*. By 1980, however, the Arlecchino’s

audience had fatally eroded, an inevitable victim of television. It was a hardship experienced by movie houses everywhere, particularly if their small size precluded transformation into multi-screen venues. Sadly, pornography took over at the 1950s time capsule, thus keeping the lights on (dimly) for a further twenty years. At this time the very central and tony Via de' Bardi was blighted by gatherings of old men loitering about the X-rated Arlecchino in raincoats. When even the *film cochon* programs were unable to sustain the ailing enterprise, it looked like the end. Just as demolition plans were afoot, Cristina Acidini, the provincial fine-arts superintendent, issued a notification classifying the cinema as an object of cultural/historical interest. It was an enlightened act of preservation ensuring the survival of this minor yet significant site. The new owner of the property, a Milan-based supermarket chain, was obliged to enter into lengthy negotiations with the authorities to devise a strategy to render the spaces functional in their new configuration while, at the same time, preserving the profuse existing decorations. The resulting compromise is an unprecedented model of thoughtful conversion and conservation of mid-twentieth-century art in a contemporary context.

Having briefly visited the former Arlecchino cinema, we can now proceed to the second, and surely most important, stop on our imaginary walk: the central rail station, officially Stazione di Santa Maria Novella, named for the great Dominican basilica nearby. It is a striking vision: the sleek, low-slung building dominating a slight rise above a vast open plaza. Its long, horizontal façade is composed of an unbroken swath of tan granite, interrupted only by a wide ribbon of glass running perpendicularly near the left edge. It is a design solution possible only with a terminal depot (as at Rome, Naples, and Venice), where the tracks dead end and trains need to reverse direction to exit the station and continue. Upon becoming prime minister in 1922, Benito Mussolini embarked on an ambitious renewal program of Italy's aging rail network. The old saw of the regime making the trains "run on time" is not entirely inappropriate. Dedicated in 1934, the Central

Station was the result of a design team headed by the then-dean of the local architectural profession, Giovanni Michelucci (1891–1990). In spite of its date squarely within the Fascist era, Michelucci's building bears nary a trace of that period's political symbols and bombast but is, instead, an impeccable example of modernist functionalism, elegantly expressed. Frank Lloyd Wright paid the Central Station a rare and supreme compliment when, in answer to a question during a Princeton symposium, he stated—not in jest—that the Florence Central Station would be the one structure in the world he would save were all to face destruction.

By the late 1980s, Florentines had adopted their station as a cherished landmark, so when a large covered bus platform flanking it to the right was completed in 1990, the protests and criticisms were unanimous in their condemnation. Though designed by the distinguished architect Cristiano Toraldo di Francia (1941–2019), the structure was seen as a clumsy attempt to accord with the elegant design and color scheme of Michelucci's masterwork. By 2010, the offending platform had disappeared. More recently, a restoration campaign has been underway to remove from the station's soaring interior spaces decades of accretions (commercial signage, improvised food kiosks, and similar claptrap). Wright would doubtless have approved of both initiatives.

Thematically related to the subject of rail travel is a recent addition to the countless other attractions available in Florence; it is an unexpected and intriguing surprise, even for visitors who know the city well. Named the "Museo Hzero," it must be one of the world's most elaborate and extravagant model-train displays. Lovingly assembled over many decades by a Sicilian nobleman, it was reassembled and further enhanced after his death by his son. Interestingly, the venue for this lavish entertainment is another long-abandoned movie theater, albeit, unlike the Arlecchino, one of no particular distinction. Set in a spectacular miniature landscape, the tiny Märklin convoys whizz about with amazing verisimilitude, controlled by computer algorithms. Finally, parents will be able to reward their children for the hours dutifully spent in churches and museums looking at art.

Letter from Fontevraud

The consolation of continuity

by Sean McGlynn

The Loire Valley is renowned for its spectacular fairy-tale châteaux and their associated tales of chivalry. The Château de Saumur exemplifies this: its medieval glory is captured in the fifteenth-century masterpiece *Les Très Riches Heures du Duc de Berry*. Although seen in an idealized version in that luxuriant manuscript, Saumur in person is very much the storybook castle, and it is heavily trafficked by tourists as such. But only a twenty-minute drive away in the Loire countryside lies one of France's most important religious and historical places, Fontevraud-l'Abbaye, albeit one that figures less in the guidebooks. Here spirituality and monarchy converged in the pre-revolutionary age to create a remarkable complex, one of the largest surviving monastic settlements from the medieval period, but also a site that has been modernized in a most unexpected and rewarding way.

Tourists, mainly French on their August holidays, trickled in at opening. Before long, the small village around the abbey and the boulangerie opposite the abbey's gates were busy with the arrival of further visitors, the later sightseers reflecting the broader international interest of the place. First and foremost, the abbey—the Abbaye Royale de Fontevraud, to give it its full title—was a royal tomb. Herein lies its greatest fame. Buried here between 1189 and 1204 are those towering figures of the Middle Ages: King Henry II, King Richard the Lionheart, and—respectively their wife and mother—Eleanor of Aquitaine. Alongside their surviving stone tombs is a more diminutive

one made of wood, as befits its lower social status; this belongs to “Bad” King John's second wife, Isabella of Angoulême, who died in 1246. Far from an inconsequential figure in her own right, she is nonetheless overshadowed by her sleeping companions and is often forgotten.

In some ways it is bewildering why the French should flock to these tombs. For Henry and Richard were kings of England, not France, though they ruled over half of the latter, too. It is not something one would expect the French to venerate or celebrate. Henry II was, however, a Frenchman, hence his dynasty's name: the Angevins (and, from there, the Plantagenets). By 1154, Henry Curtmantle, Count of Anjou, had fought his way to the throne of England, becoming Henry II. From the French perspective, therefore, it could be viewed as the French having ruled over England, always a happy thought.

Externally, the abbey church at Fontevraud appears large but does not prompt awe. This changes when one enters through the western portal. Internally, the church itself achieves great height and scale by having its floor lowered into the ground. One stands at the top of fourteen steps at the entrance and gasps at the vast interior, made all the more capacious by its complete emptiness, save solely for the four tombs in the nave, each royal effigy still retaining some color. For history enthusiasts—and even hardened professional historians like myself—it can create quite a moment of wonder and that clichéd tingling of the spine. The austerity of the church is

emphasized by the pristine white limestones of the walls, recently cleaned. The atmosphere keeps the visitors hushed and respectful, not least when congregating around the tombs.

Of these tombs, the effigies of Richard and Eleanor attract the most attention. This is only to be expected, given their exceptionally colorful and dramatic lives. Richard was the chivalric paradigm of his age: the *rex* as *miles*, the king as knight, the crusader who fought his way to the walls of Jerusalem, which had been taken by Saladin, and who died on campaign from a crossbow-bolt. The Anglo-Norman poet Ambroise, a companion to Richard, describes the king as having “the valor of Hector, the heroism of Achilles”; “in courage he was the equal of Alexander and Roland.” Even Richard’s Muslim enemies recognized his qualities, with Ibn al-Athir claiming, “The king was the outstanding man of his time for bravery, cunning, steadfastness and endurance.” His capture and imprisonment by the Duke of Austria on his return home from the Crusades was also the stuff of legend, giving rise to the myth of the minstrel Blondel. Many modern historians have unfairly disparaged Richard for his war-mongering; partial rehabilitation has come in the liberal age with claims that he was gay—a speculative assertion that reflects our times more than Richard’s.

The mother outlived the son; Eleanor went on to become an active octogenarian. Unfortunately, this was just long enough for her to see the Angevin Empire crumble in the inept hands of her youngest surviving son, King John. Before long, most of France finally came under the rule of the French monarch. Eleanor spent even longer in imprisonment than Richard, at the command of her husband Henry: some sixteen years, his death being her release. Her crime was supporting her sons in the struggle against their father. This patron of the troubadours and the arts, Duchess of Aquitaine, wife of two kings, and mother of two others was besieged at the age of eighty in the castle of Mirebeau, only to be rescued in John’s sole military success. She spent her remaining years at Fontevraud Abbey and now rests there in perpetuity.

The abbey’s early Gothic architecture bespeaks its distinguished age; its rejuvenated condition does not. It was founded at the turn of the twelfth century by Robert Arbrissel, an interesting religious character even by the standards of the day. His reformist mission was too zealous for some, the priest taking to an eremitic and barefooted life of self-mortifying asceticism in a forest, thereby earning an even greater reputation for piety. This, and the following he inspired, enabled him to found the abbey at Fontevraud, establishing no fewer than five religious communities in coexistence, including even ones for lepers and rehabilitated prostitutes. Abbesses headed the monastery from its outset, as decreed by Robert. Such far-sighted actions attract the sensibilities of the modern age but should not detract from the spiritual achievement of Robert and his singular devotion to his flock. A seemingly obvious candidate for sainthood, Robert remains uncanonized.

The abbey fell on hard times and was despoiled during the French Revolution, with royal bones suffering the indignity of being flung into lime pits. The desecration continued in 1804 when it became a notorious prison. During World War II, ten resistance fighters were shot here by German occupiers. The abbey’s glorious rebirth began in 1963 when the monastic complex came into the hands of the French Ministry of Culture. Lavish amounts of money were expended on it (nearly twenty million euros to date), and it was opened to the public only in 1975. It was money well spent.

The abbey’s chapter house, huge cloisters and refectory, and famous “beehive” kitchens are all noteworthy. But it is the church that leaves such a profound impression. Unfussy and uncluttered, it is a case of less being so much more. The ascetic Robert would not be unhappy to see it restored in its modern state.

One part of this abbatial complex now offers a seemingly incongruous twenty-first-century addition: the brand-new Musée d’art moderne housed in the abbey’s eighteenth-century stables. Opened in 2021 to display the impressive private collection of Martine and Léon Cligman, donated to the French state in 2018, it would seem an odd fit with a

medieval religious foundation. But it works wonderfully: it is an inspired and harmonious enhancement of the Fontevraud experience. The substantial museum has 13,000 square feet of exhibition space and houses sculptures and paintings by Henri de Toulouse-Lautrec, Edgar Degas, André Derain, Albert Marquet, Robert Delaunay, Camille Corot, Germaine Richier, and many others, which are displayed expertly and pleasingly in an impressive building. Unexpectedly, the eclecticism does not jar: one readily accepts a Fauvist painting juxtaposed with an African mask. In this setting, it just doesn't seem to matter.

The pleasure of newly encountering some wonderful lesser-known artists adds to the charm of the visit. Although the appreciation of sculpture eludes me (there are many such pieces in the museum) and my artistic appreciation wanes as the twentieth century progresses, I still found an abundance of works to enjoy. The modern here ranges from Corot's affecting *Kitchen Interior in Mantes* (1855–60) to Duilio Barnabè's less engaging geometric *Woman at Her Toilette* (1957). Paintings among the collection that captivated me include Paul Sérusier's *Mauve Landscape: Châteauneuf-du-Faou* (1917), Maurice de Vlaminck's *Flood at Ivry* (1910), Eugène Carrière's *Still Life with Teapot* (1887), Michel Kikoïne's *Village of Red Roofs* (1922), and, perhaps most of all, Marquet's gray Parisian scene *The Quay of Grands-Augustins* (1905). Léon Cligman died in May 2022, a few days short of 102 years of age. With the Musée d'art moderne, he and his wife have left behind a marvelous legacy for France.

As if all this were not enough, my summer visit coincided with a major Monet exhibition in the museum. Presented in collaboration with the Musée Marmottan Monet, which houses the world's largest collection of Monets, this impressive show was entitled "Métamorphoses," reflecting the artist's progression from an impressionistic painter of

solid, structured form to one more focused on fluid ultra-impressionistic works vibrating with color. This transition was reflected here in thirty-three works, from *The Effects of Snow, Sunset* (1875) to three versions of the *Japanese Bridge* (1918, 1918–19, and 1920–24), each one progressively becoming more indecipherable as solid objects merge increasingly into the surrounding foliage. The canvases in Monet's later style are often huge (although still not on the gargantuan scale of his murals at the Musée de l'Orangerie in Paris). Giant water lilies and willows abound; it is these Giverny garden works that attract the most attention from the visitors. As Monet's contemporary Arsène Alexandre wrote in his piece "Le Jardin de Claude Monet" for *Le Figaro* in August 1901: "The garden is the man. . . . What has inspired him in all this? The flowers. What has been his teacher? His garden." This connection seemed intuitively understood by his admirers attending the exhibition. (Zola's praise for Monet—"Here is a man in a crowd of eunuchs"—seems overly aggressive and masculinized for such a florally inclined artist.) Nonetheless, my tastes ran to the earlier works on display, especially the snow scene mentioned and *Les Tuileries* (1876), a masterly representation of Monet's ability to render nature atmospherically. But something else happened on this magical day: I found myself warming to his great walls of color and understanding a little more of his genius. Such is, perhaps, the power of the place.

The day's experience at Fontevraud was intensely moving. The restored freshness of the magnificent abbey combines with its tombs of medieval kings and queens to root it in the real world of power, both secular and religious. While the abbey's cohabiting monastic communities have long since gone, it now has a new spiritually uplifting cohabitation—with modern art. There is much consolation to be taken in this continuity of artistic triumph amid the degrading madness of the contemporary world.

herd's heartfelt denunciation of young men. I knew my contemporaries too well to have been much impressed by youth culture—a term I came soon to regard almost as an oxymoron—or by youthful professions of concern for humanity, and somehow I sensed that one day my sentiments would coincide almost exactly with the shepherd's:

I would there were no age between sixteen and three-and-twenty, or that youth would sleep out the rest; for there is nothing in the between but getting wenches with child, wronging the ancients, stealing, fighting . . .

Whenever I pass an establishment in which young Britons have gathered in large numbers to enjoy themselves, the sound of their enjoyment being indistinguishable from that of a mob intent on murder, I recall the shepherd's words.

The third thing from *The Winter's Tale* that stays with me was that self-description of Autolycus the Rogue, that he was a “snapper-up of unconsidered trifles.” Autolycus is a kind of thin and less attractive Falstaff who shamelessly fleeces the poor. Honesty is no more to Autolycus than honor is to Falstaff. “What is honour?” asks Falstaff: “a word. What is in that word honour? what is that honour? air.” Autolycus says, “What a fool honesty is, and trust—his sworn brother—a very simple gentleman!” The first is amusing, the second unpleasantly cynical.

Yet unattractive as I find Autolycus and his cynicism, I recognize something of the snapper-up of unconsidered trifles in myself. Having had neither the patience nor the determination for true scholarship, I have flitted from subject to subject and mastered none. I am an intellectual Autolycus.

When I reread the play, I still experience puzzlement. In part, this derives from an inability to free myself from medical literal-mindedness. For me every character in a play is a real person, and, as I look at the world through diagnostic spectacles, he is also always a case of something or other. In *The Winter's Tale*, the principal diagnostic puzzle is the nature of Leontes' jealousy.

Here I cannot very well avoid a summary of the plot. Leontes, King of Sicilia, is paid a prolonged visit by his childhood friend and playmate Polixenes, now King of Bohemia. Leontes begs Polixenes to stay longer, but he refuses until Leontes' pregnant wife, Hermione, also begs him to do so.

Leontes suddenly becomes violently jealous, believing that Hermione and Polixenes are lovers, and that she is pregnant by Polixenes. Leontes asks his trusted courtier, Camillo, to poison Polixenes, instead of which Camillo warns Polixenes of his danger and flees with him to Bohemia. Leontes then imprisons Hermione.

Hermione gives birth to a daughter, Perdita, in prison. Hermione's faithful servant, Paulina, goes to the king with the newborn babe in the hope of melting his heart, but he remains adamant. After first thinking to kill the infant, whose father he still believes to have been Polixenes, he is deflected from his original intention and orders Antigonus, Paulina's husband, to voyage to a far distant land with the child and expose it in a deserted place, leaving it to chance or providence as to whether or not it survives. Antigonus does as he is commanded, leaving the baby girl with a package of jewels and letters that testify to her royal birth. Having fulfilled his orders, Antigonus is pursued by a bear (and eaten by it, fortunately offstage).

