

The New Criterion

January 2024

A monthly review *edited by Roger Kimball*

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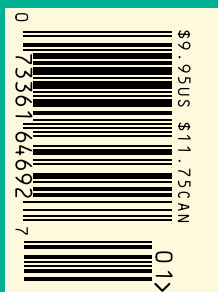
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Notes & Comments: January 2024

Henry A. Kissinger, 1923–2023

ROGER KIMBALL WRITES: I first really met Henry Kissinger over dinner at Bill Buckley’s house in Stamford, Connecticut, in the early 2000s. We had been introduced in passing once or twice before at various events. But it was at that small dinner party that we first had a real conversation. If memory serves, Abe Rosenthal, the former editor of *The New York Times*, and his wife Shirley Lord were also in attendance that night, as was Henry’s wife Nancy.

What did we talk about? I wish I could recall. I can do better with some later meetings. As I sat down to write this, I discovered to my surprise that I have written more than a hundred letters to Henry. Around the time that I shifted from “Dear Mr. Kissinger” (I did not know then that he preferred “Dr.”) to “Dear Henry,” he began inviting me to lunch, almost always at his New York club, The Brook, on Fifty-fourth Street near his office. Politics writ large was always part of the conversation, but so were other topics. I remember in particular one long luncheon at which we wrestled with Spinoza’s idea that human fulfillment or blessedness centrally involved *amor Dei intellectualis*, an intellectual love of God. I cannot at this distance say how it was that the old lens-grinder found his way into the conversation, but—without wishing to impute any theistic convictions to Henry—I may observe that the idea appealed to him.

Over the years, Henry and Nancy were extremely generous with invitations, both to their New York apartment and to their country house in South Kent, Connecticut. The guests were partly a cavalcade of celebrities, partly a constellation of personal friends. The categories often overlapped. The famous couturier Oscar de la Renta, for example, and his wife Annette were close friends and frequent, enlivening guests. At one large outdoor luncheon in Kent, the most notable guest was President George W. Bush. Security was tight. Every car was searched on its way up the long dirt drive and given a sniff by dogs trained to detect explosives. Sharpshooters with their rifles could be seen patrolling by the woods at the edge of the lawn. A clutch of Secret Service agents were distributed among the crowd, aloof, intense, Argus-eyed. When everyone was present and accounted for, we were herded inside as Marine One touched down and disgorged the president. It was an impressive day.

When Henry died at the end of November, halfway through his hundredth year, he had occupied a bubble of celebrity (and notoriety) for some six decades. Yet it is worth bearing in mind that the prolific author—more than twenty books—National Security Advisor, Secretary of State, Nobel laureate, and counselor to countless presidents, prime ministers, and other heads of state had originally walked a rocky, not to say inauspicious, path.

In 1938, nearly on the eve of Kristallnacht, he emigrated with his family from the Bavarian city of Fürth, Germany, via London to New York. He was fifteen. Like many Jewish

refugees, the Kissingers found cheap lodgings in Washington Heights. Jobs and money were scarce. Eventually his father found work as a bookkeeper while Henry labored at a shop that made shaving brushes. He started by squeezing acid out of badger hairs and then graduated to the sales side of the operation. Aptitude and hard work quickly brought him success. Everything but his famous gravelly German accent soon assimilated to American life. He studied accounting at City College before being drafted into the army in 1943. He returned to Germany to do intelligence work and was awarded a Bronze Star for his efforts helping to track down Gestapo agents and other bad hats.

After the war, Henry matriculated at Harvard, where he was graduated *summa cum laude*. His senior thesis, “The Meaning of History: Reflections on Spengler, Toynbee, and Kant,” was a four-hundred-page behemoth that prompted Harvard to impose a 35,000-word limit on such documents. He earned a Ph.D. in the mid-1950s with a dissertation on the Congress of Vienna. This became his first book, *A World Restored: Metternich, Castlereagh, and the Problems of Peace, 1812–1822*, a magisterial study of the reassembly of political legitimacy (a key Kissingerian concept) in a revolutionary period. Quite apart from its intellectual sophistication, the book is notable for its scintillating, epigrammatic prose. Henry may never have lost his heavy German accent, but he early on learned to deploy an English writing style that was clear, supple, idiomatic, and evocative.

Henry began his career as an ambitious academic teaching at Harvard. He ended as his era’s most distinguished diplomat, a public intellectual who trod the corridors of power from Washington to Beijing. Throughout his career he was guided by two overriding goals.

Intellectually, he was driven to understand the complex pageantry of events, “the meaning of history.” Unstoppable curiosity was a trademark of his character. Most of his writing was about history, foreign policy, or the unscripted alchemy of leadership. But he had

long been concerned about the unchaperoned intrusion of technology into the metabolism of education. Reading books, he noted in one reflection, “requires you to form concepts, to train your mind to relationships.” Computers and the internet threaten that process: “Now there is no need to internalize because each fact can instantly be called up again on the computer.” In some ways such celerity is an advantage. But, he warned, “Information is not knowledge. . . . This new thinking erases context. It disaggregates everything. All this makes strategic thinking about world order nearly impossible to achieve.” In 2021, at the age of ninety-eight, Henry took up the subject of artificial intelligence. Together with Eric Schmidt, the former head of Google, and the computer scientist Daniel Huttenlocher, he published *The Age of AI: And Our Human Future*, an anatomy of and admonition about a subject that has since become fodder for daily headlines and apocalyptic hand-wringing.

In practical terms, as a diplomat, Henry strove to maintain or reestablish peace wherever his remit took him. “Equilibrium,” like “legitimacy,” was for him a central desideratum. Early on in *A World Restored*, Henry noted that the attainment of peace is the “overriding concern” of diplomacy. Nevertheless, he pointed out, “The attainment of peace is not as easy as the desire for it.” Indeed, “Not for nothing is history associated with the figure of Nemesis, which defeats man by fulfilling his wishes in a different form or by answering his prayers too completely.” It is part of the irony—if not, exactly, the meaning—of history that “[t]hose ages which in retrospect were most peaceful were least in search of peace.” These were lessons Henry himself later rehearsed in Vietnam, the Soviet Union, China, and elsewhere.

Partly because he came to prominence during the wildly excoriated Nixon administration, Henry had early on been a conspicuous target for the Left. Christopher Hitchens, Noam Chomsky, Howard Zinn, Oliver Stone, and many others lined up to condemn him as a “mass murderer” and “war criminal,” not to mention (my favorite) a “Satanist.”

Nor were certain elements of the neoconservative Right happy with Henry. His pursuit of détente with the Soviet Union they regarded as insufficiently confrontational. They were skeptical about his efforts, with Richard Nixon, to open up diplomatic relations with China. More recently, they have rejected his pointing out that the war in Ukraine could not profitably be understood as a simple battle between good (the Ukrainian side) and evil (the nasty Vladimir Putin). “Russian history began in what was called Kievan-Rus,” he wrote back in 2014. “Ukraine has been part of Russia for centuries, and their histories were intertwined before then.” Which leaves us where? Without as neat a morality tale as we have been telling ourselves about Putin and Ukraine. “The demonization of Vladimir Putin is not a policy,” Henry observed; “it is an alibi for the absence of one.” All of which is to say that the Manichean temptation should be resisted in world affairs as well as in matters of theology. It is simple and dramatic to draw up armies of angels and devils. The actual troops on the world stage are seldom that easy to distinguish. In the case of Ukraine, Henry was probably correct:

Far too often the Ukrainian issue is posed as a showdown: whether Ukraine joins the East or the West. But if Ukraine is to survive and thrive, it must not be either side’s outpost against the other—it should function as a bridge between them.

Above all, perhaps, Henry possessed abundantly that most uncommon virtue, common sense. Asked about scenes in Germany of migrants celebrating the October 7 attack on Israel by Hamas, he noted that “It was a grave mistake to let in so many people of totally different cultures and religions and concepts, because it creates a pressure group inside each country that does that.” That is wisdom as simple as it is rare.

I am pleased that over the years Henry participated in several *New Criterion* events and contributed to our pages. It is occasionally said that he did not quite approve of Ronald Reagan’s aggressive policy towards the Soviet Union (“We win, they lose”). There may be some truth in that, but in a 2014 essay for us he noted that Reagan

was exactly the right man for those times. He knew how to . . . [define] the limits beyond which the Soviets would not be permitted to go, but, at the same time, [to lay] down perspectives for peace around which people could rally.

Longtime readers will recall that in 2012, Henry was the first recipient of *The New Criterion*’s Edmund Burke Award for Service to Culture and Society. The one thing everyone knows about Henry Kissinger is that he represented a “realist” as distinct from an “idealist” foreign policy. In his remarks at that event (published in our June 2012 issue), he spoke at least in part as a *tertium quid*, a Burkean conservative.

The difference between the idealist and realist view of foreign policy, he notes, turns on whether “power or values is the dominant force in international relations. The advocates of a realist foreign policy,” he slyly writes, “are caricatured with the German term *Realpolitik*, I suppose to facilitate the choosing of sides. . . . Values, it is claimed, are irrelevant to a ‘realist’ foreign policy; the balance of power is its dominant, or even sole, motive force.”

The “idealist” or “values-based” perspective assumes that American democratic ideals are “universal and transportable.” Consequently, “relations are bound to be adversarial with imperfectly democratic societies,” i.e., most of the world. “This school of thought calls on America to spread its values by the sponsorship of revolution and, if necessary, by force.”

Neither the realist nor the idealist school, however, can pass the Burkean test of accounting for “the full variety of human experience and the complexity of statesmanship.” The realist needs to be guided by a strong and clear moral vision, and the idealist requires an appreciation of historical and cultural particularity, an appreciation that breeds caution and humility in proportion to its thoroughness.

Henry ends, as I will, by quoting Bismarck: “The best a statesman can do is to listen carefully to the footsteps of God, get ahold of the hem of His cloak and walk with Him a few steps of the way.” Henry Kissinger was privileged to have grabbed on tight to that hem and to have walked a long way. *RIP*.

A stately setting

by Myron Magnet

Don't mistake the sumptuously produced, lavishly illustrated *America's Collection: The Art & Architecture of the Diplomatic Reception Rooms at the U.S. Department of State* for just one more coffee-table bagatelle.¹ It's an important reminder that architecture is as much about the interior as the exterior of buildings, that its role is to adorn and enhance the activity it houses as well as to present a gracious face to the public world. Chief among the landmarks of architectural history, after all, are Michelangelo's muscular staircase hall in the Laurentian Library, for instance, or Robert Adam's neoclassical rooms built into the Elizabethan Syon House, or the interiors of the great cathedrals in Christendom. Like those additions to the Laurentian and Syon, the forty-two splendid, classical State Department rooms are built within an earlier building, a bland, modern behemoth, to which these rooms stand as a corrective, even a mild reproach. *We can and should build like this*, these interiors seem to whisper.

Just such an impulse brought the rooms into being, as several of this book's dozen engaging essays, under the direction of the State Department curator Virginia B. Hart, recount. When the Truman Building, the State Department's limestone-clad headquarters, opened in 1961 in Washington's Foggy Bottom district, Secretary of State Christian Herter's wife, Mary, toured her husband's new domain with dismay. Deco-

¹ *America's Collection: The Art & Architecture of the Diplomatic Reception Rooms at the U.S. Department of State*, by Virginia B. Hart; Rizzoli Electa, 352 pages, \$100.

rated in late-1950s motel style, writes the contributor Carolyn Vaughan, it had the charm and dignity of an airport—and the Queen of Greece was just about to arrive for a dinner there. Couldn't something be done?

Yes, replied Clement Conger, State's visionary deputy protocol chief, who had originally suggested building the reception rooms for diplomatic gatherings on the building's top two floors. First Lady Jacqueline Kennedy, lacking government funds to replace the department-store furniture that then embarrassed the White House, had just formed a committee to solicit donations of antiques, and Conger, following her lead, set up his own fine-arts committee. He proved so effective an advocate that he earned the nickname of "the Grand Acquisitor" and became the rooms' curator. But the splendor of his newly acquired furniture and decorations only pointed up the banality of the rooms' architecture, dismally shown with their blank walls, fluorescent lights, and acoustical-tile ceilings pierced by air-conditioning outlets in "before" photos throughout this book.

An introduction to the Georgia architect Edward Vason Jones supplied the abracadabra to complete Conger's magic spell. Jones, who'd apprenticed with the classical pioneer Philip Trammell Shutze, had taught himself architecture by photographing and measuring some of the nation's major Colonial and Federal houses, studying them so thoroughly that he could "enter into the mind and almost become the hand of an early American architect," as Allan Green-

berg, his successor as the rooms' designer, writes in this volume. An architect of distinction, Jones designed houses that eloquently testify, both inside and out, that classical architecture never ceased to be a living American tradition from colonial days through the buildings of Benjamin Henry Latrobe, Charles Follen McKim, and John Russell Pope, up until his own mid-twentieth-century moment. Jones, the hyper-refined connoisseur, nevertheless didn't hesitate to take off his bow tie and well-tailored suit jacket and dirty his hands, mixing paint to get the precise shade he wanted and assembling a team of craftsmen who could make paneling and carve mantels with the virtuosity of the Georgian masters. He volunteered his services to Conger and set to work in 1965. He kept at it for fifteen years.

As you step off the elevators on the eighth floor of the Truman Building, you pass through a procession of halls and galleries leading to the John Quincy Adams State Drawing Room, all elaborately paneled and modeled on pre-Revolutionary houses. These rooms speak the 2,500-year-old architectural language of classicism with a Colonial American accent. All the traditional balance and harmony are there, the sense of an ordered, comprehensible universe, but instead of the grand size of the old-world palaces that visiting diplomats are accustomed to, the scale here is domestic, as if to ennoble the individual citizen rather than to impress with the overwhelming power of a monarchy. Even so, the decoration is rich indeed, from the marble-looking plaster pilasters of the elevator hall now named in memory of Jones to the entrance hall's ceiling plasterwork copied from the Philadelphia house of the formidable Elizabeth Powel, who famously asked Benjamin Franklin, as he emerged from the Constitutional Convention, what kind of government the delegates had given America, drawing the more famous reply, "A republic—if you can keep it."

After you've passed through the architectural virtuosity of the anterooms, the Adams room, a tribute to the sixth president's service as ambassador and secretary of state, still strikes you as a tour de force. Greenberg, in

his chapter on Jones, points out the technical challenges posed by this long, low room. Jones's solution was to divide it in half visually. He split one long wall with a central fireplace topped by a tall, pedimented overmantel, deftly carved and flanked by Ionic pilasters, and he halved the opposite wall with a fanlight-crowned doorway between matching pilasters. He further emphasized the vertical with pilasters at the room's corners and six tall windows flanking the fanlit doorway, balanced on the opposite wall by two built-in, pedimented china cupboards stretching up to the elaborate crown molding. It's hard to stop looking at this volume's photo of the stone-colored room, spread across two pages. The design, both beautiful and interesting, is like a set of musical variations as you follow the rhythm and harmony of the resemblances played off against the differences.

Nevertheless, Jones thought his Thomas Jefferson State Reception Room topped this. With it, he said, "I tried to do something Jefferson might have done, appreciated, given his approval to." He achieved this in three ways. As Jefferson, an amateur architect of genius, had done in designing Monticello and the Virginia State Capital, Jones gave the architectural language of classicism not just an American accent but a specifically democratic, republican inflection. As Greenberg contends in his earlier *Architecture of Democracy* (2006), Jefferson looked to the architecture of republican Rome, democratic Greece, and the independent city-states of the Italian Renaissance as embodiments of the political qualities he cherished. Jones's Jefferson room strikes all these notes. He copies Monticello's Greek ox-skull-and-rose motif on his entablature's frieze and the frame of his French doors. He echoes its classical pediments and moldings, and he centers the room on an antique marble fireplace carved with Roman scenes. His main doorway, with its fanlight and marbleized plaster columns and pilasters, resembles a Palladian window from Renaissance Italy, and indeed, the whole scheme, in its perfectly balanced classicism and exquisite restraint, is Palladian. (To appreciate this point even more fully than the book shows, look at the virtual tour on the State

Department’s website.) And the room’s seven-foot-high doorways, Greenberg emphasizes, are human-scaled to fit the individual citizen, as democratic architecture always is.

Second, in adapting some of Monticello’s characteristic decorative motifs, Jones combined them to create something both Jeffersonian and original. The striking pattern of the mahogany and maple floor is a more elaborate variation on Monticello’s parlor parquetry, for instance. The circular niches over the paneled mahogany doors on either side of the fireplace echo the round windows in Monticello’s dome room and its bedroom portholes, and they contain busts on consoles, like Jefferson’s tea room. The triple-hung windows reach down to the floor, as Jefferson’s do, and the clear robin’s-egg blue of the walls matches the paint in Monticello’s South Square Room.

The third homage to Jefferson is explicit—a life-sized statue in a pedimented niche of the man himself, holding a pen in one hand and the Declaration of Independence in the other. It’s a reminder that Jefferson had inscribed on his tomb not that he’d been secretary of state and president but only that he wrote the declaration and the Virginia statute of religious freedom, and founded the University of Virginia. He was a champion of liberty in full—political, religious, and intellectual. And as if embodying American liberty, carved and gilded eagles seem to lift upward the graceful Jones-designed window curtains on either side of him.

When Jones died in 1980, the curator Conger asked Walter Macomber, the resident architect at Mount Vernon, to complete the unfinished eighth-floor rooms, which he did in what the architect and architectural historian Mark Alan Hewitt, in one of his informative chapters, politely terms a “more academic” style than Jones’s. Conger then staged a competition for the last and biggest project on that floor, the Benjamin Franklin State Dining Room, seating 375. The winner, John Blatteau, produced a classical confection “as beautiful as anything in Washington,” Hewitt writes. With its restrained shades of buff-colored paint, it is composed of few, though opulent, elements: paired rose-colored faux-marble columns with gilded Corinthian capitals framing pedimented French

doors out onto the terrace, a coved ceiling with gilded coffers in the cove, a gilded ceiling medallion showing the Great Seal of the United States, eight grand crystal chandeliers, and a fireplace also flanked by paired rose-colored columns. Worked into each Corinthian capital is a great seal, with its eagle and shield. Above the fireplace hangs a copy of David Martin’s portrait showing Franklin, the polymath who served as America’s first diplomat. He negotiated, as the historian Stacy Schiff recounts in her graceful biographical essay, the treaty of alliance with France that was key to the new nation’s victory in the revolution.

Secretary of State George Shultz wanted a hand in choosing the architect for the seventh-floor rooms, where his office was. After all, he’d been the president of the global construction giant Bechtel, and “the banging of hammers and the whine of drills,” he once wrote, “were not noise to me, they were the music of progress.” When Conger introduced him to Greenberg, the two quickly became friends.

Greenberg, as soon as he’d graduated from architecture school in his native South Africa, had fled to Europe out of a hatred of apartheid. He’d hoped to work for the modernist luminary Le Corbusier, whom he idolized, but he worked instead for Denmark’s Jørn Utzon on the celebrated Sydney Opera House and then for two more years in Scandinavia. But there, as he wandered around Stockholm, he felt his first misgivings about the modernist project.

He had come upon a lovely housing development, built around courtyards in 1907 and cherished by its working-class residents, as was clear from the flourishing flower boxes and crisp curtains at the windows. Because it didn’t meet current building codes, the government had decided to tear down the complex and replace it with modernist buildings. Many noisy protests by the residents finally prevailed. It hadn’t occurred to officials to consult them before making plans to raze their homes.

Maybe, Greenberg reflected, architects and planners—influenced by Corbusier’s autocratic city-planning vision of inhumanly tall towers arranged geometrically in windswept parks like filing cabinets for storing people—shouldn’t

be quite so dictatorial. Maybe Jane Jacobs and Henry Hope Reed were right in their critique of modernist architecture and urbanism as sterile, ugly, and alienating. Perhaps even Norman Mailer had a point in condemning it as “fascistic” in its arrogance.

Suspended in uncertainty, Greenberg decided to come to America and enroll in the Yale School of Architecture in 1964. The world being small, his class of twelve included the future architects Norman Foster and Richard Rogers. With memories of the Stockholm courtyards, Greenberg began to look closely at Yale’s neo-Gothic quadrangles by James Gamble Rogers and John Russell Pope—looked, admired, and learned. After graduation, he joined New Haven’s Redevelopment Agency, just when it was ground zero for the urban-renewal movement Jane Jacobs so deplored. A “tawdry reflection of Le Corbusier’s ideal city,” the movement’s bulldozing of old, cozy neighborhoods with history and character to be replaced by stark towers was, Greenberg wrote, “an unmitigated disaster for American cities and towns.”

As a respite, in 1967, he made a long-planned trip to Charlottesville, to visit Monticello and the University of Virginia. He was developing the kind of American patriotism that perhaps only those who have lived under tyranny can feel. He has written that he revered the Declaration of Independence and the Constitution “as miraculous creations . . . on the order of the tablets of law God handed Moses,” and he wanted to see what kind of architecture the author of the Declaration had created. It was a life-changing pilgrimage. “I felt as if I was walking through Jefferson’s mind,” he writes of Monticello’s complex, rational, inventive geometry (an epiphany I and doubtless many others also have had). For Greenberg, the house and college “captured some quintessential aspect of the spirit of America,” the spirit of the free, self-governing individual citizen that he has sought to embody in the many chastely beautiful houses and college buildings he has designed in his distinguished career.

So he was an ideal choice for carrying on Jones’s State Department project and for providing Shultz with “a place Thomas Jefferson could walk into and feel at home,” as the secretary of state told him he wanted. Ed-

ward Vason Jones would have felt equally at home there, for Greenberg, as he says, had figuratively sat “at the feet of this great master,” studying what he had achieved on the floor above and digesting its lessons as only another great master could. It’s as if Greenberg ups the ante on Jones; he sees him and raises him, incorporating his motifs—his rich, stone-colored cornices, his pilasters, his magnificent carving and paneling—and taking them a step further with confident audacity.

His masterpieces are the Treaty Room, for ceremonial signings, and the offices of the secretary and deputy secretary of state. The two offices are virtuoso variations of each other, serenely classical yet paradoxically bursting with almost mannerist energy in the commanding scale and elaboration of their cornices and entablatures, and the drama with which the paneling projects and recedes to emphasize the rooms’ architectural features. Fireplaces with exquisitely carved mantels and vigorously molded overmantels, flanked by stop-fluted pilasters, project outward, and then the wall drops back to another set of pilasters and drops back again to display cabinets on either side, before turning the corner with a projecting pilaster. The rare marble facing of the fireplaces continues around the baseboards of both rooms. Corinthian capitals containing a gilded great seal top the secretary of state’s pilasters, and pediments break through the entablatures over his fireplace and doorway, with its assertively carved frame, gorgeously figured mahogany double doors, and polished brass Georgian-style box locks. The deputy secretary’s pilasters sport Ionic capitals adorned with a carved, gilded ribbon, and that office’s display cupboards have frames modeled on Christopher Wren’s window frames at St Paul’s Cathedral. These are the drawing rooms of citizens, yes—but very rich ones.

The Treaty Room is Greenberg’s greatest triumph, a grand recapitulation of the most striking motifs of the forty-two rooms and a brilliantly original work of art, deploying traditional elements in unexpected ways. A dozen pairs of white Corinthian columns line the large oval room. They support a relatively

simple architrave topped by a dentil molding that's reminiscent of Jones's Jefferson Room, as is the room's blue-and-white color scheme, its ceiling medallion, and its elaborate inlaid floor of maple, mahogany, and ebony, its design derived, however, not from Monticello but from Michelangelo's pavement at the Piazza del Campidoglio in Rome. Four built-in display cupboards, their frames like Wren's at St Paul's, as in the deputy secretary's office, stretch up to the architrave.

At both ends of the room's long axis, the paired, stop-fluted columns, which echo Blatteau's down to the gilded great seal adorning each capital, do something extraordinary. Here the curved wall opens up into a doorway framed by the architrave, which continues around, and by two pairs of columns, the outermost two columns still half-engaged with the wall and the inner two freestanding. Each opening leads into an anteroom painted the same blue and white and with the same architrave and molding, so that one has the impression that the Treaty Room has magically burst its boundaries and expanded outward. When the beautifully framed mahogany double doors on the opposite wall of each anteroom are open, they lead into matching wainscoted reception rooms, so that the view from one reception room through the entire five-room enfilade is an exhilarating architectural experience.

But what of the furniture and decorations with which Conger began this project? The second half of the book catalogs some of the collection's highlights, and the catalogue is unusually engaging, studded with interesting historical tidbits, if quirky in its selection. The collection's jewel, the contributor Alexandra Kirtley writes, is "an extraordinary piece of American history"—the desk on which the Treaty of Paris, ending the Revolutionary War, was signed in September 1783. The desk adorns Jones's John Quincy Adams room, displaying not one but two portraits each of Adams and his wife, Louisa. The room is a shrine to the treaty and to the diplomacy of the republic's first decades. Over the mantel hangs a (mediocre) copy of Benjamin West's group portrait of the five American commis-

sioners who began negotiations for the treaty, including the three—John Adams, Benjamin Franklin, and John Jay—who signed it. The other half of the painting remains unfinished, as the British commissioners never turned up to sit for West. At one end of the room hangs Gilbert Stuart's portrait of Jay, the treaty's real hero, for the first chief justice was also a brilliant diplomat. He ignored Congress's instructions, which had been dictated by the French foreign minister, to negotiate in lockstep with the French. Instead, he negotiated a separate treaty with Britain, a treaty that left the new nation much bigger, more powerful, and more independent of France than the French minister had planned—or than the Founding Fathers and Congress had dared to hope.

Balancing the desk on the other side of the fireplace is an eighteenth-century architect's table that the former secretary of state John Kerry, in his foreword to this volume, points to as the table on which Jefferson drafted "the blueprints of a democracy," which George Shultz elsewhere identified as the Declaration of Independence. This pleasing attribution is most likely mythical; it's not clear that the table was even Jefferson's. But very real are the room's 1820 engraved facsimile of the then-fading declaration, the basis of all subsequent reproductions, and its Thomas Sully portrait of Jefferson at seventy-seven. Other treasures include John and Abigail Adams's monogrammed silver coffee-pot, from the workshop of Paul Revere, and (to me as sacred as the Holy Grail) one of the four silver-plated wine coolers that George Washington bought for his presidential dining room and later gave as mementoes to members of his cabinet—this one to Timothy Pickering, the third secretary of state.

A glance at the Metropolitan Museum of Art curator Alice Cooney Frelinghuysen's description of the collection's ceramics shows what makes the five catalogue essays sparkle. Though the furniture, pictures, and silver display the finest American artistry, the plates and vases, Frelinghuysen explains, illustrate the new nation's immersion in global commerce from the time American ships first entered the china trade. The essay doesn't just describe the items but also offers a brisk, eye-opening

account of how the eighteenth-century export china business operated, with wares fired in Jingdezhen then shipped five hundred miles overland to the Pearl River at Canton (as foreign merchants called Guangzhou), where foreign trading companies, permitted to operate but four months of each year, gathered them in riverfront warehouses, transported them in small boats to ships anchored in deep water down the river, and shipped them to Europe and America. A colorful punch bowl of about 1780 depicts five of the long, narrow warehouses, flying the flags of Denmark, Sweden, France, Holland, and Britain.

In Canton, painters decorated the wares, often with designs ordered by the retail purchasers. The collection boasts a plate from George Washington's dinner service—emblazoned with the angel of fame holding the badge of the Society of the Cincinnati, the fraternal order of Revolutionary War officers—ordered by the first American trading vessel to reach China in 1784. Tea saucers from 1790 show the arms of Rhode Island and of New York State, while a 1795 saucer of Martha Washington's shows her monogram surrounded by a chain of the fifteen states that then made up the union. When French porcelain came into fashion in the nineteenth century, James and Dolley Madison bought a dinner service, one plate of which is pictured in the book, in 1806. The friend who acquired it for them boasted that he'd saved 40 percent on the price by getting it from Nast's Paris factory rather than from the Sèvres factory, as originally intended.

The ceramics collection also offers a welcome corrective to our era's hypersensitivity about race. Yes, slavery disfigured the founding, but here is the famous medallion Josiah Wedgwood's pottery works made in the 1780s, showing a kneeling, chained black slave, surrounded by the motto "AM I NOT A MAN AND A BROTHER?" Wedgwood was a leader of the British slave-trade abolition society—a movement that succeeded in 1807—and in the mid-1780s he sent several of the medallions to Benjamin Franklin, the president of the Pennsylvania Abolition Society, which had already succeeded in getting the state to pass its Gradual Abolition Act in 1780, the

first such law in America. So, even before the Constitutional Convention, Americans were working to end slavery, an affront to "freedom itself," as Wedgwood wrote Franklin in sending the plaque. Less well known is the collection's 1838 copper medal showing almost the same image, but of a female slave, surrounded by the legend "AM I NOT A WOMAN & A SISTER?" The size of a penny, these medals were passed off as pocket change, an effective propaganda tool circulated by the American Anti-Slavery Society until the U.S. Mint swiftly suppressed their circulation.