Meanwhile, Leontes has sent for the Delphic Oracle to pronounce on the guilt or innocence of Hermione. The oracle's message, read out in Hermione's presence, is entirely favorable to Hermione: the oracle declares her to be innocent, but Leontes still refuses to believe it. As if by punishment of the gods, a message then arrives that Mamillius, Leontes' beloved son and heir who has languished ever since his mother's imprisonment, has died, and suddenly Leontes is reconverted to sanity and therefore to deep guilt and long repentance. But the news of Mamillius's death causes Hermione to faint and die.

The play then moves forward by sixteen years, the only such temporal hiatus in all Shakespeare. Perdita in the meantime has been found and raised by an ancient shepherd who, through superstition, has not opened

the package that would reveal Perdita's true lineage. Florizel, Polixenes' son, happens to meet her and fall in love with her, for she is very beautiful and has a way about her that bespeaks a noble birth.

Polixenes, however, is furious at his son's love for so lowly a creature and threatens him that if he continues, he will cut him off from succession to the throne. True to his love, Florizel flees with Perdita to Sicilia, where he is well-received by Leontes, and where he claims that Perdita is a North African princess. Polixenes, however, follows his son to Sicilia (having reconciled with the repentant Leontes), and, after considerable stage business and revelations from the letters and jewels left with Perdita at her birth, the love of Florizel and Perdita is blessed by both kings. In the final scene, a statue of Hermione, which Paulina has kept in her house for sixteen years, comes to life and speaks to her daughter Perdita.

I think it will be seen from this brief résumé that *The Winter's Tale* is not a work of social realism, to put it mildly. It is, rather, mythopoeic; it is self-evidently filled with symbolic meanings, even if we cannot be certain what exactly is being symbolized. How far, then, is it reasonable to demand realism, or even mere plausibility, psychological or otherwise, of such a work, which has no pretensions to being a direct mirror of the world? Unfortunately, my tendency to concrete thought—possibly the consequence of a medical career—requires and searches for such realism or plausibility, and so I try to account for Leontes' sudden accession to jealousy according to our modern conceptions.

The jealousy of Leontes seems to emerge without warning. In the second scene of the play, he begs the visiting Polixenes not to keep to his intention to return to Bohemia. Postpone it by a week, asks Leontes, but Polixenes says he will leave the next day; three or four days then, replies Leontes, but Polixenes remains adamant. It is only when Leontes enrolls Hermione to beseech Polixenes to stay that he agrees to do so. And when she gives her hand to Polixenes, all suddenly becomes clear to Leontes:

Too hot, too hot!

To mingle friendship far is mingling bloods.

In other words, Hermione has and has had a sexual relationship with Polixenes, and from that moment Leontes' delusion emerges fully-formed, like Aphrodite from the sea. He incorporates into it anyone who tries to persuade him of its unreality: everyone knows that he is a cuckold; every small sign is confirmation in his eyes of Hermione's infidelity. As Iago puts it in a better-known drama of jealousy:

Trifles light as air

Are to the jealous confirmations strong

As proofs of holy writ . . .

Does anyone become deluded in this fashion, that is to say completely and at a stroke? There is in psychopathology a symptom known as a primary delusion. A delusion is a fixed false belief that is impermeable to reason or evidence and not accountable for by a person's culture. A primary delusion is one that occurs suddenly, seemingly without antecedents or preexisting mental disturbance. For example, I once had a patient who saw a red car pass as he was looking out of the window, and he knew from then on, with invincible certainty, that the KGB was following him. Such was Leontes' conviction of Hermione's infidelity. Primary delusions are not common, but they do occur.

In his *General Psychopathology* (1913), the philosopher-psychiatrist Karl Jaspers says that, for the person who experiences such a delusion, "We observe that a new world has come into being," and this fits Leontes exactly. Leontes is not merely upset or angered by Hermione's supposed infidelity but tormented by it: "Nor night nor day, no rest," he says. For Leontes, the world has suddenly been infused with a new and malign meaning.

Primary delusions can also occur as a delusional mood, an ominous but vague feeling of foreboding that something has changed, always for the worse. The sudden onset of the delusion makes all clear to the person who suffered it: *now* he understands what the mood was all about.

ing that she is the daughter of Hermione and Leontes, he says:

nothing she does or seems
But smacks of something greater than herself;
Too noble for this place.

And when Florizel says to Camillo, neither of them yet knowing of her true descent, that she is “as forward of her breeding as/ She is i’ the rear our birth,” Camillo replies:

I cannot say ’tis pity
She lacks instructions, for she seems a mistress
To most that teach.

How came she by her extraordinary qualities though raised in a shepherd’s humble cot, surrounded by sheep rather than by courtiers? The unexamined explanation of this is that she was, unbeknown to anyone at the time, of royal birth, and that royal blood would make itself manifest in any circumstances.

This seems absurd and even repellent to modern democratic sensibility. And yet it is a commonplace that genetic endowment affects a person’s temperament, even if the exact strength of the influence cannot be calculated. Moreover, I have known from clinical experience people of the most refined moral sensibility to emerge from the worst imaginable environments (and, of course, and alas, the reverse).

Not that Perdita’s genetic inheritance, at least on her father’s side, is without blemish. The jealous person such as Leontes does not love the person of whom he is jealous, but rather himself: he is afraid of the wound to his *amour propre* that infidelity in his lover would cause him. He is thus a narcissist: Leontes shows himself willing to poison his former best friend and dash out his own infant daughter’s brains. True, he was psychotic at the time and whether we say, by analogy with the saying *in vino veritas*, that psychosis demonstrates something other than itself about a person is a matter of opinion. Still, Leontes cannot be said to have been a model of psychological balance, as is Perdita.

Perdita’s mother, Hermione, is greatly the superior of Leontes, of course; indeed she is well-nigh perfect. But she is the daughter of the emperor of Russia, and emperors of Russia were never known for the sweetness of their disposition. Hermione’s goodness is therefore itself something of a mystery.

In short, if we discount the royal blood or other genetic theory of Perdita’s character, we are left with the unsolved puzzle of how she became what she is, and by extension how we ourselves become what we are. We remain what Pope says that we are: the “glory, jest, and riddle of the world.”

As to the overall meaning of the play, it remains to me (at least) enigmatic. Its geographic impossibilities, its anachronisms, and its mixture of pagan and Christian imagery render it permanently difficult to interpret. Some commentators see it as a work of Christian philosophy: of sin, loss, forgiveness, and redemption. But the forgiveness and redemption at the end seem to me highly ambiguous. When the statue of Hermione comes to life in the last scene, she briefly embraces Leontes but addresses her words only to Perdita, ignoring Leontes altogether. This is less than full reconciliation, despite Leontes’ long years of repentance. Perhaps there is forgiveness in Hermione’s heart but no forgetting in her head. Perhaps she still harbors bitterness towards him (which would be understandable) but for religious reasons cannot express it openly. Perhaps, were the scene to continue, we should see Leontes and Hermione in perfect harmony once again. We do not and cannot know.

The indefiniteness is that of life itself. As Doctor Johnson put it,

This therefore is the praise of *Shakespeare*, that his drama is the mirror of life: that he who has mazed his imagination, in following the phantoms which other writers raise up before him, may here be cured of his delirious extasies by reading human sentiments in human language.

Theater

Triple crown

by Kyle Smith

August Wilson's great play *The Piano Lesson*, perhaps his defining work, has returned to Broadway (at the Ethel Barrymore Theatre through January 29) for the first time since its 1990 triumph there, shortly after it won the Pulitzer Prize. The revival has a few rough edges, but it's still one of the most important offerings of the season. It's also an implicit rebuttal to the party-line propaganda on race that has overwhelmed the stage in recent years.

The revival has a pleasing symmetry: Samuel L. Jackson, then an unknown, originated the part of the young Southern hothead Boy Willie when the play debuted at the Yale Rep in 1987. Now Jackson has returned to portray Willie's sensible uncle Doaker Charles and is appearing for the first time onstage under the direction of his wife, LaTanya Richardson Jackson. The younger man is played by John David Washington, whose father Denzel is one of the foremost interpreters of Wilson's work. Washington *père* has done much to keep Wilson in the public eye since the playwright's 2005 death, having starred in the stage and screen versions of *Fences* and produced an incendiary film iteration of *Ma Rainey's Black Bottom* for Netflix a couple of years ago.

Ma Rainey starred a volcanic Chadwick Boseman in the lead role, a character very similar to the one John David Washington is taking on now. Both plays develop Wilson's great theme: that though massive historic injustices have been visited upon black folks, these wrongs must be kept locked up in the past rather than encouraged to roam free in

the present. To dwell on them and treat them as though they demand a fresh response invites a cycle of vengeance and bloodshed that is, in Wilson's work, a continuing plague on black people. Very often the past violence and degradation visited on blacks by whites is transmuted into current aggression by blacks against other blacks, as in the climactic action of *Ma Rainey*, in which one black musician murders another in a dispute ostensibly born in the one stepping on the other's shoe but which is actually rooted in the attacker's anger at being cheated by a white record producer.

John David Washington, who has steadily built his reputation as a screen actor with his cool restraint in films such as *Tenet* and *BlacKkKlansman*, pushes hard in the opposite direction with a flamboyantly loud and bitter performance as a fast-talking Boy Willie, who at the outset of the play appears in 1936 at the Pittsburgh house that his sister Berniece (a pleasing Danielle Brooks) shares with their uncle Doaker (Jackson). Boy Willie turns up alongside a lunkish and slow-witted companion, Lymon, with whom he has acquired (possibly stolen) a truckload of watermelons the pair intend to sell at a big profit after driving all the way from Alabama with their cargo. Ray Fisher unexpectedly steals the show with his baffled drawl and his witty line readings as the large and ungainly Lymon.

As for Washington, who speaks so rapidly and with such a thick Southern accent that I had difficulty catching some of his words, he comes across as trying too hard to expand his

boundaries as a performer. To put it another way, he spends the entire evening shouting every line at top speed. The director, Jackson, bears some part of the blame for not drawing a more nuanced performance from her young star, a former professional football player with very little stage experience.

Yet Wilson's play remains a towering work. In the piano the playwright devised one of the most powerful symbols of black American experience ever imagined in any medium. In the instrument—an upright worth over \$1,000 even in 1936—Wilson has poured slavery, forced family separation, the weight of history, rage, a blood feud, and the role of song as salve and connective thread down the generations when very little else could be kept intact. Boy Willie spends the play scheming to sell the piano, which is equally owned by him and Berniece, in order to use the money (along with the proceeds from selling the watermelons) to buy the cropland of Sutter, the farmer whose family in previous generations owned Boy Willie's family. In a lengthy digression, Doaker explains that the piano was purchased by one of the previous generation of Sutters during the slaveholding era for his wife—paid for with two slaves, a mother and her child. This meant destroying a family for the sake of assuaging a lady's need for some entertainment. The lady missed the two slaves, however, so in their memory the traded woman's husband, a carpenter, carved lovingly detailed likenesses of her and their child, as well as other family members, into the body of the piano. Boy Willie's father then stole the piano, which he saw as representing both the images and the blood of his family, from the Sutters, and was killed for his trouble. The present Sutter died when he fell down a well under murky circumstances, but as the play goes on it becomes obvious that Boy Willie pushed him down the well with an eye toward finally reversing the wrongs of the past and gaining control of Sutter's farmlands himself. The level-headed Doaker points out that the land is no longer worth very much, and if the family is willing to sell it to someone as analytically unblest as Boy Willie, the sale is likely to amount to something of a

swindle. Sutter's vengeful ghost now inhabits the piano, and the play heads for a climactic confrontation with that restless spirit.

Handling that confrontation presents a major challenge for a director: although in the early going the ghost exists merely as a matter of discussion, it actually appears before the end of the play. The supernatural element was highly uncharacteristic of Wilson's work, which ordinarily stuck closely to kitchen-sink realism, and the technical matter of how to present the ghost is mishandled here. The play ends with a sensation of twopenny horror rather than serious art. A more imaginative director would have created a *coup de théâtre* here; as it is, the climax is at best adequate, not awe-inspiring.

Younger readers will have noticed that there comes a time in a man's life—say, the stroke of midnight on his fiftieth birthday—when he becomes extravagantly interested in discussing his various aches, maladies, prescription regimens, “procedures,” doctors, and real or imagined run-ins with death. What younger readers may not suspect is that, about the time one becomes a verbal fount of woe, one tends also to become deeply interested in other people's tales of bodily breakdown and decay. *Others are suffering too! And in many cases they're even worse off than I!* It's an endlessly cheery thought. Which is why hearing Mike Birbiglia discuss his bladder cancer, possible heart disease, near-fatal episodes of sleepwalking, and type 2 diabetes in his monologue *The Old Man and the Pool* (at the Vivian Beaumont Theater at Lincoln Center through January 15) constitutes such a splendid evening.

But I'm being slightly unfair; Birbiglia is a terrific comic writer and performer, with precision timing and superb phrasing, and though I can't get enough of other people's medical trauma, he brilliantly elevates each anecdote into comic splendor. Beginning with a story of how he was asked to blow into a tube at his doctor's office and was told that his breathing was so weak it was at the same level as a man actually experiencing a heart attack, he takes us through a digression-filled reflection on his various medical scares, noting along the

way that both his father and grandfather suffered heart attacks at fifty-six. Birbiglia is in his mid-forties and has a seven-year-old daughter to live for. His explanations of why he was disinclined to, say, eat healthier foods or take up exercise are thoroughly convincing. Who wants to eat vegetables or break a sweat? Birbiglia also delves into some childhood trauma relating to an early trip to the YMCA when he was growing up in Worcester, Massachusetts: he didn't enjoy being exposed to quite a lot of penises at eye level. Nor could he shake the image of an old man slowly and lavishly applying talcum powder to his testicles, hence the title of the show.

As directed by Seth Barrish on a set with a curved backdrop that suggests a cresting wave, the show differs only slightly from an ordinary stand-up-comedy routine. Some adjustments to the projections suggest a swimming pool or a doctor's office, and the performer obligingly moves around the stage or lies down to recreate, for instance, the experience of snuggling with his daughter. Birbiglia is an ordinary-looking, ordinary-seeming chap who eschews all traces of the please-love-me mugging that characterizes many stand-ups, and his self-deprecating observations are completely engaging. Recalling his early onset distaste for exercise, he notes that he enjoyed only the first part of the push-up, meaning the part where you lie down. When his doctor told him to take up swimming if he wished to get his heart into better shape, he said, "I don't have a swimmer's body. It's more of a drowner's body." When he missed a weekly appointment in the pool, he skipped a second week as well because "it was so fun not going the first time." How can we not like Mike Birbiglia? He is everyman.

I hope I'm not giving anything away when I report that, despite his ongoing woes, the comic seems to be in good health. His bladder cancer was never treated on the suspicion that it might simply settle in and do no harm, and so it has indeed done. He undergoes regular checkups that involve camera surveillance, and how the camera makes its way into the bladder provides him with some typically wry one-liners. He has gotten the diabetes under control, and has even managed to get in the

swimming pool five times a week. The passing mentions of his daughter, Oona, clarify how he accomplished this last feat: though we men do have a tendency to destroy ourselves, if there's any force on earth that can dissuade us from so doing, it's the face of a little girl. When we fail at living for ourselves, we sometimes do just fine when it comes to living for others.

Birbiglia, for all of his lumpen traits, is a sneakily charismatic man, with a smile charming enough to fill a very large theater. The Vivian Beaumont would seem a strange place for a slightly embellished stand-up routine, but I certainly haven't seen anything this funny on Broadway in years, and laughs are laughs. The advantage to ticket buyers is obvious: it's so hard for a show as simple as this one to sell out a space of this size that cheap seats are bound to be obtainable at the last minute. Running a sprightly ninety minutes, *The Old Man and the Pool* is one of the major delights of the season.