Also qualifying today's claim that American history is an unrelieved tale of racism is the collection's 1848 lithograph made from William Sidney Mount's 1847 painting *The Power of Music*. A white fiddler plays for two appreciative white friends inside a barn, while a black laborer, hat in hand and with patched clothing, listens raptly outside, an expression of wistful sensitivity on his fine features. Though separated by the barn door, all four men share a common humanity in their appreciation of beauty. As for the mysterious anonymous American oil portrait of a fashionably dressed black flutist holding a score of William Shield's duets, painted somewhere between 1785 and 1810, we can say only that the sitter looks like anyone's equal.

Leafing through this book brings to mind a remark the classical architect Peter Pennoyer once made, that modernists forgot how to design rooms, or didn't bother to: witness bedrooms with an air conditioner on one wall, a closet on another, an entry door on a third, and a bathroom door on a fourth, leaving no place for a bed. And if you look at advertisements for new houses and apartments, you'll see lots of raw, unadorned space, dignified as an "open plan." Such formless emptiness is not an advance on the balance and harmony of these traditional, classical rooms, with their respect for boundaries and individual privacy. At bottom, isn't Le Corbusier's dictum that "a house is a machine for living in" poor and brutish, like feeding instead of dining? Architecture is meant to strive for the beauty of these rooms, to adorn and humanize life, not merely to shelter us like an artificial cave.

A model up in heaven

by Mark F. McClay

When launched in 1911, the Loeb Classical Library was an altogether new type of publishing venture. Its founder and first patron, the businessman and amateur philologist James Loeb (1867–1933), envisioned editions of ancient Greek and Latin texts with English translations on facing pages. The series’s aim was to make the whole corpus of Greco-Roman literature available to as wide a readership as possible, especially readers with a basic (but non-specialist) knowledge of Greek or Latin. Virginia Woolf, reviewing one of the early Loeb’s in 1917, approved this democratic goal, welcoming the project as a “gift of freedom” for the “open and unabashed amateur.” Ordinary readers, she declared, should “make up our minds that we shall never be independent of our Loeb.”

More than a century on, Woolf’s pronouncement seems vindicated. The series is still very much with us; even many of us non-amateurs would not wish to be without our Loeb. Until fairly recently, however, many classical scholars did not view the series so favorably. Ulrich von Wilamowitz-Moellendorff (1848–1931), the dominant German philologist of the era, opposed the idea for reasons that later critics have echoed. In correspondence with Loeb, Wilamowitz worried that readers would be distracted from the original texts and “hypnotized” by the translation on the facing page. At the time, translation was also not felt to be the serious scholar’s business. The proper focus of classical philology was above all the methodical reconstitution of Greek and

Latin texts, and Wilamowitz complained that Loeb’s would cut into the market for more-scholarly editions. In effect the Loeb, a book for amateurs (as Woolf recognized), was not seen as a book either by or for scholars. The uneven quality of the series in its first decades did not help its case.

Today, the Loeb’s standing is much stronger. From the 1980s on, improvements under the editors G. P. Goold and Jeffrey Henderson steadily enhanced the series’s quality and reputation. The weakest entries of the old catalogue have been replaced, other volumes have been revised and updated, and the library continues to add new titles every year. Loeb’s increasingly serve both as a showcase of Anglophone scholarship and as something like a version of record, a convenient first-stop orientation to texts, their interpretation, and further reading. Still, today’s Loeb has not abandoned the “unabashed amateur” for whom it was envisioned: in many respects, refinements have rendered the Loeb truer to its founding mission than before. If Woolf was excited by the series’s promise in 1917, then she would heartily approve its more recent offerings.

Readers can approach a Loeb either left-to-right or right-to-left: that is, keeping one’s eyes on the original text with an occasional peek at the facing translation, or reading the English while spot-checking the Greek or Latin. Both approaches presuppose a physical book—a basic fact reflected in the series’s distinctive design and exceptional produc-

tion quality. All Loeb's are cloth-bound with signature jackets, color-coded green (Greek) and red (Latin). A digital counterpart to the series was launched in 2014, but its avowed purpose is to supplement rather than replace the physical books: Henderson, the current editor, states that "the print Library will continue to serve the purposes best served by the codex, of which the Loeb volumes have long been a beautiful and exceptional variety."

Plato is well represented in the series, which has begun updating its Plato volumes from the 1910s to '30s with new editions. The original Loeb Plato comprises twelve volumes, of which four have so far been replaced: Paul Shorey's two-volume *Republic* (1930); translations of *Euthyphro*, *Apology*, *Crito*, *Phaedo*, and *Phaedrus* by Harold North Fowler (1914); and the *Symposium*, *Lysis*, and *Gorgias* of Walter Lamb (1925). These remain fine volumes, especially by the spotty standard of early Loeb's, but all have long since begun to show their age, especially as repositories of scholarship. The successor volumes are edited by the English team of William Preddy and Chris Emlyn-Jones (henceforth PEJ), whose translation is tailored to a facing-page format. The new editors

operate on the assumption that our readers are interested in being able to refer across from translation to text (or from text to translation) . . . We therefore attempt to keep closer to the Greek than the average standalone translation, consistent with clarity of meaning and acceptable English style.

In other words, un-hypnotic by design.

The biggest differences appear in the new volumes' supplementary materials. The old Plato editions, like most early Loeb's, tended to squeeze as much text as could fit between two covers, keeping commentary to a minimum. (This lack of scholarly annotation was another point of complaint from Wilamowitz.) New Loeb's, however, supply better aids: substantial introductory essays, reviews of major interpretive questions, and frequent notes to the translation. A case in point is PEJ's first volume. The four dialogues dealing with Socrates'

trial and execution—*Euthyphro*, *Apology*, *Crito*, and *Phaedo*—fill 523 pages in this edition; by contrast, Fowler's volume stuffed the same material onto 402 pages.¹ (It also shoehorned in an additional fifth dialogue, the *Phaedrus*, which the new series transfers to another volume.) The new edition's length is due mainly to expanded commentary. Fowler's volume includes only a perfunctory eleven-page introduction by his fellow editor Walter Lamb. The replacement, by contrast, features a wide-ranging thirty-six-page introduction covering topics that range from Plato's literary models (his dialogues seem, at least initially, to have been patterned after an existing genre of *sōkratikoî logoi* or short discourses incorporating Socrates as a character) to the non-Platonic evidence for Socrates' life (the testimony of Aristophanes and Xenophon and a biography by Diogenes Laërtius).

Throughout, PEJ urge appreciation of Plato's literary art, regularly drawing attention to the fictional settings and narrative structure of individual dialogues. There are concise but substantive discussions of cultural and historical background: the elite banquet (for *Symposium*), the Athenian legal and political systems (for *Apology*), and so forth. (Once in passing, the editors rather puzzlingly describe Athens as "the nearest thing to a democracy" in classical Greece.) Greek words in Platonic dialogue often slide back and forth between technical and everyday meanings, and PEJ are careful to translate such words with sensitivity to context (especially when they are used in nontechnical ways): thus, for instance, *epistēmē* is sometimes translatable as "knowledge" or "understanding" but at other times assumes the technical sense of "science"; *eidōs*, which later becomes a word for Plato's metaphysical "Forms," sometimes refers only to a "characteristic" of something; and the troublesome *daimōn*, which usually means a god or divine being, is translated as "spirit" when it describes the divine voice that urges Socrates to pursue philosophical questioning.

1 *Euthyphro. Apology. Crito. Phaedo*, by Plato, edited and translated by Chris Emlyn-Jones and William Preddy; Harvard University Press, 576 pages, \$30.

The editions of Lamb and Fowler, though fine in their own right, have clearly been improved upon. The replacement of Paul Shorey's *Republic* is a loss more keenly felt. Shorey (1857–1934) was one of the few American classicists of his day who could stand toe-to-toe with his counterparts across the Atlantic. (Not many of his contemporaries, in America or anywhere, would have had the nerve, as Shorey did, to dismiss Wilamowitz's *Platon* of 1919 as a mere "historical novel.") Shorey is known today for his uncompromisingly "unitarian" view of Plato. Many classical scholars, then and now, have challenged the unity of Plato's work, arguing that the dialogues reflect changes in his views across different periods of his life (especially regarding the so-called Theory of Forms) or identifying contradictory parts within individual texts (proposing, for instance, that the first and last books of the *Republic* were composed separately from the dialogue's middle portion). Shorey had no patience for such speculations. Instead, he argued forcefully that the main outlines of Plato's thought took their mature shape early on, and that any apparent inconsistencies across his body of work are primarily due to literary considerations—that is, the topics, fictional contexts, and *dramatis personae* of individual dialogues. This approach, summed up in *What Plato Said* (1933), was in some ways ahead of its time: though few classicists today subscribe to Shorey's strict unitarianism, the importance of dialogue format and narrative technique in Plato's work is now widely recognized. Shorey would, I think, have concurred with PEJ that "the dialogues . . . are intended to be performed, if only in the mind of the listener/reader."

Shorey's *Republic* of 1930 is a gem. I am aware of no other Loeb that so visibly bears the imprint of a great scholar's mind and personality. The prefatory essay, unlike the brief and forgettable front matter of most early Loeb, offers thirty-nine pages of elbow-throwing opinionation that still make for fun reading. As might be expected, Shorey heaps scorn on contemporaries who challenged the unity of Plato's magnum opus on flimsy pretexts. "[I]t is the height of naïveté," he writes, "for philological critics who have never themselves

composed any work of literary art to schoolmaster such creations by their own *a priori* canons of the logic and architectonic unity of composition": no intelligent reader could permit "minor disproportions and irrelevancies" to obscure the "total impression of the unity and designed convergence" of the dialogue's construction. Shorey's crisp translation hews close to the Greek, often with keener precision and in brighter colors than present-day English can manage. His commentary deals incisively with interpretive tangles while frequently addressing Plato's place in the wider tradition: he engages (in several languages) such disparate authorities as Augustine, Chaucer, Montaigne, Emerson, and Herbert Spencer with equal facility.

Perhaps inevitably, PEJ's *Republic* is more modest.² While the retirement of Shorey's edition is regrettable, its successor is a strong contribution to the current series. The new edition is informative but undogmatic. The introduction, for instance, offers the reader a fair-minded survey of critical approaches to the *Republic* ranging from the Renaissance to Karl Popper and Leo Strauss without putting a finger on the scale. If PEJ show any overall tendency in their commentary, it is toward underscoring the dialogue's polyphonic complexity: their proposal is that the *Republic* is "essentially exploratory, reflecting the hesitations, uncertainties, and changes of direction of [the] main character, Socrates, as well as the agreements and doubts of his interlocutors."

In the *Republic*, Socrates and his companions (chiefly Plato's brothers Glaucon and Adeimantus) develop a famous thought experiment: an imaginary city, as well-ordered as possible, is constructed in speech as an analogue for the just soul. The city mirrors the condition of the individual soul, first in its state of perfect kingship and then in its decline through oligarchy, democracy, and

² *Republic, Volume I: Books 1–5*, by Plato, edited and translated by Chris Emlyn-Jones and William Preddy; Harvard University Press, 656 pages, \$30.

Republic, Volume II: Books 6–10, by Plato, edited and translated by Chris Emlyn-Jones and William Preddy; Harvard University Press, 560 pages, \$30.

finally tyranny. Each corrupt constitution is found to correspond to a corrupt type of soul.

The discussion of the ideal city is undertaken at first in order to understand the soul, but the “beautiful city” (Kallipolis) quickly assumes a life of its own. It is a perennial question how far, if at all, Plato intended the “city in speech” as a real political program rather than strictly as a metaphor for the soul. The dialogue is ambiguous on this point. Certainly there is interaction between the civic and psychic levels: Socrates even claims that the most unjust soul can only come about in the man who becomes a tyrant in real life. Ultimately, though, Socrates and his interlocutors seem to conclude that the ideal city, with its ruling caste of incorruptible philosophers, is unrealizable in this world. Even so, he says (in PEJ’s rendering),

perhaps there’s a model up in heaven for anyone willing to look and if he sees it, found himself on it. But it makes no difference whether it exists anywhere or will do. You see, he’d only involve himself in its affairs, not those of anywhere else.

The crucial verb for the philosopher’s action is *katoikizein*, which usually means to “settle” or “colonize” a place. It is difficult to translate here, as the new and old Loeb both remark. Shorey’s rendering, “constitute himself its citizen,” stresses that the philosopher’s home can only be within Kallipolis. The translation of PEJ, “found himself on it,” better captures the verb’s ambiguity: the individual soul’s conversion to philosophy is identical with the “founding” of the city in speech, and the images of city and soul collapse into one. The philosopher, lacking a real Kallipolis, must make a city of himself. Both translations capture the philosopher’s ironic relation to political life. The state governed by philosopher-kings, which is the philosopher’s true home, cannot be realized; it follows that the real city, where the philosopher dwells, is one where he can never fully belong. At the same time, the final recusal from the political domain sharpens the dialogue’s importance for the philosophically minded reader. Few of us will ever have opportunity to rule a city:

but each of us must perforce govern his own soul, and it is within every man’s choice to do so as king or as tyrant.

Plato’s antipathy toward “the poets” is a critical commonplace. Is this view accurate, though? Socrates expels the epic and dramatic poets from Kallipolis in *Republic* 2, and subsequently in *Republic* 10 (on different grounds) finds imitative art incompatible with philosophy. As PEJ stress, though, poetry’s role in Plato’s thought is not always consistent:

Throughout the dialogue Plato’s attitude to poetry varies from between a degree of acceptance of its value and function, undercut by criticism and on occasion a degree of irony . . . and more or less outright dismissal.

Across the dialogues, Socrates constantly quotes and alludes to well-known poets—Homer, Hesiod, Sappho, Anacreon, Simonides, Pindar, and the tragedians—both as authorities and as touchstones of shared culture with his conversation partners. In the *Phaedo*, he even takes to composing verses as a hobby while awaiting execution. It should be clear, then, that the “expulsion” of the poets in the *Republic* is not a straightforward proposal. Rather, this exclusion wraps the dialogue’s central discussion within a veil of unreality, where its psycho-political experiment can unfold unencumbered by traditional authorities or practical constraints.

There is an element of rivalry, too, in the *Republic*’s poetic throwdown. Nietzsche, in his 1872 essay “Homer’s Contest,” cannily recognized that the competitive one-upmanship that animated all Greek poetic art also lay at the heart of Plato’s challenge to the poets and other verbal artists. The artistry of Plato’s dialogues, claimed Nietzsche, itself grew out of

a contest with the art of the orators, the sophists, the dramatists of the time, contrived so that he at last could say: “Look! I, too, can do what my great rivals can do, and I can do it better than they. . . . And now I discard all that entirely and pass sentence on all imitative art! The contest alone made me into a poet, a sophist, an orator!”

Ancient tradition, be it noted, even credited Plato as the poetic author of some thirty epigrams in the *Greek Anthology*. The mythical afterlife is a special focus in this contest with the authority of poetic tradition. In *Republic* 3, Socrates singles out traditional representations of the underworld for criticism, and four of his major dialogues—*Phaedo*, *Gorgias*, *Phaedrus*, and the *Republic* itself—culminate in elaborate stories of the soul’s postmortem existence that rank among Plato’s own most overtly “poetic” creations.

The newest Loeb Plato volume contains his three so-called erotic dialogues: *Lysis*, *Symposium*, and *Phaedrus*.³ The collocation of these texts in a single volume is in itself an improvement on the earlier Loeb. As PEJ emphasize, the three dialogues, though united by their interest in erotic love, differ markedly in their dramatic settings. In the *Lysis*, Socrates recounts a short and inconclusive philosophical discussion with a group of youths in the public context of a *palaistra* or wrestling school; the *Symposium*, narrated by a third party named Apollodorus, envisions a banquet of Athenian celebrities who offer competing speeches about Eros; and the *Phaedrus*, which has no external narrator, conjures a vivid landscape just outside the city walls as the staging area for a wide-ranging one-on-one conversation between Socrates and a young aficionado of rhetoric. In these as in other dialogues, the staging shapes the arguments that unfold.

The Athenian practice of pederasty also furnishes crucial background for all three dialogues—a fact which, for modern readers, takes some getting used to. In early Greek literature, what we might call “romantic” love was explored not through marriage plots or courtship stories, but in homoerotic relationships. Marriage was, on the whole, thought of in practical terms as the means for producing legitimate offspring and passing on property rather than as something to be pursued for

³ *Lysis. Symposium. Phaedrus*, by Plato, edited and translated by Chris Emlyn-Jones and William Preddy; Harvard University Press, 592 pages, \$30.

love. Since it was believed that everyone was susceptible of attraction to members of either sex, homosexual relationships were the main context in which men might expect to experience romantic love with someone of equal social status (as opposed to noncitizen women or prostitutes). Such relationships were normally not between partners of the same age. In Athens, at least among the upper classes, it was customary for a thirty- or forty-something “lover” (*erastês*) to pursue a teenage “beloved” (*erômenos*). Pederastic etiquette called for the two to adopt respective roles as pursuer and pursued, and more generally as “active” and “passive” partners—in more senses, shall we say, than the strictly grammatical.

Such are the rather foreign cultural parameters that bound Plato’s discussions of erotic love. Fowler and Lamb pass over the dialogues’ social background with hardly any comment; their translations often mention love of “boys,” but the nature of the pederastic relationship is never directly explained. Here PEJ are less squeamish, offering a clear and factual discussion of the issue in their introduction to the volume and wherever relevant throughout the text. They also stress that Athenian pederasty was quite unlike homosexuality in the modern sense; indeed, on this point and others, PEJ rightly warn against reading Plato through the distorting lens of our own culture wars.

The new volume’s frankness yields intriguing dividends. Perhaps the most interesting thread that emerges from reading the pederastic dialogues alongside each other in PEJ’s version is the conceptual tension between the active and passive aspects of erotic love—or, put differently, between Eros as subject and as object. This thread begins already in the *Lysis*, thought to be one of Plato’s earlier works, in which Socrates inquires about the ambiguity of the Greek *philos* and related words: the same root can designate someone as “beloved” (*philoî* means “loved ones”) but may equally denote a “lover” of something else (as, for instance, *philosophos* means “lover of wisdom”). In the *Lysis*, this line of investigation ends at an impasse; but the problem

resurfaces in the *Symposium*, where the foregrounding of pederastic themes heightens the tension between the subjective and objective character of Eros. The first several symposiasts' speeches all privilege the perspective of the *erastês*, the "active" lover: adopting this point of view, various speakers describe erotic love as a mode of health (Eryximachus), a means of realizing one's own nature (Aristophanes), or a source of poetic inspiration (Agathon). Socrates' speech, by contrast, marks a shift in the dialogue's direction: his interest is not with the perspective of the *erastês* but with the "object" of Eros. At the heart of the dialogue, it seems, is a choice between different forms of pederastic logic: on the one hand, a quasi-therapeutic interpretation of erotic passion in terms of its benefits for the person who experiences it; and, on the other, an understanding of sexual love as directed fundamentally outward toward the beautiful beloved—and ultimately, Socrates wants us to believe, toward Beauty itself.

Socrates' argument is undermined, however, by the inconclusive note on which the dialogue ends. Just after Socrates finishes speaking, a drunken Alcibiades gate-crashes the proceedings. Alcibiades was the most notorious of the ill-behaved young aristocrats whose association with Socrates damaged the latter's reputation in Athens. Alcibiades' impromptu speech recapitulates aspects of Socrates' discourse about Eros in an ironic key. He semi-comically recounts his inappropriate "pursuit" of the older Socrates, as well as Socrates' (to all appearances unsuccessful) attempt to divert Alcibiades' lustful attention toward a philosophical life. For ΠΕJ, the last word given to Alcibiades in the dialogue implies a pessimism toward Socrates' vision of Eros as an inducement to philosophy. The example of Alcibiades, on their reading, gives a warning that the mystical ascent toward the Beautiful is bound to go badly when a dubious character like Alcibiades gets involved.

The erotic dialogues put a spotlight on a question that lurks in the scenery of many Platonic dialogues: Why should one pursue philosophy in the first place? What is the fuel that sets the philosophical engine in motion? Several of Plato's dialogues touch on this question, pointing toward different possible answers. In the *Apology*, Socrates presents his pursuit of wisdom as a divine calling that overrides his obligations to other authorities. As he awaits execution in the *Phaedo*, the discussion about the immortality of the soul gains urgency from the imminence of Socrates' own death and his friends' anxiety about his postmortem fate. Implicit also is the question of whether the enterprise of philosophy can or should carry on once Socrates has gone. In the end, it is not the promise of immortality that proves the strongest pull toward philosophy, but the example of Socrates in the hour of his death. His trial and execution serve to warn readers of the risks involved in philosophical inquiry; just as importantly, however, Socrates himself becomes a virtuous model that his followers wish to emulate.

The pederastic dialogues point to a further motive behind the philosophical life. In these texts, Eros emerges as philosophy's propulsive element, the fuel that powers the whole human machinery toward its true object. Here again is a difference from the *Republic*, where the erotic and appetitive part of the soul corresponds to the city's lowest social caste; that dialogue's later books dwell on the danger posed by sexual and other bodily desires as impediments to would-be philosophers. The *Symposium* and *Phaedrus*, however, offer a different perspective. In his pursuit of the Beautiful itself, the lover of wisdom is pushed forward by Eros in his most authentic form. Philosophy cannot compel: it must seduce. The dialogues intimate that philosophy's ultimate objects are not to be grasped with logical proofs, but approached with imagination to rival the poets and desire akin to the stirrings of love.

The peace women

by Peter Baehr

Europe is once again the theater of a major armed conflict, the worst since the Second World War ended in 1945. Four of the belligerents possess their own nuclear weapons: the Russian Federation, the United States, Great Britain, and France. Several NATO nations have U.S. nuclear weapons stationed on their territory: Germany, Italy, the Netherlands, and Turkey. Russia recently sent nuclear weapons to its ally Belarus.

One would think that a proxy war in Europe between Russia and NATO—threatening the first hot conflict between nuclear-armed formations—would trigger a major upsurge in peace movements. It hasn't. The contrast between the present decade and the twilight years of the Cold War could not be greater. That was the time of Russia's invasion of Afghanistan, of Reagan and Thatcher, of Reagan and Andropov and his reformist successor Gorbachev, the time of the NATO doctrine of limited nuclear war in Europe, the time when American nuclear bases across Europe attracted anti-war protesters by the thousands several times each year.

Women played a major role in the peace movements of the Eighties and in earlier opposition to the Vietnam War. They formed organizations such as the American-based Women Against War and the Canadian Voice of Women for Peace. Women were influential, too, in Britain's Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament. Parallel organizations and movements sprang up across the Western world and the Global South. Why is there no revival of these movements today? Their absence is

doubly baffling given the impact of the current war on Ukraine's women. While their menfolk are slaughtered on the southern and eastern battlefronts, Ukrainian women have fled their country by the millions, children in tow, or remained in ever-worsening conditions at home.

It is not that women in Europe and elsewhere are silent about the war. Some denounce it and call for serious diplomacy to end it—women such as Clare Daly, an Irish member of the European Parliament; Sahra Wagenknecht and Sevim Dağdelen, members of the German Die Linke party; and the German feminist writer Alice Schwarzer. These women are vocal. They are also isolated. Politically they lack clout, and they lack allies—including female allies—in mainstream media, or in the academy, or among students, who formerly channeled anti-war sentiment.

Not even the war in Gaza has catalyzed a distinctive female voice for peace. On social media, in the street, and on university campuses, protesters of both sexes chiefly condemn only one of the parties to the conflict. Appeals for a cease-fire suggest merely a pause in hostilities, not an end to them. Slogans against “settler colonialism” and “genocide” are neither calls for lasting reconciliation of Israelis and Palestinians, nor for a settlement that would respect each side's national interests and security.

Why have “peace women” vanished as a collective force? I will come to that. But let us first step back to recall a time, not so long ago, when the question would have been unthinkable.

The Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament (CND), once Britain's foremost peace organization, was founded in 1957 and, in its first iteration, reached its apex during the Cuban Missile Crisis. The movement had a resurgence in the early 1980s, following the Soviet Union's invasion of Afghanistan. The invasion killed the détente between the two Cold War superpowers and their military blocs. In both CND and the broader British peace movement, women formed a powerful anti-militaristic constituency. Under Joan Ruddock's chairmanship between 1981 and 1985, CND grew exponentially. By the time she retired, it boasted 460,000 members.

During this period, I lived and taught in Coventry, a Midlands city in the United Kingdom, and was an active member of CND. Coventry is a storied place. On November 14, 1940, the city was heavily bombed by the German Luftwaffe, aiming to take out Coventry's military and industrial infrastructure. It was to that point the most serious airborne attack on Great Britain. Some 552 planes unloaded around 30,000 incendiary bombs on the city. Infamously, the raid prompted Joseph Goebbels, Hitler's propaganda chief, to coin the verb *Koventrierten*: to reduce a city to rubble.

Coventry's cathedral was one of the pulverized buildings. At war's end, city officials decided to let its ruins stand in perpetuity as a monument to state violence; the new cathedral sits alongside its predecessor. Fittingly, CND held its weekly meetings in the cathedral complex. From there we divvied up work: leafletting in residential neighborhoods, talking at trade-union meetings and at secondary schools, and the like. We also invited distinguished guests to speak at our local rallies or at large indoor venues. E. P. Thompson, the great historian of the English working class and an avid peace campaigner, visited us twice with his no less formidable wife and fellow historian, Dorothy Thompson. Julie Christie, a major film star, spoke at one of our rallies.

The female peace activists I knew best in the early to mid-1980s were, to a woman, progressives. My former wife was one of them. The women embraced left-wing causes, were feminists, read *The Guardian* newspaper,

and, if they voted at all, typically plumped for the Labour Party. They abhorred Margaret Thatcher, Britain's hawkish prime minister. The similarities among Coventry's female peace activists ended there. Some of them came fresh to politics and with no religious affiliation. Others were Quakers. A few were members of the British Communist Party transitioning to cultural Marxism or were anarchists who despised Marxism of any flavor. My female colleagues, like my male ones, were in their late twenties, thirties, and early forties; the students in the movement were, of course, generally younger.

For most of the women I knew, war represented the ugliest side of male culture. The peace camp established in September 1981 on Greenham Common, Newbury, enshrined this conviction. Adjacent to a U.S. military base that housed Tomahawk cruise missiles, the Greenham camp was originally open to both sexes but soon became an exclusively female enclave, unlike its counterpart at Molesworth in which women simply played a leading role. Feminism, communalism, and anti-militarism defined Greenham's mission. The camp had no official leaders, but it did have women who spoke on its behalf to the media and to other campaigners. Helen John (1937–2017) was Greenham's most imposing figure. Hardy and unbending, she never veiled her disdain for men.

The peace women of my acquaintance in Britain were militant without being military types. They deplored NATO and the Warsaw Pact equally; discriminating between rival nuclear blocs seemed absurd. "Non-Violent Direct Action" was their preferred mode of pugnacity. A clock tower would be scaled and a peace banner unfurled from it. Roads would be blocked, local councils occupied, and, ubiquitously, nuclear bases barricaded. It is impossible for me to imagine any of these women inserting into their Twitter accounts, if Twitter had existed at this time, a Ukrainian or any other national flag. The sorts of symbols they chose were derived from the semaphore alphabet (CND's symbol), a spider web (the Greenham symbol), or the more ancient dove and olive branch.

When the Falklands War broke out in April 1982, following the invasion of the South Atlantic islands by Argentinian forces, peace activists were unmoved by patriotic feeling. With only one exception, the women I knew opposed Britain's reconquering the islands, not because they had any love for a military junta but because of the slaughter that was bound to accompany the eviction. Their fears were quickly confirmed when a British nuclear submarine torpedoed and sank the Argentine light cruiser *General Belgrano*, with the loss of around three hundred souls. *The Sun* newspaper, a Murdoch tabloid, hailed the *Belgrano*'s destruction with the triumphant headline "Gotcha!" Today *The Sun*, like the Murdoch empire more generally, supports the continuation of the war in Ukraine.

Within the broader peace movement, CND operated not as a political party but as a pressure group. Its core demand was Britain's unilateral renunciation of nuclear weapons. In 1982, this became Labour's official policy under Michael Foot, the leader of Her Majesty's Opposition in parliament. Divisive and a vote-loser, the policy was discarded by Foot's successor, but not before the Conservative Party in 1987 celebrated its third consecutive general election victory in a landslide.