Richard Greenberg's funny, smart, and ultimately tragic baseball play *Take Me Out*, which first hit Broadway in 2003 and returned last spring for a revival before shutting down and transferring to the Schoenfeld Theatre (through February 5), is a reminder that, until very recently, any play that hoped to reach Broadway had to offer something other than a politically correct *cri de coeur*. Though the play deals with racism and, especially, anti-gay prejudice, it can't be dismissed as yet another tiresome indulgence of vacuous sloganeering.

Equally surprisingly, there is evidently much love for, and knowledge of, baseball contained in the play. Greenberg was plainly inspired by late-nineties baseball, when the New York Yankees (lightly disguised as the New York Empires) were preeminent and the biracial shortstop Derek Jeter seemed (like Tiger Woods at the same time and Barack Obama after him) to constitute an appealing model of nonconfrontational assimilation and cross-racial harmony. The Jeter cognate in the play, Darren Lemming (Jesse Williams), is not only proud to call himself both black and white, he also announces to the public that he is gay.

Homosexuality is of course a central concern of the Broadway sensibility but remains

totally off-limits in Major League Baseball. To this day, no currently rostered member of any Major League Baseball team has publicly stated that he is gay. Yet to its credit, the play sketches out a scenario in which the first openly gay ballplayer is publicly and privately supported. Darren continues to enjoy sparkling conversations with his thoughtful best friend on the team, Kippy Sunderstrom (Bill Heck), and as for the knuckleheads on the Empires, one of whom is a bit grumpy about being obliged to shower and dress in front of a gay man, they mostly do their best to be accommodating. Though the team is in a slump, Darren is having a wonderful season, and his financial adviser Mason Marzac (Jesse Tyler Ferguson) tells him he's so rich he should think about starting a foundation. Darren considers this for a moment and decides the object of his charity should be psychologically damaged kids under the age of ten. This thought amounts to a sort of monkey-paw prophecy: a product of exactly the sort of environment Darren imagines turns up on the team, and he's a phenomenally talented relief pitcher who single-handedly reverses the Empires' losing habits. Too bad he's a racist gay-basher who uses words like "spic" and "faggot" in media interviews.

The new teammate, Shane Mungitt (powerfully and chillingly portrayed by Michael Oberholtzer in the showiest role in the play), had such a disjointed upbringing that, when asked where he was born, he offers, "Arkansas. Tennessee." Or maybe Mississippi. Shane's dad killed his mom, then himself. As an infant, he was present for these events. Life has not gone well for him. The second great surprise of the play is that, instead of making Shane into a simple object of detestation, Greenberg burrows into his psyche and makes the audience pity him, even as they may remember how much they hated the late-nineties relief pitcher John Rucker, a member of the Atlanta Braves who was excoriated after making racist and anti-gay remarks about New York and saw his career dissolve shortly thereafter. The relationships among Darren, Shane, and a third player, Davey (Brandon J. Dirden), a conserva-

tive Christian from a rival team who is a close friend to Darren, blur all lines about prejudice, hate, and responsibility in a crackling ending.

Greenberg's play attracted considerable attention on both its Broadway runs for the nudity it features in several scenes set in lockers and dressing rooms. Ticket-buyers to the latest production are required to put their mobile phones in sealed pouches for the duration of the show to deter photography. Yet this supposedly sensational aspect of the play is its least interesting one. (Can there be anyone who would take the trouble to go to the theater to observe male genitalia?) Greenberg poses a question that has become considerably more pertinent, indeed urgent, in the twenty years that have passed since the play debuted in London: who are the bullies in our culture? Is it the Shane Mungitts—the gibbering, semi-literate, vigorously marginalized, and wholly pathetic racists who are not only shunned but despised with a kind of religious fervor? Or is it the clever cosmopolitan apostles of diversity who enjoy the adulation of the press and of Madison Avenue? Darren briefly threatens to retire rather than play on the same team with Shane; today he would simply demand Shane be traded. By turns, Shane's career would be ruined and Darren would stagger beneath the weight of the various "human rights" awards sent his way, struggling only to figure out what to do with the colossal sums he'd be pocketing in endorsement deals.

In a moment when a large proportion of theater, and culture in general, concentrates on flattering the audience and reassuring them that their beliefs are the correct and enlightened ones, Greenberg's play does the opposite, reminding us who the marginalizers actually are. The phrase "punch a Nazi" began to gain some purchase on social-media platforms a few years ago, and encouragement keeps growing for the idea that physically attacking someone with unattractive ideas is not only theoretically justified, but perhaps necessary and brave. After all, if the people with the bad ideas are allowed to continue unpunished in society, isn't society itself threatened? If you love peace, prove it: go out and slug the nearest fascist.

Art

Rear window

by James Panero

Edward Hopper (1882–1967) was the painter of small-town America. This we know. That his small town happened to be New York City, his home for nearly sixty years, we may not know. “Edward Hopper’s New York,” now on view at the Whitney Museum of American Art, tells the hometown story of an artist we thought we knew all along in a novel and illuminating way.¹

It is certainly an achievement when an exhibition of a famous artist is able to surprise. When such an exhibition can also instruct and delight—and do so without resorting to the clichés of contemporary theory—this is a rare triumph. And when the subject is a dead white male painter—a conservative, anti–New Deal Republican, no less, who rejected every school and trend to look to the loneliness of the human condition—here is a show that must be seen to be believed. “Edward Hopper’s New York” is such an exhibition and will open many eyes to this artist’s elegiac vision.

Hopper treated New York as his own small town. Born just up the Hudson River in Nyack, he arrived in the big city as an art student at the turn of the twentieth century at a moment of dynamic change—and he wanted nothing to do with it. As the world looked ahead and up, he looked back and down to the remnants of what was left behind: the out-of-date storefronts and obsolete buildings and

lost souls left to wander the urban stage. “Edward likes the surface of the earth,” observed his wife, Josephine (Jo) Nivison; “he likes to stay close to it.”

Then, well into the second half of the twentieth century, despite his burgeoning national renown, Hopper lived like a nineteenth-century recluse on the top-floor walkup of the same cold-water row house at 3 Washington Square North where he had settled in 1913. “We’re not spectacular and we’re very private,” Jo said at the height of her husband’s fame, “and we don’t drink and we hardly ever smoke.” To which Edward added: “I get most of my pleasure out of the city itself.” Hopper could be taciturn, difficult, a creature of habit. “Sometimes talking with Eddie is just like dropping a stone in a well,” said Jo, “except that it doesn’t thump when it hits bottom.” Yet when times demanded, he and Jo pushed back, refusing to move or modernize when Robert Moses, New York University, and the urban planners came calling—“progress” be damned.

In his art, Hopper looked not to the familiar sights and sounds of the city but to the experiences of living in it—that longing for stability in a world in motion. As curated by Kim Conaty, the Steven and Ann Ames Curator of Prints and Drawings at the Whitney, with senior curatorial assistant Melinda Lang, “Edward Hopper’s New York” wanders much as the artist did in life. “The City in Print,” “Washington Square,” “The Horizontal City,”

¹ “Edward Hopper’s New York” opened at the Whitney Museum of American Art, New York, on October 19, 2022, and remains on view through March 5, 2023.

“The Window,” “Theater,” “Sketching New York,” and “Reality and Fantasy” are the thematic sections of this peripatetic exhibition that brings together some two hundred paintings, watercolors, prints, and drawings.

“Brings together” might be misleading, since a great majority of the exhibition comes out of the Whitney’s own extensive holdings by the artist. In 1968, after her husband’s death, Jo willed 2,500 of his works to the museum, supplementing the institution’s own acquisitions going back to Gertrude Vanderbilt Whitney’s purchase of *Early Sunday Morning* for her Studio Club in 1930, the same year Hopper painted the famous streetfront scene. And even these thousands have since been supplemented by another six hundred objects. Works by Hopper now total an astonishing 12 percent of the museum’s permanent collection. (It must also be said that the Whitney’s sweeping downtown views, of the former Meatpacking District and the recast High Line, now further echo the artist’s urban impressions.)

“Edward Hopper’s New York” finds its pace even with so much from which to choose. The exhibition begins with a wall of early work by the commuting art student and illustrator. In this section called “First Impressions,” with several small drawings and paintings from the turn of the century arranged salon-style, we can already find elements of the Hopperesque rising out of his Ashcan beginnings (Robert Henri was his teacher).

Works such as *Ferry Slip* (ca. 1904–06), an oil on cardboard, and *Tugboat with Black Smokestack* (1908), an oil on canvas, speak less of their purported subject matter and more of the viewer observing them. Here we see Hopper’s own world as though glancing out the window of the ferry during his commute to town. These are snapshot views of the city—quick, uncomposed, and not altogether well lit. “Unmonumental” is one way to describe them. This is a New York not of tourists but of the workaday schlub.

Hopper was soon one of them. With his talents as a draftsman he found ready work in the trades. Several examples are here on

display—illustrations for the *Bulletin of the New York Edison Company* (1906–07), *Wells Fargo Messenger* (1917–25), and *Hotel Management* (1917–25), articles on “What Makes Men Buy?” (1912) and “The Spur of Pay and Promotion” (1913), and ads for Bricklayer’s Coffee Break (1907–10), Scaffolding by Chesebro Whitman Co. Inc. (ca. 1911–12), and Knothe Unseen Suspenders (ca. 1917–20).

Hopper disliked it all, but the commercial assignments paid the bills even as his painting career went nowhere. At the same time his own work reflected his dejection and a sense of dislocation. Compositions such as *Blackwell’s Island* (1911) and *The El Station* (1908) find us glancing just far enough over the side of the Fifty-ninth Street Bridge to see the moon reflecting in the East River, contrasting with the blackness of the city far below, and a long New York shadow obscuring the platform and tracks of the elevated train as we presumably rumble by. These are lonely visions, largely unpeopled, vertiginous and isolated. *Solitary Figure in a Theater* (ca. 1902–04), of the back of a head in silhouette, only reminds us that there’s another figure, solitary and out of view just a few rows back, observing this empty scene.

Hopper spent his time wandering the city for its nooks and crannies, collecting impressions of the forgotten buildings, bridges, and streetscapes that became his signature motifs. In the Teens, he hauled a printing press up to his studio and began making small etchings of these vignettes. They brought him some of his first attention as a fine artist. *Night on the El Train* (1918), *Evening Wind* (1921), and *The Lonely House* (1922) find the city at its most unguarded state. These impressions became the backlot sets in his larger compositions.

Hopper’s view of the city was out of time and place, much like his own artistic style. “In a period of groups, manifestos, and rampant aesthetic partisanship, Edward Hopper never declared a project,” notes Darby English in the exhibition catalogue. When Hopper traveled to Paris in the heady first decade of the century, he set himself against the nascent avant-garde. After seeing the Salon d’Automne of 1906,

with works by Henri Matisse, he noted that it was “for the most part very bad.” He longed to return. Writing home to his mother, he said he found Paris a “very graceful and beautiful city, almost too formal and sweet to the taste after the raw disorder of New York.”

By the early 1920s, Hopper was in his forties, childless, unmarried, and an artist who had not sold a painting for ten years. Then in the summer of 1923 he crossed paths with Jo in Gloucester, Massachusetts. She was an artist herself who had also studied with Robert Henri at the New York School of Art. A year later they married. Jo moved into Hopper’s seventy-four-step walkup, with its shared bathroom down the hall, its views of Washington Square, and its skylit studio. As the loquacious spouse gave voice to the couple, the red-haired Jo also became Hopper’s lifetime model. *Study of Jo Hopper Reading* (1925), *Jo Painting* (1936), *Study of Jo Hopper Seated* (ca. 1945–50), *Morning in a City* (1944), *Morning Sun* (1952)—for the empty stage of his cityscapes, Hopper now had his lead actress.

In the 1920s Hopper found a new audience as modern art returned to classicism and realism. For all this he never really diverged from painting in the nineteenth-century tradition of Thomas Eakins—an artist, he prided in noting (at least on belief), who once lived at 3 Washington Square North. Yet rather than the heroic doctors or strapping rowers Eakins depicted, Hopper’s figures were the fallen angels of the new century.

The New York theater was a regular destination for the Hoppers. They saved their many ticket stubs, now on display. For his own backdrops Hopper looked to the architecture of the city’s broken skyline, ignoring the modern highrises and instead focusing on the city’s aging tenements. He noted

our native architecture, with its hideous beauty, its fantastic roofs, pseudo-Gothic, French Mansard, Colonial . . . with eye-searing color or delicate harmonies of faded paint, shouldering one another along interminable streets. . . . There is a certain fear and anxiety and a great visual interest in the things that one sees coming into a great city.

Hopper set his anonymous characters in these tableaux, increasingly looking to reflect an “Everytown USA,” even as he mined the specificities of the city. The raking light of New York became his spotlight, illuminating the stage for *Morning in a City* (1944), *Sunlight in a Cafeteria* (1958), and *City Sunlight* (1954). He used the city’s windows to frame these compositions, often with windows onto windows. The glimpses of *Automat* (1927), *Tables for Ladies* (1930), *Room in New York* (1932), and *Office at Night* (1940) open the curtains while also exposing our own voyeurism of the scenes. The awkwardness of each encounter might just about be exposed in the reflection of a storefront pane or the rattling window of the elevated train. Thus Hopper turned his viewer into his subject, just as he flipped the script for his many images of theater interiors, where the faceless spectators and distracted ushers become the actors.

Hopper’s windows not only opened up unexpected sight lines. Through their weathered frames they also exposed a city in the rearview mirror. Starting in 1946, the Hoppers fought desperately to preserve their own nineteenth-century walkup from the encroachment of a twentieth-century institution. “It is regrettable that in [our] taking over the building in which you reside it will be necessary for you to look for accommodations elsewhere,” New York University kindly wrote to the tenants of the building it sought to evict as the school saw its enrollment balloon after the war.

The Hoppers’ public fight during the last twenty years of their lives over the fate of their building and the park it overlooked became an inspiration for the city’s preservationist movement, which originated in their neighborhood of Greenwich Village. Hopper’s New York was “one that people with their restless need for change have overlooked: it is a part of its backwaters untouched by the swift current of the main tide,” observed his friend Guy Pène du Bois. “His realities are in the past of his youth.” Edward Hopper was not only the savior of a city gone by. He was also a preservationist of the souls who lived there.

Exhibition notes

“Alex Katz: Theater and Dance”
Colby Museum of Art, Waterville, Maine.
August 16, 2022–February 19, 2023

On its face, the premise of “Alex Katz: Theater and Dance” sounds unpromising. The stiffness of the artist’s painted figures is a key component of his style and has been since he arrived upon it seven decades ago. (He is in his mid-nineties and still painting.) How might he handle dance, of all things?

The answer depends on whether you accept the validity of Katz’s creative project. If so, then you agree that Katz has kept the Color Field movement alive all these years in his outsize canvases and their single-hue backgrounds. The flattening of the figures arises from a formal need to integrate them with the grounds. Cropping them oddly, as Katz often does, pushes that integration further. It stops the surrounding color from operating as space or atmosphere and prevents it from having any identity except that of a wall of paint, true to the Color Field ethos. His willingness to admit fashion into his work, as well as the stylish people sporting it, transformed the tendency of Pop Art to wallow in vulgarity into something less cynical and more friendly and affirming. You accept the assertion of the renowned curator Robert Storr, who contributed a short essay to the “Theater and Dance” catalogue and consulted on the show’s installation, that Katz is “paying close attention to how things look, knowing, as he does, that rather than being superficial, appearances are the key to understanding who and what we are.”

In that case, the paintings are as appropriate as anything else in his oeuvre. A typical Katz has an aggressively simple logic of figure and background, so a scenario of costumed bodies arrayed across a bare stage plays to his strengths. The costumes themselves prove as amenable to the Katz treatment as regular clothing while offering their own formal possibilities with their improbable colors and styling. Katz’s deadpan, which is necessary to the paintings’ functioning, reigns within the rectangle. No dancer’s gesture, no matter how energetic, can defy it. In *Song*, *Laura Dean Dance Co.* from 1977, the company is

standing about the stage with right arms raised, clad in rose blouses and pink pants in front of a similarly tinted and shaded background. At twelve feet wide, it’s close to life-size, and its visual impact is undeniable. Standing near it feels akin to walking through an installation.