I left Britain in 1990, first moving to St. John's, Newfoundland, for a decade, and then to Hong Kong for two more. I lost touch with my female former friends and colleagues in the peace movement. What happened to that cohort of women of the 1980s whose public engagement and organization for peace took a markedly gendered form? I can't say for sure. But I doubt that any of them joined the ranks of the women I describe next.

In "Women and the Evolution of World Politics" (1998), published in *Foreign Affairs*, Francis Fukuyama offered an overview of the violent proclivities of men and women. (The piece occasioned several replies by feminist scholars.) Judged by their record of war-making, looting, pogrom, mass murder, ethnic cleansing, rape, and pillage, men are the more violent sex by a long shot. All the world's bloodiest dictators have been men.

Summarizing the findings of evolutionary biology, Fukuyama concluded that genetics, rather than patriarchy, was the root cause of the male-female disparity in violent behavior. He added:

Observers have suggested various reasons why women are less willing to use military force than men, including their role as mothers, the fact that many women are feminists (that is, committed to a left-of-center agenda that is generally hostile to U.S. intervention), and partisan affiliation (more women vote Democratic than men). It is unnecessary to know the reason for the correlation between gender and antimilitarism, however, to predict that increasing female political participation will probably make the United States and other democracies less inclined to use power around the world as freely as they have in the past.

Fukuyama could not have been less clairvoyant about Democratic and left-of-center women (unless we count all his other predictions). If women peace activists of the 1980s were suspicious of the state—the organization that, as Max Weber noted, monopolizes legitimate violence within a given territory—their successors are now housed in the state in growing numbers. Their territory is the world.

In the United States, such women include Avril Haines, Director of National Intelligence and previously, with John Brennan, a policy advisor on extra-judicial drone killings; the color revolutionist Samantha Power, Administrator of USAID, a CIA front organization; the Ukrainian putschist Victoria Nuland, Acting Deputy Secretary of State; and her colleague Elizabeth Horst, Deputy Assistant Secretary of Pakistan, who recently gave the nod to the ouster of Imran Khan. The doyenne of these officials is Hillary Clinton. When Fukuyama published an earlier article on women and politics, a short review in 1994, Bill Clinton had only recently been installed as president, and Hillary as first lady. After her healthcare plan failed to pass Congress, she launched other initiatives relating to children and foster care. Today, she is a super-hawk for whom the war in Ukraine is

an expeditious vehicle with which to topple the Putin regime, break Russia as a great power once and for all, and restructure the Russian Federation on lines consistent with the dream of American unipolarity. Apropos of these officials and their male colleagues, one is reminded of Montesquieu's comment about the rulers of an earlier violent republic: "Their custom was always to address other nations as though Rome were their master."

These Lilliputian counterparts are flourishing. The Trudeau deputy Chrystia Freeland and Canadian Foreign Minister Mélanie Joly are two such political warriors; President Ursula von der Leyen of the European Commission and Prime Minister Kaja Kallas of Estonia, two more. Sanna Marin, till September 2023 the prime minister of Finland, successfully renounced her country's former neutrality, while NATO's summit in July 2023 in Vilnius was hosted by Lithuania's prime minister Ingrida Šimonytė. All are supporting NATO's war against Russia, as is Giorgia Meloni, Italy's firebrand prime minister. None of them has ever cowered under the storm of artillery fire or emerged from combat with limbs lost and minds unhinged. Save the occasional mercenary, none of their citizens is dying on the battlefronts of Ukraine. The women of Greenham Common would be particularly floored, however, by Germany's minister for foreign affairs, the bellicose Annalena Baerbock. She belongs to the Green Party. When founded in 1980, *Die Grünen* were stridently anti-war. Today they are proxy-war champions.

The most obvious answer to the question of where the peace women went, and by no means a trivial one, is that they aged and died (thankfully, some of my old comrades are still hearty). With the United States and Russia temporarily at peace, a new generation of political women immersed itself in other causes: LGBTQ, anti-racism, anti-colonialism, environmentalism, and so forth. Furthermore, women do not enter political activity only, or even mainly, as women but first and foremost as members of the broader society. What affects that society necessarily affects women as citi-

zens. And since the Cold War ended, Western citizens of both sexes have been blitzed by a plethora of fears that have pushed the prospect of nuclear war far into the background.

Long gone are the days when citizens were enjoined to "fear only fear itself." Instead, we are told to fear without respite. In the past decade alone, Westerners have been deluged by panics over Brexit, Donald J. Trump (ongoing), COVID, Russia (ongoing). Today we are told that, without draconian action planned and executed by experts, the planet is in danger of a climate apocalypse. A fear that arises spontaneously is, usually, a natural response to the perception of danger; fears that follow in quick succession are almost always orchestrated. Philosophers dispute whether zero is a number, and mathematicians say that it can be treated as a number, but when politicians invoke it, zero is neither a number nor a non-number: it is a portent that life is about to get a lot nastier. The most obvious results of such alarums—Net Zero, Zero COVID, Year Zero—are suspended parliaments, rule by decree, internet censorship, skewed data, corrupted science, and a poorer society, especially for the already poor.

Perhaps psychologists can tell us how many fears it is possible for a person to entertain at any one time. Are fears separable in the mind of an individual, or does one fear flow out of, or into, another? Are fears compoundable? If fears are plural, is one fear more likely to have greater salience than the rest? I do not know the answers to these questions. I do know, and so do readers, of the media's role in amplifying some risks and minimizing others. Between the Sixties and the end of the Cold War, the risks of nuclear confrontation were abundantly debated, pro and con. Academic conferences, special issues of journals, newspaper columns, and television broadcasts aimed to educate citizens about nuclear deterrence, nuclear winter, and the differences among battlefield, tactical, and strategic nuclear weapons. Cinema and television dramatized the effects, both imagined and real, of nuclear war. The bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki occasioned yearly, highly publicized vigils across the world. The vigils continue. The publicity does not.

I have been suggesting that the issue of international peace did not so much vanish from the minds of the post-Eighties generation as it was displaced by new fears that beset men and women alike. But peace politics among women is, today, also supplanted by developments within feminism, by currents that divide it, make it more inward-looking, and threaten to overwhelm it. No cultural movement is more dangerous to feminism, and to women in general, than fissionism.

By “fissionism” I refer to a movement that is antithetical to the foundational feminist enterprise, namely, that of promoting the independence, life-chances, and safety of girls and women and of creating a peaceful world for men and women alike. Fissionists, by contrast, are shapeshifters of both sexes whose most conspicuous feature is their aggressive denial of stable sexual identities: everything is deemed fungible, including the category of “woman.” The charity Stonewall is fissionism’s Manhattan Project.

Fissionist declarations are as unmoored from biological reality as they are from historical experience and inherited wisdom. Words are considered mere power pragma: they mean what fissionists want them to mean, today, tomorrow, and whenever. Translating them back into recognizable form requires patience. What fissionists call a trans woman is really a man pretending to be a woman, whereas a trans man is really a woman pretending to be a man. The success of fissionism in capturing modern institutions—hospitals, Congress, the courts, advertising agencies, the entertainment industry, official media, the police—is nothing short of momentous. A woman who enters a hospital to deliver a child might find herself classified as a “birthing person,” as if her sex had nothing to do with the medical care she and her child need. An aspirant Supreme Court justice declares, under questioning from senators, that the definition of woman is beyond her competence because she is not a physician. Miss Netherlands 2023 is a man. So is the college-champion American swimmer who goes by the name of Lia Thomas. “The destructive character,” observed the culture critic and philosopher Walter Benjamin, “knows only

one watchword: make room.” Fissionism is the destructive character writ large.

The peace women of the Eighties identified themselves as women, heterosexual or lesbian. They focused their efforts on peace. They mobilized for peace as women, *united* as women. They marched in alliances with men. They would have been astonished to learn that lesbians can possess a penis, as fissionists insist they can, or that men pretending to be women are entitled to occupy prison cells or shelters that were once sexually segregated for the safety of women. Peace women of the Eighties would have been equally bewildered at being called “sexual racists” for opposing these extraordinary ideas. Fissionists have no time for peace when they are constantly warring with women. One cannot expect non-fissionist feminists to make international peace a priority when they are daily embattled by people who libel and assault them. A peace movement powered by a significant female constituency cannot be expected to arise when the descriptor “female” is a more visceral bone of contention than the risk of a nuclear war in Europe.

Irony shadows all human projects. For decades, Western feminists claimed that reality is a “construct,” a metaphor which implies that social relations are as malleable as putty, or as easily assembled as Legos, and that the human person can, in effect, be fabricated and re-engineered. Fissionists simply extended this idea to biology. For decades, too, radical feminists have attacked masculinity, deriding it, denying it, and socializing boys to be a caricature of girls. Unmanly men do not make strong allies. They are just the sort of men to pivot to fissionism.

It was a basic intuition of peace women that the ultimate disgrace of war is that the people who provoke, fund, and vaunt it typically take no responsibility for the carnage they sow. Often, in the disastrous aftermath, they move up to more lucrative and prestigious positions. The organs that should call these people to account and to shame rarely do. More often they do the reverse: provide cover. Karl Kraus (1874–1936), the Viennese author of *The Last Days of Man-*

kind (1922), once took the measure of these distortive instruments when he coined the term *Journaille*, a hybrid of the German word *Journalismus* and the French *canaille* (rabble), to describe the reporters of the *Neue Freie Presse*, Austria's paper of record. The paper's editors and reporters, Kraus lamented, hid significant facts from public view, ignored or libeled dissident perspectives, avoided complexity, wrote in platitudes, and channeled, instead of interrogating, war propaganda. They were the avatars and servants, not the critics, of the powerful.

Like the war in Ukraine today, the First World War was one of artillery and attrition, a meat-grinding war. Kraus saw its shattered remnants begging on the streets of Vienna. In his poem "Kriegswelt," he records the moral stature of those politicians and media pundits who sent—and cheered and lied—soldiers to their doom, and their families to ruin:

They spent their lives in laughter and play
While ours were put on the line.
They got themselves drunk with blood in
the day
And chased it at night with wine.

They feasted and threw their weight about,
Considering boredom a crime;
And when their supply of people ran out,
They turned to killing time.

Peace movements cannot make peace. Only states can do that. The best that peace movements can do is to alert the world to the horrors of war and to demand that all reasonable efforts be made to avoid it and, if begun, to stop it. Time and again, women have been at the forefront of these efforts. Their disappearance as a cohesive force is not just women's loss but the world's.

Hopper horrors at the Whitney

by Gail Levin

Hilton Kramer, who founded this magazine in 1982, was one of the great defenders of the art of Edward Hopper. He was especially concerned with the scandalous treatment given to Hopper by the Whitney Museum of American Art following the artist's death in 1967.

As the chief art critic for *The New York Times*, Kramer took the Whitney Museum to task for its response to inheriting Hopper's estate—what he called “Selling a Windfall”:

But if you think that the Hopper bequest means that we shall now have a permanent archive at the Whitney where all this material can be studied by the scholars and critics of future generations, you would be guilty of harboring a very old-fashioned notion of how museums conceive of their responsibilities.

Kramer added that “The Whitney, it appears, plans to retain only a certain portion of the Hopper bequest for its permanent collection,” concluding that “The rest will be put up for sale on the open market—in gradual stages, of course, in order to keep the (high) price of Hoppers from suffering any precipitous decline.” The selling, or “deaccessioning,” of any art given to a museum's permanent collection risks violating donor intent and undermining scholarship. But in fact, the Whitney had already been furtively selling Hopper's art to collectors in its inner circle, decidedly not on the open market. As for the art by Hopper's wife Jo in the bequest—ninety-six oils and watercolors—four went to New York

University and ninety-two to hospitals, from which they all quickly disappeared.

Stung by Kramer's speculations, the Whitney resorted to a relatively new idea in the scholarship of American art: a catalogue raisonné to include all authentic works by Edward Hopper. In 1976, Kramer welcomed me as the museum's choice of curator for the Hopper catalogue, predicting that I would “produce a catalogue raisonné of the entire Hopper oeuvre and organize a major Hopper exhibition to take place in 1980.” He elaborated, “The Hopper project is particularly interesting as an index of the Whitney's new intentions.” He called the bequest by the artist's widow “the largest single gift of its kind the museum had ever received,” suggesting that

it seemed at the time to throw the museum into a great state of confusion. It was first announced, and then denied, that the museum would disperse this bequest after selecting a certain number of works for its own permanent collection.

In choosing a curator, the Whitney had passed over experienced scholars to pick me, a new Ph.D. in art history. I was still in my twenties, with little museum experience and no specialized knowledge of Hopper, let alone of the pitfalls of producing a catalogue raisonné. The opportunity was fraught but meaningful, as Kramer foresaw:

Miss Levin's assignment is important, then, not only to the fate of the Hopper bequest but to

the future of the Whitney as a significant repository of American art, and to the museum's reputation as a place where the standards governing the study of American art will be based on something beyond the seasonal turnover of temporary exhibitions.

He added, generously,

It is almost enough to inspire some hope, especially as Miss Levin recently demonstrated, in the small but illuminating show of "Morgan Russell: Synchronist Studies, 1910–1922," which she organized at the Museum of Modern Art, that she brings both a keen eye and a scholarly intelligence to the very large task that awaits her.

Despite Kramer's vision for a new age in Hopper scholarship at the Whitney, the museum simply used me to avoid the scandal that would result if the public learned that many works said to be by Hopper and thus—if authentic—willed to the museum, were making their way *not to the museum* but to the market, with no proof of how they left the studio, which is to say no proper provenance. In 1976, the museum, instead of instructing me to investigate the hemorrhage of Hoppers from their rightful home, ordered me to write about Hopper for a show at a gallery that mingled works actually sold by Hopper, and thus authenticated with provenance, with works said to be by Hopper but offered for sale by a collector with no document as to how he got them, and thus no provenance.

So it came to pass that the Whitney's then-director, Tom Armstrong, had me write both an essay and a new chronology for a Hopper show at Kennedy Galleries organized by its proprietor, Larry Fleischman. The plot thickened when Armstrong sent each of the museum's trustees an advance copy of my essay and copied me on his notice to them. At the time, I was flattered, but, in retrospect, it seems obvious that Armstrong did not explain why the museum's new curator was writing for a commercial gallery, since the trustees already knew. Indeed, it was a pronouncement by the board that had first alerted Kramer to potential misdeeds.