If you don’t accept the validity of Katz’s creative project, or if like me you’ve been wavering on it for a long time, “Theater and Dance” is an uncomfortable exhibition. This viewer, at least, feels torn between sensing the works’ internal consistency and success on their own terms and noticing that the propositions in play often produce unsatisfactory results. Certain canvases big enough to tarp a roof look oddly like trifles.

This is even after discounting some personal distastes, specifically a combination of black, teal, and purple that I associate with the 1980s in a bad way, and which Katz has employed to plodding effect in a series of paintings from 2021 that dominate the opening room. I grant that they’re innovative relative to a long history of prior Katzes. He has noticed a phenomenon of stage lighting that can fill the shadow side of cross-lit faces with strange colors and has attempted to simulate it in oil, given that any such shadow in a Katz may only exist as a single mid-tone shape. Good for him for trying something new. But we don’t go to Katz to see riffs on theatrical illumination, as when Degas depicts the cabaret in soft pastels. *Dancers 4* (2021) cries out for some kind of remedy, which is probably to neutralize the background with the pale aqua of the facial shadows, but that would make it not a Katz. Also in this series are some close-ups of a blue-eyed performer named Emma, whose 2020 portrait merges the shadow of her face with the grape-flavored background in an undistinguished mass. Like a bad flashback, the Eighties are exacting their revenge as the artist conducts an experiment on his own style.

I have also never been entirely convinced that Katz’s powers of observation and documentation, credited to him by Storr and many others—even critics less sympathetic to Pop such as Robert Hughes—manifest in the work except as notation. (“To doubt the ultimate value of Katz,” wrote Hughes in 1986, “might be construed as a vote . . . against everything that makes the arts-and-leisure section of American

life such a nice place to be.”) Jocular memories of Max Headroom return upon studying the enormous (360 inches!) quintuple-double portrait of five couples, *Pas de Deux* (1983), evoked in particular by the ladies’ outfits. If Katz’s world can be unrelatably genteel, he has nonetheless captured its manners. But the slightest tilt of a head blows his sense of anatomy to smithereens, with eye sockets sliding to wild locations on the skull and faces sometimes going completely Picassoid. Katz has afflicted the figure in *Dance 7* (2022) with a mouth shaped like that of a duck. It comes off not as deliberate Cubism but helpless discombobulation brought on by subjects that defy his usual—and, let’s admit it—limited stock of techniques for rendering people.

Hughes concluded that Katz was a poor draftsman, but the numerous study drawings in this exhibition don’t display such difficulties. Many of them, for instance the pounced cartoon from 1991 of a posed dancer, are preferable in their resolution to the paintings for which they were prepared. I believe instead that the troubles are a downside of Katz’s method. He wants the oil to look fresh. That means that he must, as much as possible, put down confident strokes of paint and leave them alone. If a face goes catawampus in the process, or a passage seems slack instead of untroubled, he regards it as meant to be, and would no more correct it than Jackson Pollock would fix one of his strands of slung enamel. More preliminary drawing on the canvas would prevent errancy in the results, but that would cause the paintings to look facile in a less interesting way. Katz’s choices, for better or worse, are attempts to protect artistic integrity.

That is the chief frustration of these works, the unimpeachable seriousness with which the artist seeks such light rewards. The light rewards accumulate, however, as Katz collaborates with the dance companies of Paul Taylor and Laura Dean and contributes to the dramas of Kenneth Koch. Katz’s practice of painting on aluminum cutouts makes obvious sense in relation to his construction of stage sets. “Theater and Dance” is an exhibition of considerable art-historical interest, allowing the viewer to glimpse a process in which the artist designs costumes for the choreographers,

then paints the tableaux they enact, then bases prints on the paintings, then re-costumes the dancers in his studio for further exploration. Like a dancer in performance, he embraces his stumbles and moves through them.

Katz hit upon something that worked for him before I was born, and I’m hardly young. To this day he mines it for treasure with assiduous discipline. For that I feel nothing but respect.

—Franklin Einspruch

“An Italian Impressionist in Paris:

Giuseppe De Nittis”

The Phillips Collection,
Washington, D.C.

November 12, 2022–February 12, 2023

Calls to revise the history of this, that, and the other thing have become so numerous in recent years that they’ve instilled a reflexive skepticism in those of us who place a premium on differentiating between discernible facts and elaborate fictions, between events as they occurred on the ground and the arrogance of contemporary mores. Even within that variegated entity known as the art world there is a stunning conformity of opinion among elites as to the necessity of reconfiguring the roll calls of art to make them more inclusive. Of course, “inclusion” isn’t necessarily a bad thing—that is, if it remains tethered to artistic worth. All of which is a roundabout way of suggesting that the history of art does, in fact, need revision so that it can now include Giuseppe De Nittis (1846–84). You mean, a cisgendered heteronormative scion of patriarchal culture? Yes, and De Nittis was a damned fine painter. That he remains the purview of specialists is, at the risk of engaging in hyperbole, a cheat on our common humanity.

“An Italian Impressionist in Paris: Giuseppe De Nittis,” now on view at the Phillips Collection, is among the most bracing shows to come down the pike in some time. New Yorkers with some sense of cultural memory may recall De Nittis as the standout player in “Masterpieces of Nineteenth-Century Italian Painting from the Gaetano Marzotto Collection,” an exhibition mounted by the National Academy almost thirty

years ago. Among a parochial array of Impressionist wannabes, De Nittis appeared a beacon of pictorial invention, an artist whose painterly brusqueness worked in conjunction with a finely grained attention to detail. Since then, De Nittis has been in short supply here in the States. The stray canvas can be cherry-picked from the Met's nineteenth-century wing, but, otherwise, De Nittis is a local hero—if that. Renato Miracco, the curator of the Pinacoteca Giuseppe De Nittis in Barletta, Italy, writes of how the painter has been “largely overlooked.” The retrospective Miracco has organized for the Phillips Collection, the first dedicated to De Nittis on these shores, is a concerted effort at putting out the news that, yes, here is an artist worthy of the canon.

De Nittis's oeuvre is testament not only to the benefits that can accrue from working in a cultural capital, but also to the value of one's friends in helping one overcome adverse circumstances. Born in Barletta, a city located on the Adriatic in the region of Apulia, De Nittis's life was short and, at times, brutish and tragic. De Nittis's father, a landowner of some affluence and a voluble critic of the House of Bourbon, was jailed for his political opinions just months after his son's birth. After release in 1848, Raffaele De Nittis was never the same; his psychological state was rendered more fragile when his wife, Teresa Barracchia, died the following year. When Raffaele committed suicide seven years later, the eldest son, Vincenzo, apprenticed Giuseppe to a local painter in the hopes of remedying his brother's “listless and distracted” ways. Much to Vincenzo's chagrin, Giuseppe took to the “hopeless trade.” Hopeless, indeed: not long after enrolling in the Reale Istituto di Belle Arti in Naples, De Nittis was deemed talentless and booted out of school. He subsequently joined a cadre of *plein air* painters in southern Italy, among them Federigo Rossano. Rossano's acquaintance Edgar Degas befriended the young De Nittis and later became his mentor.

De Nittis could have been content with being a big fish in a small pond; in an irony surely not lost on the young artist, the Bourbons began collecting his canvases. But another meeting with Degas, this time in Florence, fostered his ambitions. At age twenty-one, De Nittis traveled to, and fell in love with, Paris. Among

the artists he encountered were Jean-Léon Gérôme and Jean-Louis-Ernest Meissonier, a painter whose work De Nittis thought the world of. Anyone with a cursory knowledge of nineteenth-century French art will discern a disconnect between De Nittis's attraction to artists typical of the academy and his friendships with progressive figures such as Degas, Edouard Manet, and Gustave Caillebotte. De Nittis straddled both sides of this seemingly contradictory divide, exhibiting both at the Salon and the Société anonyme des artistes. Indeed, De Nittis achieved some notoriety—so much that Monet and Renoir were livid at the Italian's popularity and, out of spite, removed his canvases from the First Impressionist Exhibition of 1874. The paintings were reinstalled a few days later at Degas' insistence. Again, the quality of friendship can count for a lot.

Fans of Impressionist painting will feel at home upon entering the exhibition. Fashionable young women; breakfast in the garden; Parisian thoroughfares marked by light, leisure, and the unstoppable prerogatives of modernity: De Nittis's subjects are par for the course. What he does with them is startling to behold. Here and there De Nittis yields to a Florentine rectitude that is often stiff in nature. The majority of the time he navigates, with breathtaking dexterity, between telling particulars and rough-hewn brushwork. A pair of canvases dedicated to the eruption of Mount Vesuvius conveys the drama of nature's independence while attending to the minutiae of sightseers heading for safe ground. Elsewhere, De Nittis devotes a number of paintings to his wife Léontine, the brevity, bravura, and wit of which put Manet to shame. Pictures by Manet, Degas, and Caillebotte are included as context, and it's worth comparing the bonhomie in De Nittis's *Return from the Races* (1875) with that of Renoir's *Luncheon of the Boating Party* (1880–81), long a staple of the Phillips's permanent collection. De Nittis was, in the end, his own man, a painter of supernal gifts whose life was cut short by a cerebral hemorrhage at age thirty-eight. What he accomplished up until that moment is presented with considerable splendor in “An Italian Impressionist in Paris.”

—Mario Naves

Music

New York chronicle

by Jay Nordlinger

Sondra Radvanovsky, the Illinois-born soprano, gave a recital in Carnegie Hall—as you would expect. She is one of the leading opera singers in the world. Carnegie Hall is probably America’s foremost concert venue. Why shouldn’t she sing a recital in that hall? She should. But voice recitals are getting fewer and fewer, or so it seems to me. I’m glad for each one that materializes.

When I was growing up—do I remember correctly?—voice recitals were plentiful. This was in Ann Arbor, Michigan, in the 1970s and ’80s. We had Sills, Sutherland, Price, de los Angeles—and that is only to name sopranos, and only to name big stars. There were many others as well.

In an interview about ten years ago, Anne Sofie von Otter, the Swedish mezzo-soprano and an exemplary recitalist, told me that audiences could no longer really sit through an evening of songs. Something had changed in our culture (our broad Western culture). On the evening of the Radvanovsky recital in Carnegie Hall, a music-industry pro told me that voice recitals don’t really sell—unless the singer is a big star (*à la* Sills and those others).

Sondra Radvanovsky is a big star, or big enough. She is a Verdi soprano and also what you might call a dramatic coloratura—the kind that sings the Three Queens of Donizetti (Anne Boleyn, Mary Stuart, and Elizabeth I). The current season at the Metropolitan Opera opened with Radvanovsky singing Medea—the title role in the Cherubini opera, which most of us know as a Callas vehicle.

At Carnegie Hall, Radvanovsky sang a very old-fashioned program, I’m pleased to report. It was diverse, offering a little of this, a little of that. Songs and arias from various periods, in various styles, in various languages.

The program began with arias by Purcell and Handel. It continued with three songs of Duparc. Then there were three songs of Rachmaninoff. To close the first half, there were the Petrarch sonnets of Liszt. And after intermission? Four of Strauss’s best songs. A couple of songs by Verdi (who is not often heard in song). A chestnut, “O del mio amato ben,” by Stefano Donaudy. A brand-new piece by Jake Heggie. Then a verismo aria, by Giordano.

If we live in an age that prizes diversity, the world should have hailed this recital program.

Radvanovsky came out looking fit and glamorous, in a bare-shouldered gown. The crowd went nuts, hootin’ and hollerin’, as after *Tosca* or something. Then Radvanovsky launched into Dido’s Lament. About her singing, in the recital at large, I will make some general remarks.

The voice tended to have a husk to it, not unpleasant. It was at times worn, or frayed. But usually it was warm, and beautiful too. Moreover, Radvanovsky sang without fear. When a high *piano* was not necessarily pretty or secure, she did not engage in a cover-up. She simply stood exposed, and admirable. About interpretation, you and I could have quarreled with the singer, here and there. But she did nothing unreasonable. Let me say, too, that Radvanovsky did not have a “song” voice and

an “aria” voice: *Now I am a proper recitalist, now I am an opera star.* She treated the songs and arias as music, essentially.

We are talking about a big voice. And if Carnegie Hall is sometimes unsuited to a voice recital—too large, not intimate enough—it was the right size, or at least not a wrong size, on this night.

At the piano was Anthony Manoli, who teaches at one of the New York conservatories, Mannes. He played pianistically, which may seem a strange thing to say, but what I mean is that he played freely and confidently, without an accompanist’s inhibitions, while never forgetting his singer.

After Dido, Radvanovsky picked up a microphone and began to talk. Uh-oh. She said that she liked an audience to get to know her, personally, during a recital. Double uh-oh. Apparently, Radvanovsky was going to serve as the emcee of her recital. She was like a cabaret host. She was going to talk throughout the evening. We were in for a long, trying night.

Soon into her initial remarks, Radvanovsky said something startling. This had been an *annus horribilis* for her: “My mother passed away, and I am getting a divorce.” Her recital program dealt with loss and grief, hope and love. It was all very, very personal. I shifted uncomfortably in my seat. Couldn’t all this be unspoken, simply heard or imagined in the music (with its texts)? I thought of initials: TMI, standing for “too much information.” Yet I would change my mind, as the evening progressed.

Before she sang her Rachmaninoff songs, Radvanovsky spoke of Dmitri Hvorostovsky, the late Russian baritone. She and he had been friends, and he taught her these songs, she said. Hvorostovsky died in 2017, at fifty-five.

After intermission, Radvanovsky took the stage in a new outfit and began her Strauss songs. She was especially warm, and soulful, in them. (Those are good qualities to have in Strauss.) I thought of a saying in music: “You play who you are.” You sing who you are, too, at least some of the time. (Opera roles are a different story.) The audience was somewhat rowdy, during the Strauss and all

recital long. Inappropriately so? Well, rowdiness is better than indifference or tepidity. But this crowd whooped and hollered after “Morgen!” and “Befreit.” Those songs should occasion more like hushed awe or reflection. But what can you do?

Our program booklet contained a note by Radvanovsky. In it, she calls Jake Heggie “my friend and America’s foremost composer.” The second part is debatable—but Sondra Radvanovsky certainly has a right to debate. Heggie composed for her “If I Had Known,” a lovely and thoughtful piece. The words are by the singer herself:

If I had known
That day would be the last I’d really see you
The last you’d really see me

If I had known
Your final words would be: “I miss you, my
daughter.”

Too much? Too raw? I can say that everything about this evening was sincere and, ultimately, moving. Radvanovsky introduced two people in the audience and had them stand: her mother’s doctor and nurse. Any discomfort I had felt melted into pure appreciation. I “bought in” to the spirit of the evening, you might say.

Radvanovsky ended her printed program with “La mamma morta,” the aria from *Andrea Chénier* (Giordano). A little maudlin, or macabre, under the circumstances, right? The aria begins (I will give an English translation), “They killed my mother at the door of my room.” But as Radvanovsky explained, this is a hopeful and affirmative aria, full of love. She went on to sing it freshly and potently. Indeed, this was possibly the freshest and most potent singing she had done all night. She had a lot of gas left in the tank.

Her first encore was “Io son l’umile ancella,” from *Adriana Lecouvreur* (Cilea), and her second was “Vissi d’arte,” from *Tosca* (Puccini). The aforementioned Leontyne Price sang these arias at encore time in almost every recital she gave. Radvanovsky was once more—twice more!—fresh and potent. This was after a couple of hours of singing.

She sang one more encore, a song, rather than an aria—a song that she had sung at her best friend’s wedding over the summer, she said. A song imbued with hope and goodness: “Over the Rainbow.” Her singing of it, to a rapt Carnegie Hall audience, was flooring.

This was one of the strangest and most affecting recitals or concerts I have ever attended. And as a friend and I were discussing afterward, there is nothing like a voice recital. The music world offers an excellent and appetizing menu: orchestra concerts, chamber-music concerts, instrumental recitals, operas—but nothing can beat a voice recital for sheer emotional connection and overall satisfaction.

A concert of the New York Philharmonic was guest-conducted by Hannu Lintu, from Finland. Where else? In that country, they have almost as many conductors as they do cross-country skiers, or saunas. You may wonder whether Maestro Lintu conducted Sibelius with our New York band. He did—the program concluded with the Symphony No. 7.

I thought of Esa-Pekka Salonen, the most famous of the Finnish conductors, who told me that he went through an anti-Sibelius period. This was when he was young, and rebelling. He fled to Italy to study, wanting a “Sibelius-free zone,” as he put it. But, in a shop, he chanced upon a copy of the Symphony No. 7. The score was on sale “for the price of an espresso,” as Salonen said. He bought it—and marveled at the symphony, never turning away from his national composer again.

Lintu conducted it with precision and fluidity. Everything was seamless, everything cohered. It was hard to tell whether the piece was a symphonic work or more like a chamber work.

On the first half of the program, there had been a concerto, by Bartók: his concerto for two pianos and percussion (and orchestra, of course). Didn’t Bartók write a *sonata* for two pianos and percussion? Yes, and he later made a concerto version of it. One rarely hears the concerto version. In fact, the last time the New York Philharmonic had played it was in 1966.

The piano soloists this season were Sergei Babayan and Daniil Trifonov, born in the Soviet Union thirty years apart. Trifonov was

born in March 1991, when the Soviet Union had about nine months left. Trifonov grew up to study with Babayan, in Cleveland. It was nice to see teacher and student have this moment, this concerto, together. They were good, and so were their percussion partners.

Incidentally, a cellphone went off at the beginning of the concerto, playing a Finnish tune—or rather a Spanish one, by Francisco Tárrega (1852–1909). But a Finnish company, Nokia, spread this tune around the world, as a ringtone.

Earlier, I was lamenting a paucity of voice recitals. The Park Avenue Armory, doing its part, presented Ying Fang in its Board of Officers Room—a splendid place for a voice recital. As a bonus, the chairs in this room are the most comfortable of any venue in New York. You feel like an officer yourself.

Ying Fang is a Chinese soprano, now in her mid-thirties. Many of us first heard her in Wagner’s *Tannhäuser* at the Metropolitan Opera. That was at the beginning of the 2015–16 season, and Ying Fang sang the small part of the Shepherd. She made an impression in it, however. Her singing was pure and beautiful. The next season, she made an impression in Mozart, singing *Exsultate, jubilate* with the New York Philharmonic. Speaking of Mozart: Ying Fang was part of an outstanding cast in *Idomeneo* at the Met earlier this season.

In the Board of Officers Room, she was accompanied by Ken Noda, a distinguished pianist who spent some thirty years on the Met staff.

When Ying Fang took the stage, some in the audience whooped and hollered as for Sondra Radvanovsky in Carnegie Hall—only, in this little room, the greeting was somewhat awkward. There were young Chinese fans in the room, understandably adoring of Ying Fang.

Like Radvanovsky, she sang a mixed program, whose first half was all in German: Bach, Schubert, and Strauss. As usual, she sang purely and sincerely. As usual, she sang in tune. And, as usual, I could snipe at her diction. Even in familiar songs, I had trouble getting the words. You certainly had no trouble *hearing* Ying Fang. One thing this recital proved,

or confirmed, is that a singer needs a right-sized hall for his or her recital. In the Board of Officers Room, this light lyric soprano was downright *loud*, drilling a hole through your head with her focused sound.

The second half of her recital opened with three French songs—by Hahn, Debussy, and Chausson. The Hahn song was “À Chloris,” which Susan Graham, the American mezzo, calls her favorite song. (Good choice.) Ying Fang sang it superbly. Honestly, I have not heard better, even from French singers. (Graham is from Midland, Texas, but is French by musical adoption.)

After her French songs, Ying Fang sang in English: the *Six Elizabethan Songs* of Dominick Argento (1958). Many of us learned these songs when Barbara Bonney recorded them with André Previn at the piano. Ying Fang was effective in them (and so was Ken Noda). If it is not too rude to say, Ying Fang had a bout of lisping—lisping I had not noticed in German or French. That happens to singers. The aforementioned Beverly Sills used to have bouts of lisping, and could only laugh at them.

I keep mentioning Leontyne Price, too. She sang recital after recital in Europe, always including spirituals at the end. Her attitude, she said, was, “I have sung *your* songs, now you will hear *mine*.” I thought of this when Ying Fang concluded her printed program with five Chinese art songs, by five different composers. She was charming and personable in them, and I trust idiomatic.

For an encore, she did what Sondra Radvanovsky did, at the end: sing “Over the Rainbow”—touchingly. Afterward, in the hallway outside the Board of Officers Room, her young Chinese fans met her, as excited as bobby-soxers for Sinatra, or as today’s young fans for Taylor Swift. This was touching to observe.

Programming is an interesting art, I think we can agree. In the orchestra world, overture—concerto—symphony is a convention. A wonder-

ful convention, never improved on. People like to play and conduct big symphonies: Bruckner ones, Mahler ones. Short pieces often get short shrift, going unplayed. This is especially true in an age—our current one—when orchestras seldom play encores. In the piano world, people like to play a late Schubert sonata, say, on the second half of a program. On the first half, they may like two pieces, or three, max.

Hélène Grimaud, the veteran French pianist, came to Carnegie Hall for a recital. *Veteran French pianist*—how odd to write those words, because it seems like yesterday that she was a teenager, winning and melting every heart (as she still does)! The first half of her program had thirteen—count ’em, thirteen—pieces. Little short ones. They were by four composers: Chopin, Debussy, Satie, and Silvestrov. This last composer is Valentin Silvestrov, a Ukrainian born in 1937. The thirteen pieces were of a piece, you could say: tending to be delicate, lyrical, simple, inward, beautiful. They suited La belle Hélène to a T, and she suited them, equally. Some of the thirteen pieces were common, such as “Clair de lune” (Debussy). Some were uncommon, such as selections from the *Pièces froides* of Satie. Another, Grimaud sort of brought back: “La plus que lente” (again, Debussy). Rubinstein used to play this piece, regularly.

After intermission, Grimaud played one piece: Schumann’s *Kreisleriana*. And yet, this is a set of eight smallish pieces, isn’t it? In any event, a pianist needs imagination, and a Romantic sensibility, to play *Kreisleriana*. A portion of virtuosity helps, too. And Grimaud gave a fine account of this work.

What do you play for an encore, when you’ve played a program of encores, so to speak? Grimaud played four encores, regardless: a Chopin étude, two Rachmaninoff *Études-tableaux*, and one more Silvestrov piece. Not only did Hélène Grimaud perform a recital—a first-class one—she performed a service, by offering a wonderful assortment of shorties.

The media

Visions of the future

by James Bowman

There's a funny exchange in the otherwise forgettable movie *Father's Day* of 1997 that goes like this:

Billy Crystal: You're a tragic hero. You're Lou Gehrig.

Robin Williams: Who?

Crystal: Lou Gehrig. Everybody knows Lou Gehrig. The baseball player. He died of Lou Gehrig's Disease.

Williams: Wow, what are the odds on that?

In the immediate run-up to the November midterm elections—out of which Ron DeSantis, the governor of Florida, was one of the few Republicans to emerge with much credit—Donald Trump himself appeared to become the ultimate victim of what has been called Trump Derangement Syndrome when he took credit for having put Mr. DeSantis in the governor's mansion and proceeded to deride him as “Ron DeSanctimonious.”

It's true that the former president has never numbered graciousness among his virtues as a public man, but such a misstep only hours before an election in which, though not a candidate himself, he had so large a stake seemed like a gratuitous effort of self-sabotage with the sort of swing voters his favored candidates were just then trying to attract.

There were other examples of his tone-deafness after the election, when he also an-

nounced his candidacy for the presidency in 2024. These included a similar belittling of another former protégé, Governor Glenn Youngkin of Virginia, and a dinner with three notorious anti-Semites, the most charitable interpretation of which is that he was, as Byron York says, “played” by one of them, his would-be political rival Kanye West—who now prefers to be called simply “Ye.” Later, he seemed to imply that the Constitution should be “terminated” so that he could be proclaimed the rightful winner of the 2020 election. Such a “death wish,” as Mr. York terms it, must be the result of temporary insanity and would seem to confirm, in retrospect, the most popular theory doing the rounds at the time of why the Republicans did so poorly in the election after such high expectations—namely that Trump-wearry swing voters rejected so many of his favored candidates just because he favored them, or they favored him.

There are of course other theories that have been cast up, on both ends of the political spectrum, for why the elections went as they did, based on the assumption of Democrat success and Republican failure—again, as measured against expectations—but I don't propose to rehearse them here. Like nearly everything else that appears in the media these days, such theories have been largely self-serving, *ex post facto* explanations designed to fit the election results into some preconceived notion of current political reality and the public opinion that creates it. Not that

there's anything wrong with that, I hasten to add, since in what follows I intend to do exactly the same myself.

My theory, in case you want to know, is that this election represents the high-water mark (so far) of the media's long-term project to convert traditional politicking, involving serious (or at least semi-serious) debate over rival visions of and policy prescriptions for what would be good for the country, into what the Lewinsky-era Bill Clinton called, even as he and his party were engaging in it themselves, "the politics of personal destruction": something that is, when you think about it, just the negative version of the positive but equally fantastical politics of personal self-promotion that we call "virtue signaling." Both represent the takeover of the political by the personal, which, under its latest guise of "polarization," we too often tend to regard as if it were a kind of natural phenomenon, like a hurricane or an earthquake, visited upon our innocent political culture by an unkind fate.

It is not. Neither personalization nor polarization are accidents but acts of revolutionary will, pioneered by feminists (who first insisted that "the personal is the political") and since adopted by other identity groups as a political strategy preemptively to isolate and delegitimize would-be counterrevolutionaries as being beyond the (new) moral and intellectual pale. Argument or debate with those who had traditionalist ideas of the domestic roles of the sexes was rendered unnecessary when all you had to do was call them "sexists"—i.e., people with no right to an opinion on the subject. And it has been with the same purpose that the media's fellow travelers on the left now employ against those who resist them words like "fascist" or "white supremacist" or even just "extremist"—though the views thus described are nearly always straight out of yesterday's mainstream. The conservative—or reactionary, as he is now more likely to be called—becomes irredeemably *other*, someone with whom a true progressive can have nothing to do but whom he must regard with a hatred and loathing that is more than likely to be returned by the hated ones.

As the recent election showed, however, the polarizing techniques may also be a little less obvious. A Trump or a Biden may have been chosen by his party to lead precisely *because* he is so easy for the other side to hate, thus producing an equal and opposite reaction on his own side. But in a midterm election, candidates for the inferior and not very powerful offices of senator or representative naturally have a harder time portraying each other as monsters of evil and must rely on more subtle methods of suggesting either the contemptible qualities of their opponents—such as their willingness to associate themselves with the hated party figurehead—or else their own superior amiability (the kind of guy you'd like to have a beer with) or authenticity, personal qualities formerly seldom thought of as having much in the way of political implications.

Consider the results of the senatorial elections in the two neighboring states of Ohio and Pennsylvania, which in November elected senators of polar opposite political views (at least as these things are measured nowadays), both of them running against opponents who would seem to have had better qualifications for the job but much less compelling backstories—or perhaps I should say backstories that allow them to claim, by the media's measure, a superior authenticity to that of their opponents. The Republicans, J. D. Vance in Ohio and Mehmet Oz in Pennsylvania, were both bona fide celebrities before receiving Mr. Trump's endorsement, just as their Democratic opponents, Tim Ryan and John Fetterman, were run-of-the-mill politicians. The value of the Trump endorsement for Mr. Vance and Mr. Oz, while decisive in their respective primaries, was perhaps more likely to have been a drawback in the general election.

The stroke that disabled Mr. Fetterman earlier this year seemed to many to be a disqualification, but it may have been the making of him. The not inaccurate characterization of Mr. Fetterman as a spoiled rich boy who had no job and lived with his parents until he was in his forties began to look as if it was telling against him until his lamentable performance in the candidates' one "debate" made him seem instead like a brave victim, striving to

overcome the merely personal limitations imposed on him by his disability. Here was a form of authenticity, particularly by way of contrast with an obviously well-to-do diet doctor in regular consultation with Oprah Winfrey, that could stand comparison with that of J. D. Vance, a man whose unhappy childhood and adolescence were retold in interesting and (dare we say it?) amusing detail in his best-selling memoir *Hillbilly Elegy*.

When at first it appeared that Mr. Fetterman had blown his chances of election through extreme verbal incoherence in the reality show with Mr. Oz—to call it a debate would be to violate *The New Criterion's* policy of always calling things by their right names—a neurologist named Michael P. H. Stanley wrote a thoughtful piece for *The Wall Street Journal* titled “John Fetterman and the Gravity of Language” in which he opined:

For a moment in the coherent campaign between Messrs. Fetterman and Oz, we've been reminded that words—and the ideals they underpin—are more important than the prosody of a politician's performance. In civic discourse, a matter of semantics is a semantics that matters.

Fine words! But, boy, was the joke ever on him! It's not the semantics, doc; it's the semiotics, such as, for instance, the unmistakable signifier of the hulking Fetterman physical presence on the campaign trail, decked out in the shorts and hooded sweatshirt that did the talking the candidate himself could do no longer. With this in mind, Joan C. Williams, writing for *Politico*, hailed his candidacy as a “New Model of Blue-Collar Masculinity” for left-wing Democrats to follow in order to win back the allegiance of the white working class. Just look at the spanking he gave his Trump-favored opponent's use of the word *crudités*—the sort of word that you might expect to find in the mouth of an elite snob who would speak of the humble eaters of mere raw vegetables as “a basket of deplorables”—even though, as Ms. Williams notes, “the irony is that Fetterman himself does not come from a blue-collar background.” The Substack blogger Chris Bray commented:

Yes, it certainly is an *irony* that “Fetterman himself does not come from a blue-collar background,” but, see, he wore cargo shorts. So. As an example of Fetterman displaying more blue-collar masculinity than his opponent, *Politico* goes on, Oz said the word “crudité.” And then Fetterman dropped the HAMMER on his girly little bitch ass, BOOM.

He paraphrases, of course, but his larger point is essentially identical to my own: that, judging from the juvenility of so much of the rhetorical cut and thrust of the campaign, “we've just had our first mostly post-adulthood election.”

The observation is illustrated with a photograph of the disgraced cryptocurrency trader and Democratic donor Sam Bankman-Fried—an apparent fraudster who kept afloat for as long as he did mainly by Stakhanovite virtue-signaling on behalf of Democrats and some of their favorite causes. He is pictured sitting in a semiformal setting with Bill Clinton and Tony Blair while wearing those classic markers of childhood: sneakers, a T-shirt, and short trousers. The implication that all this childish playacting that has taken the place of genuine debate is also part of a larger fraud on the public is not one that I would relish having to contradict, though I'd like to believe that the average American voter is shrewd enough to see through it. I have to admit, however, that such a voter, without being a closely attentive student of the media, would not be wrong in saying that both parties are involved in the scam, if not to the same extent, and that Mr. Trump's recent behavior does not do anything to dispel this impression.

And then, too, the Fetterman–Oz contest was only for a seat in what has long since ceased to be, if it ever was, “the world's greatest deliberative body” (See “Polite fictions” in *The New Criterion* of March 2020). As Governor Chris Sununu of New Hampshire said by way of explaining to Salena Zito of *The Washington Examiner* why he would not run for the Senate,

No, no . . . I can't, no. I[ve] got to tell you, the U.S. Congress and the Senate are the most

disappointing political bodies that I can imagine right now. They have done so little, and they've set the bar so low for success[,] that if they pass one bill, we all give them a big cheer. It's like our four-year-old finally brought home a finger painting or something, and we're so proud, and we're going to put it on the . . . [i]t's ridiculous.