The board's impulse to cash in on the Hopper legacy had motivated one trustee to resign. In his 2002 memoir, *The Passionate Collector: Eighty Years in the World of Art*, Roy N. Neuberger told how he decided to leave the Whitney board in 1969 and become instead an honorary trustee at the Metropolitan Museum:

I began to question my role at the Whitney after the death of Edward Hopper's wife Josephine (March 6, 1968). Jo Hopper left to the Whitney a whole body of her husband's works, many of them small, but it was a large quantity—some 2,000 oils, prints, watercolors, and drawings. At the Whitney, discussions began about selling some of the paintings to raise cash. I did not like the idea of immediately thinking of these works as money, and I voiced my opinion at the board meeting quite sharply.

Despite Neuberger's objections, the Whitney started marketing works by Hopper, whether through Kennedy Galleries or not. The transactions surrounding this Hopper show do not survive in the Archives of American Art (which Fleischman helped to found); also missing are records for the large number of undocumented works attributed to Hopper that Kennedy Galleries took on consignment in 1972 from the Rev. Arthayer R. Sanborn, a Baptist minister from Nyack, New York, the town on the Hudson River where Hopper grew up.

Recalling that consignment, Larry Fleischman's wife, Barbara G. Fleischman, wrote in her 1995 book, *No Substitute for Quality: The Many Worlds of Lawrence A. Fleischman*:

He was thrilled to be called in on an important cache of Edward Hopper drawings and paintings by a minister in Nyack, New York, who had befriended the Hoppers and to whom Mrs. Hopper had willed the art work.

Perhaps that is what the minister told Fleischman, but the fact remains that Jo's will very clearly left all Edward's art to the Whitney, which the trustees and administration knew very well, yet chose not to enforce.

A variant story of how Sanborn got his Hoppers emerged in a 2011 interview for the Archives of American Art. Barbara Fleischman remarked on Sanborn: “We lost track of him because the deal was done, and Larry had wonderful things. And so that was a fascinating experience.” This remark prompted the interviewer, Avis Berman, to say, “Well, I know [Sanborn’s] son because I did his show. I wrote the catalogue—there was a Hopper show in Nyack—it was last spring at the Hopper House.” Berman adds: “Marion Hopper, the sister, still never married, . . . lived in that house. And [the Sanborns] helped her. They were doing so much for Marion that I think the Hoppers gave them some things.” Fleischman does not object, although her book claimed that Sanborn got art from Jo’s will.

More likely, Sanborn got his Hoppers by taking advantage of Jo’s circumscribed existence during the last few months of her life, after most of those concerned with Edward had ceased to take any interest in her, whereas the minister was assiduous. She was fragile, quite ill, visually impaired, and entirely alone. Lacking any close relatives, she depended on whatever friends and acquaintances she still had. One of her legs was so damaged that she could not walk the seventy-four steps up to her apartment, so the building’s janitor, Eddy Brady, did what little shopping she required. It was then that Sanborn got himself named in Jo’s will, but only, like Brady, as one of six residual legatees. Only one of the residual legatees, Mary Schiffenhaus, was willed any art. She alone was willed the Hoppers’ Cape Cod house and all of its contents, which included some artworks, most of which were preparatory sketches on paper, but also a few unfinished canvases.

The lack of documentation for Sanborn’s consignment posed an obstacle for marketing those works. Larry Fleischman initially sold works from Sanborn privately to collectors in his orbit such as Baron Heinrich Thyssen-Bornemisza. Fleischman’s goal with his 1977 exhibition was to mingle works from the minister with those documented as originally sold by the artist and then traded on the secondary market. Fleischman bought major Hopper oils

such as *Hotel Room* (1931) and *New York Office* (1962) and watercolors such as *Freight Car at Truro* (1931) and *Toward Boston* (1936), all of which he used to make Sanborn’s hoard appear legitimate. The fully illustrated catalogue of the Kennedy Galleries exhibition omitted all record of provenance.

Fleischman not only excluded such information, but also failed to mention the minister, who had supposedly been “Hopper’s friend,” although such a documented friendship would have supported authenticity and added to the artworks’ value. Fleischman arranged for an essay by me to reinforce the air of authenticity surrounding the paintings. Armstrong himself called a meeting to dictate the assignment and boasted of it to his trustees. The veteran Whitney curator and Hopper expert Lloyd Goodrich, Fleischman’s close friend, was already on board with the plan. It’s not clear that the Whitney ever coordinated with Sanborn, but the two parties’ actions aided each other as the Whitney looked to deaccession Hopper’s work and Sanborn sought to sell his own questionable collection.

In the first months of my cataloguing mission, provoked by Kramer’s zealous predictions, I had to use my research skills to try to figure out where Kennedy Galleries had obtained its Hopper inventory. At the time of the show, for example, Fleischman gave me no clue that *City Roofs*, Hopper’s oil painting of 1932, had been consigned to the gallery by Sanborn. It certainly had not come out of the Nyack house, where, as the minister told, he had befriended Hopper’s spinster sister.

Had I been on the job longer, I might have discovered that it was Sanborn who had consigned *City Roofs* by reviewing the entry in the meticulous record book bequeathed by Jo to Goodrich, where she very specifically had penciled “Here in Studio,” hence indicating the canvas should have been in Jo’s bequest. Had Jo given *City Roofs*, a major canvas (worth tens of millions of dollars today), to Sanborn, as he later claimed, she would have taken care to note it in the record book, so that it would not seem stolen. *City Roofs* was not a minor work of slight value that suddenly slipped into the minister’s possession with no document

whatsoever of the transfer. *City Roofs*, would, if in fact given to Sanborn, be the only canvas from Hopper's maturity ever bestowed upon any individual.

Fleischman adroitly obtained essays from both the Whitney veteran (Goodrich) and novice (me) to make it clear that the museum approved of his show. He thus used me, the new curator, to mask the very kind of stealthy traffic that Kramer had denounced and that my work on a catalogue raisonné was supposed to correct.

Galleries then were not as regulated as the auction houses, and some dealers knew how to "launder" art. "Laundering" is not a term that I learned in graduate school. Indeed, I did not know it until I read the 2011 book *Chasing Aphrodite: The Hunt for Looted Antiquities at the World's Richest Museum*, by the investigative reporters Jason Fetch and Ralph Frammolino, who quoted Fleischman as commenting about provenance: "Everything comes from somewhere."

For Fleischman's catalogue, Goodrich wrote, "the records and information now being assembled" by me at the Whitney "in preparation for the catalogue raisonné of Hopper's works in all media, will fill a wide gap in our knowledge of his art and life." He added,

[T]he Kennedy Galleries' collection of over a hundred drawings, watercolors, and oils, with its full representation of early works, is of great interest for the information it furnishes on his production in his childhood, youth, and art student years.

Strategically, Goodrich avoided mention of where this unique collection had come from. At the time, it struck me as odd to find no mention of the minister.

In my essay, what I did not say and perhaps had not yet understood was how the minister had gotten hold of so much of the contents of that attic, including most of Hopper's printed illustrations, which were surely a part of the "entire artistic estate," bequeathed by Jo very specifically to the Whitney. I did not fully understand Jo Hopper's bequest because I had not yet seen her last will, which the museum never shared with me.

My essay also announced the discovery of documents: "In the process of researching Hopper's work for the catalogue raisonné, I have uncovered the letters he wrote home during his three trips to Europe from 1906 through 1910." While I did not say that these early letters came from the minister, I illustrated how I was able to use these and other letters I collected from diverse recipients to construct a more detailed chronology than previously possible; it appeared at the end of the Kennedy Galleries catalogue.

Kramer had been early to notice a noxious smell in the Whitney's Hopper affairs, but he was outfoxed by Fleischman. One reason that the sudden appearance of early works by Hopper was not questioned may have been a previous public interaction between Kramer and Fleischman. In a *Times* article from June 1969 captioned "Studying American Art History," Kramer noted that new interest in American art was resulting from aesthetics, politics, and economics, correctly pointing out the relationship between "critical scholarship and the fluctuations of the art market." Kramer then devoted about half of his article to attacking *The American Art Journal*, the newly announced publication sponsored by Kennedy Galleries and coedited by Fleischman—the gallery's owner-director—and Milton Esterow, the associate director. Kramer bemoaned "an unhappy paradox, a scholarly journal edited by two non-scholars." Fleischman deployed a veneer of scholarship to hide unethical practices, as in the show contrived in tandem with the Whitney.

When the dubious show opened at Kennedy Galleries in May 1977, Kramer was still the *Times*'s chief art critic, but he assigned this review to John Russell. Writing under the headline "The Truth in Hopper's Art," Russell concluded his positive account with an augury:

[S]ince 1969, when Hopper's widow bequeathed more than 2,000 of his works to the Whitney Museum, and since Gail Levin became the curator in charge of that mammoth bequest, we have been no less interested in untypical Hoppers. The

early drawings, the letters written from Europe between 1906 and 1910, the occasional foray into illustration—all these things will in time contribute to a revisionist view of Edward Hopper.

Russell then wrote that “Hopper didn’t like to give too much away at any one time. He will one day be a great subject for biography.” Yet Russell did not grasp that these early works by Hopper had no stated provenance, no legitimate way to have made it to the art market. Fleischman and Goodrich did not so much invent ownership histories as they concealed the way that so many original artworks moved from Hopper’s storage into Sanborn’s hands rather than the museum. It is as if they thought that they could just bury the truth. Had the Whitney not tried to cover its action with a catalogue raisonné, which meant tracking provenance to determine authenticity, and had the museum not hired me, an energetic and ethical scholar determined to execute the project professionally, they would have been home free.

In 1977, neither Russell nor Kramer understood that the newly found and rather revealing letters from Paris, which allowed me to construct a new Hopper chronology, were not owned by the museum, but had been taken by Sanborn. When it later became apparent to me that Sanborn had not consigned his entire cache of artworks, I spoke with Fleischman, who told me that he would try to buy the rest, including documents from Hopper’s papers, which he would then make available for my research. But Sanborn, who understood the value for him of holding onto the papers, did not cooperate and kept most of the evidence under wraps. Only when I read a Whitney press release from July 28, 2017, did I learn that Sanborn had taken and hidden all the Hoppers’ papers, from which some five thousand documents survived; four thousand were given to the Whitney to be known as the “Sanborn Hopper Archive.”

Five years passed before the Whitney opened those four thousand papers to scholars in October 2022. Celebrating the archive with the show “Edward Hopper’s New York” (reviewed by James Panero in *The New Criterion*

of January 2023), the Whitney director Adam Weinberg wrote in its catalogue:

Great occasions often take a long time to realize. Discussions regarding the Sanborn Hopper Archive extend back more than two decades and began with Anita Duquette, our now retired manager of rights.

Here was a tacit acknowledgment of the trade in Hopper artworks that Kramer had decried. At last, it became clear to me that I had been laboring to complete the catalogue raisonné with my hands tied. Sanborn controlled and concealed so many documents from the Hoppers’ papers; neither he, nor Fleischman, nor Armstrong, really wanted an accurate catalogue. Indeed, when I reported to Armstrong in 1984 that my rigorous research made clear the problems and the Whitney’s refusal to pursue its inheritance, the museum trashed Kramer’s reformatory mission and terminated me *tout court*.

A search through Sanborn’s four thousand papers recently given to the Whitney by his heirs has turned up further appearance of the impropriety. Although Sanborn’s name does not appear in the Hoppers’ careful recordings of all sales and gifts of artworks in the ledgers Jo bequeathed to Goodrich, she recorded elsewhere their only gift to Sanborn with a link to Edward Hopper’s art: for Christmas 1964, the Hoppers gave Sanborn a photomechanical reproduction of the Metropolitan Museum’s Hopper oil painting *Lighthouse at Two Lights*. On this same list, we see that the Hoppers gave the identical token gift to dozens of others, including some of the guards and secretaries at the Whitney and Eddy Brady.

Sanborn’s efforts to protect himself by hiding the Hoppers’ papers may be inferred from his obituary in the *Orlando Sentinel* of November 28, 2007:

Upon retiring, he moved to Melbourne Beach, FL, while continuing to summer in Newport, NH. In “retirement,” Art began his research and tireless efforts to document the artworks, diaries and other personal papers which advanced and made invaluable contributions to

the scholarship on Edward Hopper and especially his wife Josephine.

To the contrary, far from aiding scholarship, Sanborn obstructed research for a very good reason: to conceal the details of his particular involvement with Hopper estate. Instead of making contributions to scholarship, he restricted and impeded scholarship on the Hoppers for a full fifty years after Edward's death. He took and sequestered their papers, which Jo very surely intended to be part of her bequest, as she and Edward had planned and as she had signaled to the Whitney Museum staff, who ignored her written warning.

The Whitney delayed the publication of the Hopper catalogue raisonné until 1995. It was released in a set of three printed volumes, but with information on provenance available only on a compact disc, which cannot be read on contemporary computers. Searches can be made on titles, media, support, and locations, but not on collectors. Furthermore, phrases appended by me to Sanborn's collection, such as "undocumented transfer," were erased from my careful entries without my consent. Finally, I was not able to complete the drawings volume since the provenance information for hundreds of works was problematic because those works had passed through Sanborn's hands. Auction houses refuse to divulge the names of consigners even after more than half a century.

Kramer's courage to sound the alarm when he sensed something was going wrong both with Fleischman's guile at Kennedy Galleries and then with the Whitney's mishandling of the Hopper bequest represents an important legacy that should not be forgotten. Kramer did not live to see the Whitney's public sales of Hoppers from the bequest, most recently at Sotheby's in May 2023, headlined by a 1930s oil, *Cobb's Barns, South Truro*—which had hung as a loan in the Oval Office of the White House during Barack Obama's presidency—that went under the hammer for over seven million dollars. Sotheby's also sold three watercolors: *Group of Houses* (1923) for \$698,500, *Red Barn in Autumn Landscape* (1927) for \$635,000, and *The Battery, Charleston, SC* (1929) for \$571,500. The Whitney's own collection-management policy statement says a work should only be sold if it constitutes "an unnecessary duplicate of other objects in the collection, including objects which are repetitive of similar themes in a similar medium." An analysis by Kabir Jhala in *The Art Newspaper* found that none of the above was obviously duplicative. Meanwhile, in the same sale, from Sanborn's hoard, was Hopper's early watercolor *Sailboat*, from 1899, which was estimated to fetch between \$100,000 and \$150,000 but did not sell through. That picture should, of course, have been inside the Whitney.

New poems

by Peter Vertacnik

Photograph

Glimpsed from across the living room it seems
a normal portrait of an aging couple,
taken for their church directory,
framed and placed on a built-in shelf beside
a vase of red carnations and baby's breath.

Up close, though, something's off. Gone are the seams
on their cheeks and foreheads, yet the skin not supple,
just blank. An airbrushing—designed to free
this likeness from time's price—has been applied
to strange effect, forging not youth but death.