I guess it makes sense that behaving like a child should constitute a qualification for entry into such a body. Debate is as dead in the Senate itself as it is among the rival candidates for senatorial seats or their most passionate supporters, who are on both sides inclined to believe that there is no more matter for debate, so sure are they of their own views on any formerly debatable subject.

What is there left to recommend you as a candidate, then, but supreme confidence in your own rectitude and skill in invective (or its televisual equivalent) about the other guy? As I write, the campaign for Senator Raphael Warnock of Georgia is running an ad that presents a clip of his opponent in that state's runoff election, the former Georgia Bulldog and professional football star Herschel Walker, talking with almost Fetterman-like disfluency about cinematic vampires and werewolves while people supposed to represent ordinary voters make comments like "What the hell is he talking about?" or "There's no substance. There's nothing." It ends with one of the supposed onlookers saying, "Let's call it what it is. It is embarrassing." The funny thing is that neither the speaker nor Herschel Walker looks the least bit embarrassed. The speaker is affecting to believe, like Dr. Stanley, in the high civic purpose of political language and the dignity thus putatively accorded those called upon to speak it. Such language and such dignity are now both so rare that you'd have to go back at least a couple of decades to find anybody so unaccustomed to their absence as to be embarrassed by it. The ad

asks viewers: "Does Herschel Walker really represent you?" But the unspoken answer is that of course he does. Or at least that he *can*, since representing you is now considered by majorities everywhere as a job requiring nothing more than a winning personality.

How curious, then, that the infantilization of our politics and general culture should coincide with the increasingly anti-child ideology of the Left. Even as we treat adults more and more like children, so do we treat children more and more like adults. To a large extent, Republican hopes for victory were based on the sense of popular disgust with woke educational practices, and the ever more apparent damage done to children by lengthy school closures during the pandemic, which were among the factors supposed to have carried Governor Youngkin to victory last year. Governor DeSantis was also thought to have been given a boost by his taking on the teachers' unions and his lonely attempts to arrest, at least in his own state, the ever-increasing sexualization of childhood that has been sweeping the country in recent years.

Well, maybe. For on the other side of the aisle, Governor Gavin Newsom of California coasted to victory despite that state's massive decarceration of pedophile sex offenders, while one of the most popular theories of the Democratic success mentioned at the beginning of this essay had to do with the impact of the Supreme Court's *Dobbs v. Jackson Women's Health Organization*, universally represented by Democrats as threatening to take away pregnant women's opportunities to abort their children along with the supposed constitutional right to do so. I don't know if I quite agree with Chris Bray that it all adds up to "The Politics of Self-Loathing and Death Instinct," but it's hard to argue with his contention that "this is a culture that doesn't see a future"—the future that used to be represented by its children. Now the future is just childishness.

Mind readers

by Paul Dean

Oxford University Press has launched the first batch of a new series of critical commentaries under the title “My Reading.” This installment includes Rosemarie Bodenheimer on Samuel Beckett and Philip Davis on William James.¹ “My Reading” seems a strange label: what is a critic’s reading if not personal? This review, after all, is “my reading” of the two books just mentioned. Yet a reading also aspires to be more than merely personal: to command, if not total agreement, at least a measure of assent, striking a balance between the subjective and the objective. In the present instance, the subjects undeniably matter to the authors, who write—Philip Davis especially—with a sense of almost missionary engagement, not as though fulfilling a routine publishing commission.

Beckett has been the victim of countless readings in the critical sense of the word (often the uncritical too), but William James is hardly a household name. His *Principles of Psychology* (1890) was once a standard textbook; otherwise, he is remembered chiefly for *The Varieties of Religious Experience* (1902)—which Wittgenstein admired, saying it showed that James was “a real human being”—and *Pragmatism* (1907). He also coined the phrase “stream of consciousness,” which may be to his credit, or not, according to your opinion of the novels written to that prescription.

¹ *Samuel Beckett*, by Rosemarie Bodenheimer; Oxford University Press, 160 pages, \$24.95.

William James, by Philip Davis; Oxford University Press, 208 pages, \$24.95.

Bodenheimer, aware of the extant commentary on Beckett, has made the rare, and rather brave, decision to ignore it, aiming “to fashion a Samuel Beckett of my own.” Hers is primarily a prose Beckett, the author of *Dream of Fair to Middling Women*, the so-called trilogy (*Molloy*, *Malone Dies*, and *The Unnamable*), *Company*, *How It Is*, and shorter texts; the plays are mentioned fleetingly, many other works not at all. By contrast, Beckett’s letters, and the biographies by James Knowlson and Anthony Cronin, are heavily drawn upon, connections being made between Beckett’s writings, his Joycean recoil from his Irish background, and his tense relationships with his family (apart from his father, whom he loved). Bodenheimer is too sensible to insist on the life as furnishing simplistic “explanation” for the writing—one would never deduce Beckett’s conviviality, his capacity for friendship, or his altruism from his books—but her biographical references add nuance to a body of work often misjudged as bloodless, even inhuman. There is great tenderness in Beckett, as well as wild comedy.

Bodenheimer’s background as a university teacher of nineteenth-century fiction sparked her interest in Beckett’s contrasting, resolutely anti-realistic narrative modes, while the loss of her husband gave her a natural sympathy with Beckett’s treatments of bereavement, mourning, and grief. Both topics revolve around the fragility of the self: there are often tensions between the various *Is* (author, narrator, character) who seek to reconstruct past events and emotions in a fictional world

devoid of certainties. (To what degree is my past really mine, or really past?) There may be a perceived difference between *I* and *he*, the self as subject or object, such as Beckett explores in the fourth of his *Fizzles* (“I gave up before birth”). Bodenheimer speculates that Beckett “may have been one of those people for whom life never seems entirely real”; his disturbing achievement is to persuade us that we too, on occasion, are among those people.

On what Bodenheimer finely calls “the outskirts of life”—in darkness or in mud, buried alive or confined to a wheelchair, even reduced to a manically gabbling mouth—when everything else has been stripped away from Beckett’s characters, language remains, “Beckett’s poetry of doubt,” doomed to fail in its account of experience but determined, as he put it, to “fail better.” As the baroque rhetoric of Beckett’s early work gives way to something bare, concentrated, only just intelligible, a weird and beautiful music emerges, a rhythm akin to breath or the heartbeat, words that never quite lose hope of meaning something.

The voices that address us, each other, and themselves in Beckett’s works distrust, even sometimes detest, the company for which they nonetheless yearn. Bodenheimer provides a sensitive analysis of *Company* itself, with its unusually emotional evocations of unrequited affection and its proliferation of narrative perspectives. (The novella includes, as well as the first, second, and third persons, a “last person” and ends with the single word “Alone.”) More generally in Beckett, companionship, friendship, and above all love are viewed with wariness at best; loneliness, if hard to bear, is at least safe. Disembodiment removes the risk of physical contact. Mental anguish is made the subject of farce, while torture is described with zest (most controversially in *How It Is*). Possessions are an encumbrance, yet humble objects may be cherished (Macmann’s buttons, Molloy’s stones). Behind all this, Bodenheimer sees Beckett’s experiences of alienation from his family and homeland, the ever-present fear that attended his wartime Resistance activities, his indignation at the French treatment of Algeria, and the distress of bereavement. That last experience echoes through the plays in particular.

Endgame was written in the aftermath of Beckett’s nursing his brother Frank through fatal illness; *Happy Days* may reflect Beckett’s love for the recently dead Edna Leventhal; *Rockaby* could be, Bodenheimer suggests, a “gently forgiving eulogy” of Beckett’s difficult mother. Beckett, who didn’t believe in an afterlife, still populates his work with spectral presences and disembodied voices.

Coincidentally, both Bodenheimer and Davis refer to W. R. Bion, with whom Beckett underwent psychoanalysis at the Tavistock Clinic in 1934 and 1935. Bodenheimer cites James Knowlson’s view that this experience released Beckett from his youthful neuroses and enabled him to become the sensitive and kindly figure that his later friends recalled. Davis’s use of Bion to clarify some of William James’s ideas frequently brings Beckett to mind. “For Bion, as for James,” Davis says, “thought was not the product of thinking but the other way round. Thoughts sought a thinker, became their own thinker,” as they often do in Beckett’s later fiction. Again, Bion contended that the reveries of a pregnant woman communicated themselves to the child in her womb, the time Beckett frequently referred to as the only tolerable part of life. Finally, Bion believed that there existed a domain of unknowable truth, glossed by Davis as “a pointer towards the ‘really real,’ an unnameable but regulative sense of reality, an ‘It,’ obscured within the phenomenal world of human beings but felt amongst it . . . a tool or steer within deep analysis, in the dark of the psyche.” Beckett didn’t believe in an ultimate truth, but it’s intriguing to consider the “trilogy,” particularly *The Unnamable*, in the light of all this. In *Varieties*, James referred to the “once born,” those who pursued their path relatively untroubled and sanguine about the future, and the “twice born,” those who had been brought by some personal crisis to a revolutionary upheaval in their lives, typically a religious conversion. One is tempted to think of Beckett’s characters as the half-born, who struggle towards authentic existence.

Beckett had some acquaintance with James’s *Principles of Psychology*, from which he quotes a phrase in *Murphy*, but there’s no evidence

that James ever mattered to him as, say, Descartes, Kant, or Schopenhauer did. That is not surprising, for Beckett's grappings with the problems of mind, body, world, and language took utterly different directions from James's. Yet Davis's discussion of James's view of drama as a model for thinking offers Beckettian analogies. "Good God!" James wrote in his diary in 1868, after watching a performance of *Hamlet*; "How it bursts + cracks at every seam." Shakespeare is seen as abandoning any attempt to represent in words what is going on, or rather as expressing, through the central character, the difficulty of making sense of the world—an enterprise that Beckett, too, may have recognized in Shakespeare. George Santayana wrote that James saw intelligence as "an experimental act, a form of vital tension." On this premise, thought is heuristic, defining itself in the act of discovery; the lines of Shakespeare's verse are pulsations that push the thought forward or turn it back upon itself for modification. James invents grammatical categories such as "a more," "the eaches," and "ever not quite" (very Beckettian, that last one!) to articulate nuances of reflection upon experience that threaten to be inexpressible.

Taking his cue from James's focus on such "shadings" of language, as he called them, Davis has a chapter on "The Pragmatic Grammar of William James," illustrating how such overlooked parts of speech as conjunctions and prepositions can act as modifiers and gear-changers in James's arguments. He was requested by his brother Henry to stop reading the latter's novels after complaining of their obscurity, but he can be quite as verbally supersubtle in his own way. Some of his contemporaries were uneasy about his informal style, described by Santayana as "rough, homely," and "picturesque," drawn to "whatever was graphic and racy." James had little time for the traditional Olympian philosophical manner; he was an explorer, not an expounder.

Davis's first acquaintance with James was in an anthology that included "What Pragmatism Means," with its contention that ideas were not tidy formulations or logical conclusions but a means of propelling the mind dynamically through experience: thought as process rather

than product. Like Bodenheimer, Davis—one of the general editors of the "My Reading" series—is a university English teacher, and, like James himself, he has frequent recourse to literary examples and applications. Hardy occupies most of one chapter, with references elsewhere to Frost and Whitman among others. Davis is trying out "a literary way of thinking *outside* the realm of literature." It's not quite clear to me what that means, and there are similarly gnomic formulations elsewhere in the book. It can be hard going, with synoptic references across the whole range of James's writing. Sometimes this approach can blur shifts of emphasis or developments in James's thinking; as Davis admits, "he loved language when it reappeared anew in different circumstances over the years of his writing life, not statically applied and re-applied as labels, but changing as dynamically as what it described."

In the absence of philosophical certainty or religious belief, how can life be faced bravely? How can it even be borne? James, beset by depression, had asked himself those questions in 1870 and found the answer in a sentence by the French philosopher Charles Renouvier, commending "the sustaining of a thought because I choose to when I might have other thoughts." "My first act of free will," James concluded, "shall be to believe in free will." (None of Beckett's characters, nor Beckett himself, could make such a statement.) Subsequently, in *The Will to Believe* (1896) and elsewhere, James maintained that to put one's faith in a possibility can turn it into a certainty. "Believe that life *is* worth living," he told the Harvard YMCA, "and your belief will help create the fact." (But, one may object, what "fact"?) Davis links this with Strether's admonition to Little Billham in *The Ambassadors*: "Live all you can; it's a mistake not to." It sounds like Emersonian idealism or what James called "the mind-cure movement," which he skeptically discussed in Lectures IV and V of *Varieties*, arguing that the question of the truth or otherwise of the beliefs was irrelevant: what mattered was their beneficial effect on the psychology of the believer, and what this could tell us about the way the human mind works.

For Davis, pragmatism's value lies in its openness to risk, intellectual blind alleys, moral confusions that may prove fruitful. Truths are not given. "Truth *happens* to an idea," James says; knowledge "grows *in spots* We patch and tinker more than we renew." The pragmatic life is vulnerable, tricky, exhausting even in its need for constant modification as a position throws its opposite into relief. That sounds Hegelian, but James criticized Hegel, in *A Pluralistic Universe* (1909), not so much for his dialectical method—James allows that it does give a fair account of some human experience (although it can become a rhetorical mannerism)—but for his insistence that the dialectic must end in the Ideal. James repeats a point he had made as long ago as 1879 in writing that "the Absolute is what has not *yet* been transcended, criticized or made relative" (my italics). Again, I think of Beckett here—his refusal to rest in, as it were, a negative Absolute. That, too, can be transcended in reverse: think of the celebrated ending of *The Unnamable*—"you must go on, I can't go on, I'll go on"—or the titles of his late prose texts *Worstward Ho* and *Stirrings Still*. "The worst is not/ So long as we can say 'this is the worst,'" says Edgar in *King Lear*, as he plays Lucky to the blind Gloucester's Pozzo.

Beckett was not a philosopher, but did he have a philosophy? His old friend and publisher John Calder thought so, and he wrote *The Philosophy of Samuel Beckett* (2001) to prove it. Calder's comments on specific works are valuable, but I am not persuaded that Beckett's metaphysical or ontological ideas can be formally systematized. More to the point, for me, is the essay on "Beckett and the philosophers" by P. J. Murphy, in *The Cambridge Companion to Beckett* (1994), which identifies the central philosophical question at the heart of Beckett's work as that of referentiality, the gap between language and the reality it purports to describe. This question preoccupies both Beckett and James and, in turn, challenges critics to articulate their responses to literature intelligibly and plausibly.

Is pragmatism technically a philosophy? "It has no dogmas," James says in *Pragmatism*, "and no doctrines save its method." It is at

least a philosophical attitude, dating back to the ancient Greeks, for whom *pragma* meant "action." Pragmatism is thus an *activity* first and foremost, an approach to experience rather than a system of thought. It distrusts intellectualism and rationalism, with their preference for answers rather than questions. It is still, however, an activity of the mind, and James later regretted that the etymology of "pragmatism" had led people to think it was about getting practical results, ideas "working." This was certainly the way in which G. E. Moore understood James's account of truth, to which he objected in a long essay, reprinted in his *Philosophical Studies*. Perhaps Moore had more right on his side than James allowed, for the maxim "By their fruits ye shall know them" could have been the pragmatists' motto.

The general introduction to the "My Reading" series, printed at the front of each volume, confronts contributors with a simple question: "What is it like to love this book?" (or author). The idea that literature can matter so much to us is out of fashion (misappropriating literature for therapeutic purposes is another thing altogether). To love a book is not to endorse it completely; there will be quarrels, periods of silence, boredom or incomprehension, but something will nag at us, refusing to go away, pulling us back within the book's orbit. Perhaps over years, decades even, we will come to see the book in a truer perspective. Reading demands time, patience, persistence, and humility. Anything that extols those virtues in the Age of Instant Gratification in which we are now living deserves our support.

The constant conspiracist

Tim Cornwell, editor

A Private Spy:

The Letters of John le Carré.

Viking, 752 pages, \$40

reviewed by David Pryce-Jones

In the mysterious manner with which these things happen, David Cornwell was ap-

proached in the early 1950s by the British intelligence service MI5 and then enrolled to work for them and MI6 undercover as a diplomat in the British embassy in Bonn. He was asked to report on left-wing students. At the same time, he was beginning to write under the name of John le Carré (that lowercase *l* says something about the man). Almost as soon as he found a publisher, he resigned from intelligence work. He was the first to say that his career in the secret services had been unspectacular, but all the same the Cold War with the Soviet Union was the overriding issue of the day and he knew enough to make it his principal subject matter.

Critics and then the public took it for granted that le Carré's books were exposés. In the world after 1945, the British experienced national decline and a loss of global influence. Here was an insider revealing that the powers that be were betraying everything they were supposed to stand for. The books make no genuine distinction between communists and democrats, and the ideological justification of both sides in the Cold War is treated as pure humbug. In a leading Soviet literary journal le Carré summarized his position: "I have little good to say of the British power structure, or of the morals of British intelligence. . . . I have little good to say of the Communist system either." Rights and wrongs are relative, not absolutes. Events are at the mercy of dark forces such as the CIA and the KGB, Zionism, terrorism, even the pharmaceutical industry. Not quite novels and not quite thrillers, his twenty-seven books are more like miniature conspiracy theories around the subterfuges whereby the rich and powerful always come out on top of the poor and weak.

Tim Cornwell is a dutiful son and a conscientious editor, convinced that his father was one of the greatest post-war novelists and had left "an enormous reservoir of love, admiration and good will." Le Carré certainly took his writing seriously. All his life he got up early to spend the morning writing. When not writing, he says, he would be so sunk in despair that he could not sleep. He was to tell one of his sons that in bad times he lit a candle on a special candlestick "as some kind of affirmation of belief in myself,

my talent, my survival." All his plans depended on how the current work was going. He was in the habit of discussing with his publishers the researches he still had to do and the re-drafting that lay in store. Although claiming to stand aloof from the literary scene and refusing a knighthood in a gesture of independence, he nevertheless complained to editors about what "brain-dead journalists" had put into print about him. He never forgave Clive James for beginning a review, "Le Carré's new novel is about twice as long as it should be."

Salman Rushdie, le Carré thought, should have withdrawn the novel that so upset the Ayatollah Khomeini. Le Carré exchanged compliments with the likes of Graham Greene, Philip Roth, Alec Guinness, and a variety of Hollywood personalities. Former colleagues from the secret services were likely to receive letters sprinkled with expletives and the enigmatic remarks that were a trademark, for instance, "No more picking the fly shit out of the pepper," or "the world is governed from Ruislip." He wrote politely to fans and strangers, one of whom was Helen Goldfield, an American who ran an English book club in Novosibirsk and astonishingly had lived through the siege of Leningrad.

Taken as a whole, though, the letters printed in *A Private Spy* convey the self-pity and resentment that made le Carré the man and the writer that he was.

Already an adult, he once failed to keep an appointment with his psychiatrist, so he then sat down to write an account of some of the things he would have told him. That account was seventy pages long. Always on the run, le Carré left secondary school at sixteen and made a point of enrolling at the University of Bern to learn German, the language of the recent enemy. His first job after leaving his next academic home of Oxford was teaching at Eton, and he wrote to a friend that he couldn't stand the place: "I don't think I've ever met so much arrogance." He was to handle his affair with Susan Kennaway, the wife of the writer James Kennaway, in such a way that he lost her and his first wife too.

Again and again, he returns to his childhood and what he calls the "lovelessness" of it. He was five when his mother left him and

he did not see her again until he was twenty-one. And worse, she left when Ronnie, his father, had finished his second spell in prison and had gotten through his second or third bankruptcy for well over a million pounds in the money of the day. “An infinite, darkest swindler,” Ronnie served prison sentences in “Exeter, the Scrubs, Zurich Bezirksgefängnis, Djakarta, Hong Kong.” The clothes the young David wore, the food he ate, and the books he read were paid for by anonymous victims of his father’s pretenses. What must Ronnie have been thinking when he asked his son to buy him a pig and cattle farm in Dorset, and was refused?

Success provided le Carré with a house in London, a chalet in Switzerland for winter sports, a place in Cornwall with a view of the ocean and a mile of beach that he had purchased from a local farmer, his maroon Rolls-Royce, five-star hotels, *haute cuisine* meals, and first-class tickets to wherever he chose to go. For some inexplicable reason, nobody seems to have questioned his enjoyment of the good things in life while all the time denigrating those who made it possible. At the end of his life, he pictured himself “going down with a sinking ship, piloted by lunatics and disaster addicts.” He took Irish citizenship. Many factors large and small are responsible for Britain’s decline, and le Carré’s invidious misrepresentation of the country’s measures of self-defense is one of them.

Spain in short

Giles Tremlett

España: A Brief History of Spain.
Bloomsbury, 320 pages, \$35

reviewed by Gerald Frost

Admirers of Giles Tremlett’s exciting dash through Spanish history—and there are likely to be many—may still be skeptical about *España’s* conclusion. This is that Spain’s “fractured soul” is the result of a profound disagreement about its past. That, he says, is the reflection

of strong and enduring regional identities and cultures. To illustrate his case, he points out that when Spain played the Netherlands in the final of the 2010 soccer World Cup, the Spanish players, unlike their full-throated opponents, merely hummed when the country’s national anthem was played. They did so because it has proved impossible to reach agreement on words to accompany the nation’s anthem. For although Spain has existed in its present geographical form longer than most countries of the world, there is no national narrative on which an acceptable lyric might be based. This lack of cultural homogeneity, Tremlett suggests, is the nearest thing the country possesses to a defining characteristic. But is this really the case?

There is no doubting the existence of strong distinctive regional cultures; it is this which makes Spain such a rich and rewarding experience for the traveler. *Catalonia is different* was one of the popular slogans used during that region’s recent illegal bid for independence. But similar sentiments are routinely expressed in many of Spain’s seventeen autonomous regions. Visiting hispanophiles, such as myself, are sometimes tempted to respond: “Perhaps you are not as different as you think.”

Nor is there any reason to doubt the propensity of Spaniards to enter into passionate disagreement about public affairs, as well as much else. The rhetoric employed by leading protagonists during political controversies makes Donald Trump look like a master of understatement.

In an essay written fifty years ago, the novelist and literary critic V. S. Pritchett described a typical argument with a Spaniard:

The speaker stares at you with a prolonged dramatic stare that goes through you. He stares because he is trying to get into his head the impossible proposition that you exist. He does not listen to you. He never discusses. He asserts. Only he exists.

Indeed, the unwillingness to engage properly with opposing views may well constitute one of those national characteristics, whose existence Tremlett rather doubts. His politics are those of liberal internationalism—he has been *The*

Guardian's man in Madrid for many years—and he does not care for national stereotypes. It is worth pointing out that in listing national traits, in addition to the extreme nature of political discourse and hot temper, observers (including Spanish ones) have identified personal warmth, generosity of spirit, sociability, and a tendency towards fatalism, as well as a propensity to take matters further than would be considered altogether prudent in Anglo-Saxon society. During the worst moments of Spanish history this last characteristic expressed itself in violence and cruelty.

The Spanish Inquisition is thought by some to have been more brutal and vicious than other contemporaneous examples of religious persecution that occurred in Europe; the methods of the Conquistadors who swept through Central and South America with a sword in one hand and a Bible in the other were pitiless and inhumane—all of which is described by the author with considerable skill.

This tendency towards extremism is no less apparent in art and culture. The architect Antoni Gaudí took Modernism to forms that, without the suspension of gravitational law, could be taken no further. Salvador Dalí's art was as shocking in its day as the early films of Pedro Almodóvar have been in ours.

Is it not the very characteristics listed above that contribute, along with the facts of terrain and weather, to the charge of excitement that even the seasoned traveler feels on arriving in Spain, irrespective of whether the point of arrival is Madrid, Barcelona, or Santiago de Compostela?

Happily, Tremlett's judgments are not so obtrusive as to detract from the book's merits; its strength lies in the pace of the sweeping narrative, which takes the reader from pre-historic times to the present day and includes descriptions of cultural as well as political developments. He writes with a fluency that few contemporary historians can match.

The Iberian Peninsula, which Spain shares with Portugal, stands on three of Europe's most significant frontiers: the first separating the Mediterranean from the Atlantic, the second dividing Europe and Africa, and the third only apparent when the winds and currents

of the Atlantic that link Europe and America are drawn on a map. That is how Christopher Columbus discovered America. It also explains the creation of the world's first global empire in the sixteenth century.

As Tremlett records, never in the history of post-Roman Europe did any one man inherit as much as Charles I of Spain did. Quite suddenly Spain was part of a sprawling collection of territories stretching across Europe and the Americas—an empire on which the sun never set. Tremlett describes the rise and decline of that empire with admirable clarity.

His account of the Spanish Civil War and the Franco dictatorship is similarly lucid, but there are matters of which he perhaps does not take sufficient account. He acknowledges that from 1814 to the coup d'état of 1981 there was, on average, an attempted coup every three years in Spain, with the frequency being far greater during the early part of this period. But he fails to convey the full scale of the political violence that occurred during the lifetime of Spain's Second Republic, that is, the period immediately before Franco's seizure of power. This included political arrests and assassinations, kidnappings, bomb attacks, arson, labor strikes without any obvious economic motive, the seizure of church property, the closure of church schools, the politicization of the judicial system, and censorship. The Republican government failed to quell the crescendo of politically directed violence because it was dependent on the forces responsible for it.

In the view of other historians—most notably the American scholar Stanley G. Payne—what occurred in 1936 was not so much a coup but a reaction to socialist revolutionary fervor, that is to say, a counterrevolution. Spain's political Left had destroyed much of democracy before Franco's forces finished the job.

There is no doubt that in his treatment of his opponents, Franco was as vindictive and cruel as Tremlett and others suggest and that many of his ministers were corrupt. But if the Republican forces had prevailed, it is difficult to believe that the firing squads would have played a less prominent role, and it is also clear that the subsequent return to demo-

cratic rule did not end widespread corruption. Although there was a very high price to pay, Franco's authoritarian rule brought in a sustained period of stability, without which subsequent economic—and democratic—reform would not have been possible. Franco also deserves credit for his skill in stubbornly resisting Hitler's pressure to enter the Second World War, for adroitly decolonizing Spanish Morocco—despite earlier pledges to preserve the Spanish Empire—and for choosing an apt successor, King Juan Carlos, who, despite his later transgressions, helped steer Spain in a democratic direction. Tremlett says little about such matters, but even dictators deserve their historical dues.

These are serious criticisms, but they do not detract from the author's achievement in producing what is the best-written and certainly most accessible single-volume history of Spain, one which is very likely to provoke the critical reader to further inquiry.

The Ottoman patient

Jonathan Parry

Promised Lands: The British and the Ottoman Middle East.

Princeton University Press,

480 pages, \$45

reviewed by Jeremy Black

With the Ukraine conflict, the construction of accounts to explain a given nation's interest in particular lands is very much with us. Notions of some form of inherent identity or “deep history” are used by Vladimir Putin to justify his aggressive expansionism in Ukraine. Notions of a greater Europe are deployed in competition. When foreign policy is discussed in the United States, there is also naturally reference to the accumulated weights of the past.

The processes by which such senses are formulated tend to attract insufficient attention, in part because the assessment of international advantage is too often made in terms of immediate interest, as if some mathematical positioning could explain interests and determine

policies. That is a fallacy, one of the central problems with treating humans as units in some modernization theory gone mad.

Jonathan Parry's new handsomely produced book, *Promised Lands: The British and the Ottoman Middle East*, takes a different tack. It is an account of how interests are developed and expressed, one in which (perish the thought) both ideas and individuals play a role. Of course, there is the Eastern Question, geopolitics, and economics, but Parry, a professor of modern British history at Cambridge, also devotes great attention to the politics of Christianity. In the case of the Middle East, there was rivalry between Britain, France, and Russia, with each supporting different Christian strands, and with those strands having, as Parry shows, considerable distinctions. Yet, while in France and Russia there was consensus around the importance of Catholics and Orthodox adherents respectively, the situation in Britain was more complex. While there was pressure from home to support Anglicanism abroad—an aspect of a major general commitment to proselytization—there was also much interest in the Arabs and Islam, and notably so for those looking from India to the Persian Gulf and to the Arabian coasts. This prudentialism encouraged the “official mind” to espouse an indifference to Britain becoming a Christian power in the Middle East. There were also further British perspectives offered from the Admiralty and ambassadorial outposts in Cairo and Constantinople.

Ambitions extended in sometimes surprising directions, as when in late 1841 the Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge sent a mission to the Nestorians to try to develop links between the Church of England and a faction within the Chaldean Church. The mission was led by the twenty-six-year-old George Percy Badger, who had a “high church vision of the catholicity of the Church,” hoped for unification on the basis of early Church theology, and strongly disapproved of the theological basis of both the French and American missions. In a good assessment of a figure who would have fit in an Evelyn Waugh novel, Hugh Rose, the commander of the British forces in Syria, reported:

Mr Badger is one of the last persons I should wish to see employed. . . . There is a good deal of religious excitement at Mosul and Mr Badger who if he is not a little mad is very strange will I fear increase it.

The locals were not welcoming, and in 1843 a Kurdish massacre of Nestorians was blamed on Badger, who was recalled when the SPCK realized that Kurdistan was too far in all senses.

Other exotics included Austen Henry Layard, both an archaeologist and diplomatic agent, who thought his discoveries at Nineveh proof of divine providence. A critic of Russian expansionism, Layard saw himself as a foreign-policy expert as well as a rational religious prophet. In his and other cases, contemporary Christianity was mediated by the understandings of ancient civilizations, often resulting in the invigoration of false analogies.

Parry is cautious about the analogies he makes, in large part because he understands contexts and complexities. He probes well what, as he shows, is only an apparent paradox: that, although British sympathy for Ottoman rule in Europe was limited, fragile, and declining, upholding Ottoman sovereignty in the Middle East seemed of enormous importance at the time.

There are of course other events and themes that Parry might have emphasized. I think the Ochakov crisis of 1791, when Britain nearly went to war with Russia over the apparent fate of the Ottoman Empire, deserves more attention, and indeed the concerns of the 1790s dominated British foreign policy for several decades. And while Parry does discuss anti-slavery, there is more to say about its Christian context. Yet what is repeatedly striking is Parry's ability to link the specific with the general and, in particular, to show how the former contributed to British policies. Parry ranges broadly, including in his book, for example, a discussion of the developing British presence in Abyssinia. He stresses the diversity of viewpoints among the British, which underlines his more general point that there was no monolithic imperial agenda. This analysis is a world away from the simplicity of much recent

polemic masquerading as scholarship on the British Empire—and the related attempts to characterize it as violent, as in Caroline Elkins's dire work (reviewed in *The New Criterion* of May 2022 by Simon Heffer). Parry's account, while often wry, is deeply instructive and does not force any admonitions upon the reader.

In eis plurimae litterae

Katharina Volk

The Roman Republic of Letters: Scholarship, Philosophy, and Politics in the Age of Cicero and Caesar. Princeton University Press, 400 pages, \$35

reviewed by Michael Fontaine

“There are decades where nothing happens,” it's been said, “and weeks where decades happen.” True enough, but there are also decades where pretty much everything happens.

In the failing Roman Republic, the decade of 54–43 B.C. was one of them. Those years saw the rise and fall of Julius Caesar, the former consul whose first name lives on as *July* and whose last name came to mean “emperor,” as well as civil unrest on an unprecedented scale. Those years also saw key concepts in philosophy, language, religion, political theory, history, science, and pseudoscience codified for the first time or freshly examined. The extraordinary thing, as Katharina Volk, a Latinist at Columbia University, emphasizes, is that the same six or seven men were responsible for all of it.