The two-body problem in cyberspace

Each day our pixels pack their bags and travel
across that distance measured more in hours
than miles. My evening reaches toward your night.
It's clear and calm here; there, sporadic showers
spatter the windowpanes with their failed flight.
I want to describe how the leafed and needled dusk
crosses my lawn, though your manner now is brusque,
tinged with anger and exhaustion (which
I know too well myself). What good is a voice
when there's cooking and dishes, a dog to walk?
Yet these calls usually help. Sure, we might bitch
or pout, but just the other's background noise
is enough to soothe. Sometimes we sit and talk,
imagining one couch. This can't unravel.

In memory of Ray Dolby

for William Logan

He challenged noise and won,
rinsing the hiss from analog
recordings the way the sun,
on humid mornings, dissolves the fog.

Letter from Milan

Lombardian lessons

by Sean McGlynn

Milan is an impressive, if not especially attractive, city (by Italian standards, anyway). It is ostentatious about its wealth and conspicuous consumption, and its pecuniary pride is unquestionably reinforced by its even more striking cultural riches, housed in some of the world's finest museums: Correggio, Bellini, Caravaggio, and Raphael all seem to bestow an artistic blessing on Milan's cupidity, allowing for a more edifying channel of acquisitiveness. The presence of La Scala and the memory of Verdi, who lived and died here (the city's authorities famously placed straw on the road outside the room where he lay dying so as not to disturb him), allow for the harmonies of opera to act as a demulcent resonance against the noise of the cash registers.

And then there is, of course, Leonardo da Vinci. He also made Milan his home, for some two decades. His sublime *Last Supper* (ca. 1495–98) is to be found in one of the city's splendid ecclesiastical buildings, in this case the refectory of Santa Maria delle Grazie, where awed and hushed visitors are as quiet as the monks would have been at their repasts. Even that is not enough for avaricious Milan: the Pinacoteca Ambrosiana has, among its many priceless works, the largest collection of Leonardo's writings and drawings in the *Codex Atlanticus*, with folios on display, offering a profound intimacy.

Step outside any of these places of wonder and you are immediately immersed in the city's rampant and industrious commerce. The city may not be a Verona or Florence to look at,

but it shrugs off comparisons with its blatant projection of money. Has not its historical wealth enabled it to be such a leading patron of the arts? Behind all this lies a latent projection of hard power in Italy's second city. That power is solidified spiritually in the massive scale of the Duomo di Milano, the world's third-largest church, and practically in the vast fortifications of the Castello Sforzesco, an unambiguous statement of absolute might from the times of its Renaissance princes—the Sforzas—battling their way to authority from a mercenary background in the Italian wars.

But Milan's relationship to power is not simply a relic of the distant past. Visitors arriving at its train station, the largest in Italy, cannot fail to be impressed by its monumentalism, stemming from Mussolini's time. The station marks the ongoing importance of the city and its geographical position in Lombardy as both a transport hub and gateway to the country for would-be invaders and conquerors, of which there have been many. As such, Milan has found itself at the center of some key, but not always recognized, turning points in history.

The incursions have not all been sheer physical force, though. By the Edict of Milan in 313, the Roman emperor Constantine granted religious freedom to all his subjects, allowing "Christians and . . . everybody the free power to follow the religion of their choice." The edict permitted Christianity to flourish in both the western and eastern halves of the imperium; it eventually become the official religion

of the whole empire and, consequently, all of Europe—quite a moment.

How mischievous, then, to find in the city's private museum of Poldi Pezzoli a workshop version of arguably the most famous portrait of Luther, that by Lucas Cranach from *circa* 1529. Here is a depiction of the man who brought over a millennium of Catholic orthodoxy in Europe to an end. The look of satisfaction on his face suggests that he was aware of his impact even at this early stage of the Reformation, that great dividing line between the medieval and early modern worlds. To have Luther's eyes from a contemporary portrait peer into the viewer's own across the centuries creates another, this time highly personal, moment in Milan.

Luther, unlike earlier Germans, did not penetrate very far into sixteenth-century Milan or Italy. By that time, the age of German intervention was over (or at least until the mid-twentieth century). The designs of the Holy Roman emperor—the titular ruler of Germany—and especially of Frederick Barbarossa, had seen the sack of Milan in 1162, before the city and the Lombard League took revenge at the Battle of Legnano in 1176. By the end of the fifteenth century, it was the kingdoms of France and Spain that vied for superpower status, with Italian lands as their field of contest. Milan, the dominant power in northern Italy, was central to these struggles, having reached its apogee in the previous half century under the famous *condottiere* Francesco Sforza and his son Ludovico “il Moro” (on account of his dark complexion). They renovated the castle named for them, making it one of the great Renaissance courts; Leonardo shared the spectacular creative sphere there with Bramante.

French influence ended in 1525 at the small, neighboring (and prettier) city of Pavia, when the Valois monarch François I, at that point in control of Milan, was comprehensively defeated by the forces of Emperor Charles V (also King Charles I of Spain), which caught the French entirely by surprise. François was captured on the battlefield (in the tradition of French kings, which had become almost part of their job description), and, in a conse-

quential shift of the European power balance, Italy became dominated by Spain, Europe's unquestioned hegemon. This situation lasted for nearly two centuries, and the rich duchy of Milan became central to the running of the Habsburg Empire. The ramifications of the Battle of Pavia were felt across Europe and beyond, with Spain's reach spreading across much of the inhabited earth. As the imperial diplomat Lope di Soria wrote to his master, “God has granted us this wonderful victory, which has given Your Majesty absolute power to settle the affairs of Christendom and lay down the law throughout the world.”

Milan fell into a long period of stagnation under Spanish rule and rarely made its presence felt on the world stage for the next four centuries, with one exception being another, very belated, attempted French grab of Italy. In 1805 Napoleon, the formerly republican “Little Corporal,” elevated himself to the vertiginous, and temporary, height of King of Italy in Milan's cathedral. But Milan made up for its relative quietude a century later, witnessing the birthplace of fascism as a major political force in 1919, when the two hundred or so members of Benito Mussolini's newly formed *Fasci di Combattimento* congregated in the city's Piazza San Sepolcro. Three years later he was the prime minister of Italy, and then, in 1925, the country's dictator. A devastating new ideology had come to power in Europe, shaping the twentieth century with a savagery only equaled by its symbiotic sibling, communism. Milan had once again become an axis of power.

It was a long way from Milan in 313, but a short trip—around forty miles—to Lake Como, where Mussolini and his mistress Claretta Petacci fled near the end of World War II, leaving Milan on April 25, 1945, in a desperate attempt to reach Switzerland. And that was only after he had, in his fearful and febrile state, considered—and then thought better of—making Milan an Italian Stalingrad. The pair were caught and shot by partisans near the lake on April 28, 1945, an exquisitely beautiful place to die for such a squalid man. The buffoonish dictator met with a farcical end: his executioner, Walter Audisio, could not get either his machine gun or his

pistol to work; a fellow partisan handed over his French-made machine gun to get the job done. An eyewitness claimed that Mussolini's last words were: "Shoot me in the chest." If this was his usual vanity it did him little good: his last physical appearance was to be in Milan the next morning, strung upside down in the Piazzale Loreto. Lurid stories tell of his corpse being beaten and women urinating on him; other accounts relate how, with religious deference, flowers were scattered to mitigate the desecration of his body. He was buried anonymously in a graveyard just outside the city.

Forty years later, Milan played another central part in Europe's history, but this time altogether more surreptitiously, which suited a modern Milan where money rather than overt power is more visible. Arguably more emasculated than fortified by membership in the European Union and its great integration project, Italy is now reduced to pockets of wealth in the north, exemplified by the cities of Venice, Bologna, and Milan itself. Milan's exclusive designer shops may gratefully reflect the wealth that the metropolis can boast, but not so long ago the city was the venue for a defining yet barely known event of huge significance in the exercise of raw power in the shaping of modern Europe. Milan could still prove itself to be at the center of European events and even its destiny.

At the end of June 1985, the European Council of the European Economic Community (EEC) met for a conference of member leaders. Margaret Thatcher, François Mitterand, and Helmut Kohl were representing Britain, France, and Germany respectively. Italy being the host country, the chair was

taken by Bettino Craxi, the country's socialist prime minister. Even by the Olympian standards of corrupt Italian politics back then, Craxi, a son of Milan, was in a league of his own: the public would hurl coins at him to show their disgust, while pursuit by judges led him to flee the country for Tunisia, living off funds from bribes, extortion, and the plundering of taxpayers.

The meeting discussed how to forge the EEC into a fully-fledged European Union. For this to happen, an inconvenient intergovernmental conference was necessary. Of the ten countries represented, only Britain, Denmark, and Greece opposed the move, but by EEC rules this meant the policy was blocked. Craxi, as chair, circumvented protocol by ingenuously declaring that the intergovernmental conference was not needed; willfully distorting EEC rules behind a screen of contorted semantics, he bluffed that the matter was a "procedural" rather than a "substantive" issue, thereby obviating the need for a conference. He forced the matter to a vote, much to the outrage of the opposing countries, who were of course outnumbered. This may seem like a story of dry, technical detail, but, through underhand obfuscation and misuse of deliberately complex bureaucracy and procedure, Craxi and his allies paved the way for the formation of today's arachnidian European Union, which is an anti-democratic aspirational superstate with a malign influence on European affairs.

And where did all these machinations take place? In that intimidating seat of power, the Castello Sforzesco. Renaissance and Machiavellian skullduggery were still at play in late-twentieth-century Milan. The city's gravitational pull was, and is, still strong.

Propaganda & uglification

by *Anthony Daniels*

Sometimes I think (or is it feel?) that we are living in a propaganda state, not like that of North Korea, of course, in which the source of a univocal doctrine is clear and unmistakable, but one in which we are constantly under bombardment by an opinion-forming class that wants to make us believe, or be enthusiastic about, something to which we were previously indifferent or even hostile. There is no identifiable single source of the propaganda, and yet there seems also to be coordination: for how else to explain its sudden ubiquity? It is more Kafka than Orwell.

For example, quite recently there has been a concerted attempt to persuade the European public that women's football (soccer) is interesting and exciting. The newspapers and online publications suddenly carry stories about it, with pictures, reports, profiles, and the like, whereas, shortly before, most people were only vaguely aware that women even played football.

No one can object to their doing so, of course, but the fact remains that they are not very good at it, at least not by comparison with men. They may be good—but with *for women* always appended. It is not the fault of women that they are not very good at football, any more than it is the fault of fish that they are illiterate, but the fact that everyone pretends not to notice it and dares not say it, at least in public, is surely a little sinister. A man of seventy may still play a good game of tennis, but it is always for his age: one wouldn't expect him to win Wimbledon, nor would

one expect excited, breathless reports on an over-seventies' tennis tournament. The sudden interest in women's football thus has a bogus feel about it, like the simulated enthusiasm of a crowd for the dictator in a communist state.

Many examples of the phenomenon could be given. Ever since I first noticed the ascent of tattooing up the social scale, now a quarter century ago, I have collected books about it in desultory fashion, all of them laudatory of so-called body art. Over the years, as an ever-higher percentage of the population mutilates itself in this way, I have had to change my interpretation of the phenomenon. At first, I thought it was a typical example of intellectual and moral preening, as well as of condescension towards the insulted and injured—the torn jeans of the skin, as it were. Not so very long ago, it was predominantly the marginalized—prisoners and the like—who were tattooed. Therefore, those who were not themselves marginalized sought to identify themselves with those who were, imitation supposedly being the highest form of empathy, while hypocritically enjoying the advantages of non-marginalization.

Now that a third of adults in America are tattooed, this can no longer be the explanation, if it ever was. The desire for individuation and self-expression is the commonly accepted explanation, even by those who see tattooing as a triumphant advance in human freedom. At last, people are free to express themselves! At last, they can display to the world their innermost thoughts! At last,

they can actually *be* themselves! All this is frequently, and indeed repeatedly, intoned by the intellectual fellow travelers of the fashion for tattoos, very rarely it being noted that such individuation and self-expression—if that is what it is—is indicative of tragedy, not liberation. The almost universal intellectual laudation of the phenomenon demonstrates (to my mind) the sheeplike nature of modern intellectual life, intellectuals being followers rather than the leaders they suppose themselves to be. A hundred million Americans can't be wrong, or at any rate it would not be prudent to say so; praise be, then, to tattoos!

That professional tattooists have undoubtedly become highly skilled is everywhere taken as proof that they are artists, though skill is not the same as art; indeed, skill exercised for a worthless end is morally worse than incompetence. If I were a theist, which I am not, I would even say that skill exercised in this way is an insult to God's freely given gift. As it is, it simply appalls me.

At any rate, there seems to have been a concerted attempt to persuade us that what not long ago would have been considered degradation is actually human advance. And, incidentally, what goes for tattooing also goes for the graffiti that so disfigure urban spaces. (The two aesthetic sensibilities, those of tattooing and of modern urban graffiti, seem to me to have at least a family resemblance.) The many books about the phenomenon of tagging also consider it a liberation and a form of art, as if everywhere had suddenly become Renaissance Florence. Again, one detects a certain cowardice, or at least insincerity, in this.

But one attempt to persuade us of the great value of the hideous, the dysfunctional, and the bad that has particularly exercised me of late is a seemingly concerted effort by architects and architectural critics to persuade the public that the architectural style known as brutalism has merit and is not what it appears to most people to have been: a self-evidently destructive, ugly, inhuman aberration in the history of architecture.

As many know, brutalism derives its name from *béton brut*, the French name for raw concrete, and not from brutality, though it

is difficult to think of any architectural style more brutal than the brutalism. If you asked people to design deliberately brutal architecture, brutalism is what you would get.

I have a small library of picture books on the subject, all of them laudatory, though to most people the photographs in them would be sufficient evidence of the aesthetic catastrophe that brutalism inflicted on cities and their inhabitants everywhere it was tried. One is inclined to say, on looking at the photographs, *res ipsa loquitur*, but evidently this is not so. There is nothing so obvious that it cannot be denied.

My attitude to brutalism is like my attitude to snakes: I am horrified but fascinated. In the case of brutalism, the questions that run through my mind like a refrain are: How was this ever possible? Who allowed it and why? What cultural, social, educational, and psychological pathology accounts for it? When people claim to approve of it, even to love it, what is going through their minds? Do they see with their eyes, or through the lens of some bizarre and gimcrack abstractions?