Well, not *all* the political unrest, of course. But it is impossible to disentangle from the story of that decade a few main political leaders—names like Caesar, Cicero, and Brutus—who were also highly literate men and, more, were writing for one another. Calling these and four others “senator scholars,” Volk begins her fascinating monograph by demonstrating how close-knit, prolonged, and reciprocal their contacts were, even though some wound up on opposite sides of the civil war that Caesar unleashed halfway through the decade. Borrowing an apt metaphor from the eighteenth century,

Volk dubs this tiny subset of senators—there were six hundred in total at the time—the “Roman Republic of Letters.”

It bears emphasizing how odd this situation is. As you cast your eye across the world stage, how many politicians are doing scholarship in their spare time? Can you imagine a sitting senator publishing a treatise on whether to say *pleaded* versus *pled* or *sneaked* versus *snuck*?

And yet in 54 B.C., in the midst of conquering Gaul, Caesar took time to publish such a treatise on Latin grammar. It appears he took up the burning question of whether the possessive form of the word *senatus* (meaning *senate*) ought to be *senatūs* or *senati* or *senatuis*. He dedicated the book to Cicero, the great champion of republicanism whose own masterpiece on ethics, *On Duties*, was later inspired by Caesar’s ruinous overreach. (*On Duties* was published in 44 B.C., the year Caesar was assassinated, and less than a year before Cicero himself was assassinated. Some 1,500 years later, it became the second book printed in Europe, right after the Bible.)

Meanwhile, their fellow senator Brutus—Caesar’s protégé, until Brutus helped assassinate him—dedicated his treatise *On Greatness* to Cicero, and less famous senators busied themselves with antiquarian or social-science research: religion and linguistics for Varro, astrology for Nigidius Figulus, and so on. They too, Volk shows, dedicated their works to each other.

Why did they do it? That question lies at the heart of *The Roman Republic of Letters*. Across six chapters and an enormous range of texts, Volk seeks to uncover these senators’ motives for doing scholarship. The book is, therefore, about motivations and decision-making. And since most of the texts in question are fragmentary or lost, the central quarry of evidence is Cicero, whose enormous literary output and quasi-private correspondence tell us most of what we know about those troubled years.

Volk characterizes *The Roman Republic of Letters* as a work of intellectual history. “The analysis,” she writes,

of these individuals’ activities—including, crucially, their writings—should ideally lead to an

uncovering of their thoughts and intentions. I ultimately consider the main question of intellectual history to be, “What were they thinking?” in the sense of not just “What was the intellectual content of their thought?” but also “What were they trying to do?”

Case studies dominate the book, and Volk’s approach often produces compelling results. For example, she demonstrates how a growing interest in natural philosophy can plausibly explain the increasing exploitation by Roman politicians of civic religion for their own selfish ends. Likewise, in the book’s most absorbing discussion, Volk demonstrates how Cicero used the occasion of his first post-war speech, *In Defence of Marcellus*, to admonish Caesar to use his newfound power wisely—and, in so doing, how Cicero used key words that appealed not merely to general or traditional Roman sentiments, but also to specific tenets of a Greek philosophy that both he and Caesar were interested in (specifically, Epicureanism, to which many suspect Caesar adhered). As she puts it, “Cicero addresses Caesar in the language of philosophical discourse, speaking as one learned senator to another, despite the obvious power differential.”

Volk also reaches a number of new, surprising, or challenging conclusions. For example: that despite what they seem to say, elite Roman men did not feel any special anxiety about doing scholarship; that with Caesar’s victory, politically engaged philosophy became, for the losers, a form of group therapy—a consolation for powerlessness, as well as a consolation *prize* for powerlessness; and that, rather than serving political aims, antiquarian research into religion, grammar, and the like was done for the sheer nerd fun of it.

On this view, Varro and Caesar did *not* investigate the origins of Rome’s religious practices or debate Latin grammar in order to “rationalize” them (in the Enlightenment sense) or to advocate some kind of cultural renewal. They just thought those subjects were interesting and cool. “Rather than being handed as a textbook to anxious Gauls about to go to provincial court,” Volk writes, “[Caesar’s treatise] *De analogia* was—like all

the works discussed in this book—meant to be read by a small group of social peers with similar intellectual interests. Caesar wrote his book for the Ciceros and Varros of this world, and if his ideas about language had any influence, it was with them.” This conclusion took me by surprise, and it will drive the “all scholarship is political” crowd nuts, but Volk makes an excellent case for it.

By contrast with the antiquarian research, Volk argues that the steady stream of philosophical dialogues that Cicero pumped out in these years served as a form of “group therapy” for those senators who had sided against Caesar in the civil war, had lost, and now found themselves gelded in the political arena. (In her delightful breezy style, Volk calls these writings a “Caesar-free zone” rather than a “safe space,” but it amounts to the same thing.) The conclusion rings true.

In less successful sections, *The Roman Republic of Letters* carries a whiff of psychobiography, which is where a scholar or authority overrules the speaker himself to tell him what he *really* meant by an action.

I should expand on that point. To pick an example Volk discusses at length, *why* did Brutus assassinate Caesar? For Thomas W. Africa in the 1970s, it was relevant that Brutus’s mother had been sleeping with Caesar for twenty years. Without mentioning that idea, Volk argues that Brutus did it because he was interested in Greek philosophical notions of greatness (as evidenced by his treatise I mentioned above). Both motives sound reasonable, but we can’t prove either one.

Likewise, did Cassius help assassinate Caesar *because* he was an Epicurean, or did Cato

commit suicide *because* he was a Stoic? To our knowledge, neither ever said so. Nevertheless, and despite acknowledging that both Stoics and Epicureans could be found on either side of major political issues, Volk asks:

But does this mean that individual political actions could not, among other things, have been informed by philosophy? Even if, say, a man’s Stoicism did not “clearly indicate” a particular decision . . . who is to say that he was not (also) motivated by his Stoicism in taking it?

Such questions aren’t so different from asking whether your friend’s religion could not, among other things, inform his political actions today. Even if, say, his Judaism did not “clearly indicate” a particular decision, will you assert he is not (also) somewhat motivated by his Judaism in taking it?

You see where this can go (and that’s assuming, as I believe Volk does, though I do not, that her Roman scholar senators were all rational-choice actors to begin with). Our record on these affairs is partial, full of propaganda, and I confess to more than a little sympathy for the old idea that ancient history is naught but *une fable convenue*, a fable agreed upon.

Nevertheless, granting that certainty is unattainable, Volk does an excellent job of making sense of the data we have. She commands an enormous range of confusing material and considers a variety of possibilities in reaching her conclusions. The upshot is that Katharina Volk has written an engrossing guide to an epoch-making decade of western history. *The Roman Republic of Letters* is an important intervention, and it deserves to be debated widely.

Forthcoming in *The New Criterion*:

The continuing legacy of Otto von Habsburg *by Edwin J. Feulner*

Caesar & the Roman Republic *by Adrian Goldsworthy*

Russia’s most underrated writer *by Gary Saul Morson*

Assessing Saarinen *by Michael J. Lewis*

Paeans to the potables

by R. Eric Tippin

The *Bacchae* of Euripides closes with a mother mourning over the corpse of her mangled son, whom she helped to tear apart while in an intoxicated frenzy. Her filicidal rage is a punishment for failing to acknowledge that Dionysus is a god. The gods, it seems, interest themselves in drink and its apparatus.

In the *Bacchae*, the undifferentiated chorus plays the virtuous drinker—that is, the god-affirming, god-thanking drinker. Named, self-determining, god-denying individuals (Pentheus, Agave) play villainous drinkers, crazed, mangled, disinherited, isolated, and shamed by the wrath of the divinity they have insulted. There is a kind of moral here: one's orientation toward Dionysus determines one's experience of the Dionysian. But there is also a complementary formal suggestion: singing in groups has something to do with good drinking or drinking to the good. Those moral and formal suggestions linger wherever the drinking song appears: in religious rites and festivals from Passover to Christmas, on ships, in military regiments, in sporting clubs—all gravitational centers for the first person plural, all highly ceremonial.

The long tradition of sacred or *vertical* drinking songs confirms the gods' beneficent jealousy in regulating the human-drink relationship. One of Sappho's lyrics calls in the voice of a community of drinkers to Aphrodite (Kupris):

Kupris, hither
Come, and pour from goblets of gold the nectar

Mixed for love's and pleasure's delight with
dainty

Joys of the banquet.

Here "joys" are the exclusive gift of a god to a banqueting community in celebration. They should be sought from the gods, not just from the wine itself. Persons transcend things in the Sapphic gift economy, and true—or safe—celebration begins with right orientation to persons. The drinking songs of the Jewish Passover Haggadah and Christian worship make the point more directly: wine is a divine gift that, drunk with the correct ceremonies, rids a community of its guilt and resentments. The eucharistic hymns in Act I of Wagner's *Parsifal*—sung in chorus—celebrate this idea as well as any work of art. The *vertical* drinking song's message is clear: Dionysus is a god, and wine is a divine gift to be accepted in company and in a posture of worship.

This divine imperative is less obvious in *horizontal* drinking songs—that is, drinking songs that have no thematic interest in worship of a god: Schubert's "Trinklied" lieder, Mozart's so-called Champagne Aria from *Don Giovanni*, Richard Hovey's tankard-swinging barroom choruses, sea shanties, and sporting anthems. The medieval drinking songs collected in the *Carmina Burana* maintain a connection to the divine, but usually by way of blaspheming it—parodying, among other sacred texts, St. Thomas Aquinas's hymn on the Eucharist and a hymn to the Blessed Virgin. In general, however, those drinking songs detached from

religious ritual replace a divine imperative with a corporate one, as in the late-seventeenth-century ballad “The Merry Fellows”:

Now, since we’re met, let’s merry, merry be,
In spite of all our foes;
And he that will not merry be,
We’ll pull him by the nose.

[*Chorus*] Let him be merry, merry there,
While we’re all merry, merry here,
For who can know where he shall go,
To be merry another year.

He that will not merry, merry be,
With a generous bowl and a toast,
May he in Bridewell be shut up,
And fast bound to a post.

The first line establishes a simple but central correlation at the heart of the horizontal drinking song. Meeting precedes merriment: “since we’re met,” *then* “let’s merry, merry be.” Lines two through four establish a second key principle of the horizontal drinking song, proceeding naturally from the first: non-participation in the tribal rituals surrounding drink constitutes a danger to the tribe and must be quashed. Again and again, drinking songs excommunicate and even call down curses on nonparticipants in the membership rituals of the drinking session: “May he in Bridewell [a prison and poor house] be shut up.” Here is further evidence that the sacred character of early drinking song survives in what might, at first glance, appear to be a simple celebration of animal pleasure. Far from this, the pleasure in “The Merry Fellows” and in other drinking songs is highly ritualized and focused less on the animal pleasure of drunkenness and more on the complex linguistic and gestural pleasure of a sacred cult.

The notion of drink as the gift of a higher power to a group remains in “The Merry Fellows,” except that here the group itself is that higher power. The corporate person, the *we*, is the real presence of the horizontal drinking song—the *tertium quid*, the “third that walks beside you,” blessing and sacralizing its consumption and its rituals. True

pleasure and consolation in drink is not the gift of the gods in these songs but of the tribe, and to lose the tribe is to lose the benefits of the gift and face grave consequences, not only from the drink but from the tribe itself. This appeal to the corporate person as guardian of the drinking ritual affirms the commonplace that it is dangerous to drink alone and secularizes the Christian idea that the very act of meeting summons the divine and consecrates the act.

The sea shanty, a common source of drinking songs, forms its corporate person through manual labor rather than leisure. It developed on sailing vessels to accompany and ease various group pullings and hoistings, and this direct tie to simple, physical movement gives it a pleasing formal compactness and distills key elements of the drinking song. In the shanty “Bully in the Alley,” a drunken (“bully”) sailor records two social ruptures that have spurred him to song, one between the singer and his friends and another between the sailor and a woman called Sally (a stock character in such songs). The song aims to repair both rifts:

[*Chorus*] Help me, Bob, I’m bully in the alley,
Way, hey, bully in the alley!
Help me, Bob, I’m bully in the alley,
Bully down in Shinbone al!

Well, Sally is the girl down that I love dearly,
Way, hey, bully in the alley!
Sally is the girl that I spliced nearly.
Bully down in Shinbone al!

I’ll come back and I’ll marry Sally,
Way, hey, bully in the alley!
We’ll have kids and count them by the tally.
Bully down in Shinbone al!

Drinking songs often take the form of a command to drink or to bring drink (“Come, landlord, fill a flowing bowl, until it does run over;/ To-night we all will merry be, Tomorrow we’ll get sober”), or an invitation to join a drinking bout (“Then come my boon fellows,/ Let’s drink it around;/ It keeps us

from grave,/ Though it lays us on ground”). The speaker in “Bully in the Alley” neither commands nor invites but calls for help, a subtle variation on both. He acknowledges a need for company as a means of stability in his drunken state and a need for the institution of marriage as a means of wider social stability. And, of course, marriage as envisioned by the singer also ends in a kind of “we,” that of the large family (“We’ll have kids and count them by the tally”). The very form of the sea shanty affirms this move toward repair and group membership. The shanty is antiphonal—a call and response between an individual singer carrying the verses and a group taking up the chorus. As “Bully in the Alley” is actually sung, the entire company joins in unison on alternating lines (“Way, hey, bully in the alley” and “Bully down in Shinbone al”), blurring the line between the first and third person. The song becomes a kind of collective prayer of each to all, echoing Sappho’s prayer to Aphrodite above to come and bless her feast. The performance is, by its very form, a repair of the rupture the song describes.

The group-sung drinking song has faded as a cultural force in the twenty-first century, largely because popular music has shifted away from songs suited to group singing. Recorded music, personal music-players, and headphones favor music one listens to rather than music one joins with. But the twentieth century did witness a return of the beat-driven, Dionysian drinking song, which invites group movement rather than group singing. Suffice it to say that none would imagine singing these songs while gathered around a piano or table. They more often praise the pharmaceutical qualities of alcoholic drinks, as distinguished from their taste, history, and cultural associations, all of which are part of the wider meaning of the word “intoxication.” It is not surprising, then, that the new Dionysian song praises other, harder drugs with delivery systems that bypass the palate.

Both tune- and beat-driven drinking songs attach themselves to particular beverages and brands—beer, wine, whiskey, piña colodas, margaritas, Newcastle Ale, Jameson—but the new Dionysian song overwhelmingly prefers hard liquor to beer and wine, liquor being uniquely vulnerable to pharmaceutical abuse. And in this druggist’s vision of alcohol, common to the new Dionysian song, all drinks become radically exchangeable, hard liquor only preferable because of its efficiency in raising blood-alcohol levels and in preparing the body for the kind of bacchic group dance activated by the pulsing beat.

The traditional, melody-centric drinking song, while not above this pharmaceutical vision of alcohol (“No remedy quicker, but take up your liquor,/ And wash away care with a pot of good ale”), usually attaches itself to particular drinks for different reasons: for loyalty to a certain inn, town, tribe, or nation; for hate of a different inn, town, tribe, or nation; for the palate’s sake; for history’s sake; for the sake of a social class; even for a general sense of contextual fit or rightness, as in calls for Corona beer in supine, beach-bum cowboy songs of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. Here, the drink is not primarily appreciated as a container system for a chemical and is therefore not exchangeable. It is as unimaginable to substitute, say, wine for ale in the song “Nottingham Ale” as it would be to substitute whiskey for wine in the Jewish Passover or Christian Eucharist. And as in the Eucharist and at Passover, the drink is a seal of membership: local, national, convivial, familial, divine. It is a way of orienting to other persons and of reconciling to contingency. The modern Dionysian drinking song pumped in nightclubs moves away from ritual-linguistic pleasures of this kind and toward shared limbic pleasure, usually ending in some form of erotic stimulation. It is difficult to judge whether the resulting anarchic, nocturnal corporate behavior signals Bacchus’s favor or his wrath.