Recently, like a masochist, I bought two picture books, *Brutalist Paris* and *Brutalist Italy*, by Nigel Green and Robin Wilson, and Roberto Conte and Stefano Parego, respectively, in part because I could scarcely believe my eyes.¹ The former had a text of some length, the latter only three pages, but, as one has come to expect from the writing of architects or architectural critics (Wilson is an architectural historian at a British school of architecture), length does not equate to greater enlightenment. The words are like a shifting fog though which meaning may occasionally be glimpsed, only to disappear again soon after.

What is particularly painful about these books, but also exceptionally instructive, is that both Paris and Italy are heirs to what may be the greatest architectural heritage in the world. The contrast, then—the complete ab-

¹ *Brutalist Paris: Post-War Brutalist Architecture in Paris and Environs*, by Nigel Greene and Robin Wilson; Blue Crow Media, 192 pages, \$30.

Brutalist Italy: Concrete Architecture from the Alps to the Mediterranean, by Roberto Conte and Stefano Parego; FUEL Publishing, 199 pages, \$34.95.

sence of taste and judgment—that these books illustrate beyond all possible refutation, when just around the corner, so to speak, there is a treasury of architectural genius, is all the more stark and terrible. One feels that this is not just architectural, but civilizational, collapse.

Yet the books are designed to impress and convert, or to appeal to “a new appetite for architectural form and photographic imagery,” as well as “for urban adventure.” What kind of urban adventure is suggested by Wilson’s account of his return to a housing project two years after he had first visited it:

I discovered Cité Rateau transformed by an obtrusive regime of gated access, which almost totally prevents the porosity of circulation from the street previously enjoyed. Moreover, some of the most complex sections of the inner parts of the undercroft are now entirely concealed by new, featureless, double-height walls.

One can almost smell emanating from the photographs the urine that must impregnate many of the ground-floor concrete walls, a kind of urological commentary on the efforts of the brutalist architects, who as often as not considered themselves as much constructors of a new world order as of mere buildings.

One could perhaps excuse the first architects who used raw concrete as an external material for buildings because the way in which it would deteriorate might not have been appreciated in advance of experience. But the deterioration was very rapid and indeed often set in before the building was finished. Experience made no difference to their practice, however: it is difficult not to conclude that the sheer inhuman ugliness of what resulted was not to be eschewed but embraced. It should have soon been obvious that trying to make a beautiful building from concrete was like trying to concoct a delicious dish from feces.

But beauty could not possibly have been one of the architects’ desiderata. The photograph of the building that graces (if that is quite the word) the cover of *Brutalist Italy*, the Casa del Portuale in Naples, is almost comically dreadful: it would be funny, if only it

did not actually exist. Naturally, its concrete is stained in the characteristic way of that material, as if sewage were seeping through it, but the jagged and inharmonious overall design—with unnecessary angles, curves, and juxtapositions—is redolent of psychosis. The whole acts upon the retina like a visual scouring pad. It is the worst among equals; it could, however, serve as a model for architects in training if they were given the task to design something yet worse, something uglier: *that* would take real imagination. Indeed, I rather doubt that it could be done.

Yet I repeat: these books do not set out to appall but to attract. I think part of the attraction (for those attracted) is the obvious connection of this architecture to totalitarianism, which many intellectuals long for, whether they admit it openly or not. In one of his lucid passages, Wilson tells us of brutalism:

Another vital part of the equation that contributed to the level of endeavour, innovation, and critique within the architecture of the period was the involvement of a potent, leftist politics in the urbanism of the 1960s and ’70s, and, indeed, the monetary power of the French Communist Party. Most importantly, this translated into local governance in the form of communist-led departments and municipalities of outer Paris . . . which reached a peak of communist control in the mid 1970s. . . . Many of the architects employed were themselves communist party members.

Wilson also mentions, without apparent discomfort or embarrassment, that some of the French architects were impressed and influenced by the Atlantic Wall, concrete block-houses and bunkers constructed by the Nazis to keep the Allies out.

Si monumentum requiris, circumspice—as you take the drive from Charles de Gaulle Airport into the City of Light. There may be uglier townscapes in the world, but not many.

Wilson’s commentary mentions aesthetics but never beauty. Of course, we get the usual praise of the material and the style as “honest”—in contradistinction to the mendacity of the Sainte-Chapelle, I suppose. We also get stuff like the following:

Within a purely architectural pursuit of the “as-found,” the apprehension and expression of the conditions of the building site, the moment of assembly is paramount: that is, the creation of a material expression at the intersection of labour and the medium of construction.

Verbiage is designed to disguise the most patent truth, namely that the only way to improve these buildings is by demolition:

It would seem that, in this post-war era, achieving the effect of a clear separation from the ground is no longer symbolically viable, but that now a new symbolic activation of the ground plane takes hold. In contrast to the cellular accommodation block above, the irregular vessel of communal space is a searching exploratory form, as if uncertain of its own limits.

The utter indifference, even outright hostility, to beauty is endemic in modern architec-

tural criticism. Here is Oliver Wainwright, *The Guardian*'s influential architecture and design critic, on the late Sir Roger Scruton's campaign to restore beauty as an important quality of architecture:

the *Building Better, Building Beautiful Commission* . . . headed up by the late aesthetic philosopher Roger Scruton . . . focuses on the outward appearance of buildings at the expense of much more crucial issues. Our mental and physical health depends less on being titillated by the design of a façade than by being able to live and work in adequately sized spaces with decent ceiling heights, ample daylight, good ventilation and thermal insulation.

Here technocracy finds its purest voice: it knows what is good for us, and if we don't get what we like, we must learn to like what we get. Such is the function of architectural criticism, and of the propaganda state in which we now live.

The prudence of Penelope Fitzgerald

by Richard Tillinghast

Penelope Fitzgerald was born in 1916 into a distinguished family of Church of England clergy, thinkers, writers, and editors characterized by what her biographer, Hermione Lee, calls “alarming honesty, caustic wit, shyness, moral rigour, willpower, oddness, and powerful banked-down feelings.” She got off to a brilliant start in life, seemingly with every advantage. At Somerville College, Oxford, the papers she wrote so impressed her finals examiners that one of the dons asked to keep them and had them bound in vellum. After university, she established herself as a literary journalist, wrote for the *TLS* and *Punch* (whose editor was her father, E. V. Knox), worked at the BBC during the war, and with her husband Desmond, a barrister, edited a magazine called *World Review*. But by her forties things had gone badly wrong and she found herself mired in poverty with three children to raise. Her husband’s self-confidence had been shattered by combat in North Africa during the war; he turned to drink, was disbarred, and lost his ability to cope.

In 1977, when she was sixty, she published her first novel, *The Golden Child*, a murder mystery written to entertain Desmond while he was dying. She described herself as “an old writer who has never been a young one.” Her work, she said, focused on “the courage of those who are born to be defeated, the weaknesses of the strong, and the tragedy of misunderstandings and missed opportunities which I have done my best to treat as comedy, for otherwise how can we manage to bear it?” I am not the first to write about Penelope Fitzgerald

for *The New Criterion*; I can particularly recommend two articles published in 2000, the year of her death: an eloquent unsigned obituary, and “Between head & heart: Penelope Fitzgerald’s novels” by Tess Lewis.

Her early novels, including *The Bookshop* (1978), *Offshore* (1979), and *Human Voices* (1980), were drawn from her own experience: in addition to working at the BBC, she had helped run a bookshop and had lived on a leaky houseboat moored on the Thames which sank not once but twice. But her imagination took flight when she turned to other times and other settings, producing several historical novels that established her uniqueness. My two favorites are *The Beginning of Spring* (1988), set in Russia just before the revolution, and her last book, *The Blue Flower* (1995), set in Germany during the early Romantic period. “She likes to set her books on the cusp of change,” Lee writes. What is both charming and brilliant is how the author portrays, in the first of these novels, centuries-old Russian civilization and the stirrings of dissatisfaction with it, and in the other, wild flights of Romantic fancy arising within a society that feels curiously medieval. These currents form a background that hovers somewhere around the edges of the novels’ plots, affecting the characters subtly and interestingly but never intruding as the center of attention. For example, in Grüningen, Switzerland, where some of the action of *The Blue Flower* takes place, “mention of the goings-on of the French caused no distress. When George appeared in a tricolour waistcoat there was not even a murmur of surprise.”

In addition to her novels, Fitzgerald wrote three biographies: the first one in 1975 about the Pre-Raphaelite artist Edward Burne-Jones; second, *The Knox Brothers* (1977), a group biography of her father and his brothers; and lastly *Charlotte Mew and Her Friends* (1984), an account of the eccentric late Victorian poet and her circle. The best-known of the Knoxes may have been Fitzgerald's uncle Ronald, an Anglican priest, a translator of the Bible, and a friend of G. K. Chesterton's who became, like Chesterton, a convert to Roman Catholicism. He was also the author of detective novels and the subject of a biography by Evelyn Waugh. The distinction Fitzgerald draws between fiction and biography is illuminating: "On the whole, I think, you should write biographies of those you admire and respect," she said, "and novels about human beings who you think are sadly mistaken."

This remark casts an interesting light on the characters in her novels. Frank Reid in *The Beginning of Spring*, an engaging middle-aged Englishman living in Moscow, is adept at running a successful printing business and navigating the complex network of relationships, customs, and unspoken understandings that underlie life in tsarist Russia, but his understanding of people, women in particular, is limited. Lee describes him as "one of her bewildered, likeable men, who is trying to do the right thing under puzzling circumstances." Young Fritz von Hardenberg in *The Blue Flower*—who in real life later wrote, under the name Novalis, the visionary novel *Heinrich von Ofterdingen* (1802), a seminal work of German Romanticism—is supremely self-confident and charming but strikingly oblivious to the feelings of others. Frank, whose English wife Nellie leaves him unexpectedly, becomes smitten with a Russian woman, Lisa Ivanovna, whom he has brought into his house to look after his children. And Fritz falls in love, after knowing her for fifteen minutes, with Sophie, a twelve-year-old girl whom everyone else thinks of as quite ordinary. Bringing up the subject of the transmigration of the soul, Fritz asks her,

"Should you like to be born again?"

Sophie considered a little. "Yes, if I could have fair hair."

Fitzgerald's novels can be read as comedies of manners with resemblances to Jane Austen's books. Certainly she would have ratified Puck's assertion, "What fools these mortals be." The novels' minor characters are real, fully fleshed-out people, not types or instruments of the plot. Fritz's mother, the Freifrau Auguste, responding to her daughter Sidonie's suggestion that there should be a chair in a guest's room so he would have a place to put his clothes at night, replies,

"His clothes! It is still too cold to undress at night. I have not undressed myself at night, even in summer, for I think twelve years." "And yet you've given birth to eight of us!" cried Sidonie.

A running source of amusement in *The Beginning of Spring* is Frank's English assistant at the press, Selwyn Crane, a disciple of Tolstoy who, "ascetic, kindly smiling, earnestly questioning, not quite sane-looking, seemed to have let himself waste away, from other-worldliness, almost to transparency." He comes over, uninvited, to console Frank after Nellie has left him. "My dear fellow, here I am. After such news, I couldn't leave you by yourself." Frank replies drily, "That's what I would have preferred, though." Selwyn writes poetry in Russian, and Frank's press is publishing a volume of it called *Birch Tree Thoughts*, a title that makes me laugh every time I think about it. "Selwyn pronounced his title, as always, in a different and sadder tone, which in England would be reserved for religious subjects."

Any reader of Fitzgerald's historical novels, with their precise evocations of vanished times in cultures remote from her own, is bound to wonder how she could know so much about, say, the life of a commercial printer in prerevolutionary Russia or intellectual controversies in eighteenth-century Germany. Though she had studied Russian and visited Moscow, the novelist's main sources for *The Beginning of Spring*—or so she wrote in a letter to Penelope Lively—were the 1914 Baedeker guide to Russia and the Russian supplements of *The Times*. The first sentence of *The Beginning of Spring* is "In 1913 the journey from Moscow to Charing Cross,

changing at Warsaw, cost fourteen pounds, six shillings and threepence and took two and a half days.” There you go. She kicks off *The Blue Flower* with the same matter-of-fact surehandedness: “Jacob Dietmahler was not such a fool that he could not see that they had arrived at his friend’s home on the washday.” She doesn’t have to try to win you over—as soon as you read a paragraph or two, you’re already on board. As a result, the books, as the novelist Julian Barnes puts it, “feel like novels which just happen to be set in history, and which we enter on equal terms with the characters we find within them.”

When she wrote her novel about Russia, it quite naturally became a Russian novel. Everything has a Russian flavor, even taking a taxi:

Frank . . . walked some way down Lipka Street to find a sledge with a driver who was starting work, and not returning from the night’s work drunk, half-drunk, stale drunk, or *podvipevchye*—with just a dear little touch of drunkenness.

In answer to Frank’s question about why he lives alone in Moscow,

the driver replied that women were only company for each other. They were created for each other, and talked to each other all day. At night they were too tired to be of any use.

“But we weren’t meant to live alone,” said Frank.

“Life makes its own corrections,” replies the driver. I don’t think people talk that way in most novels from the Anglo-Saxon world.

Late medieval Germany and Russia up to World War I both had room for the experience of spiritual occurrences for which there is no place in our modern rationalist understanding. Fritz von Hardenberg, walking in the graveyard in Weißenfels near his home, sees

a young man, still almost a boy . . . standing in the half-darkness, with his head bent, himself as white, still, and speechless as a memorial. The sight was consoling to Fritz, who knew that the young man, although living, was not

human, but also that at the moment there was no boundary between them.

Frank Reid’s daughter Dolly, staying at the Reids’ dacha with her temporary governess, Lisa Ivanovna, wakes up in the middle of the night, walks out onto the porch, and finds Lisa about to walk into the forest. Lisa takes her along, walking through the leafy half-darkness, when Dolly

began to see on each side of her, among the thronging stems of the birch trees, what looked like human hands, moving to touch each other across the whiteness and blackness. “Lisa,” she called out. “I can see hands.”

What is going on here has been explained in various ways by commentators on Fitzgerald’s work. Is Lisa secretly the head of some cult or revolutionary group? The working notes Fitzgerald made for herself even seem to suggest that interpretation. But in the novel as she actually wrote it, this isn’t at all clear. Lisa addresses them:

I have come, but I can’t stay . . . You came, all of you, as far as this on my account. . . . As you see, I’ve had to bring this child with me. If she speaks about this, she won’t be believed. If she remembers it, she’ll understand in time what she’s seen.

The political explanation makes sense, but at the same time these presences seem to be as much creatures of the forest as the birch trees and their leaves.

That we don’t quite know who these creatures are, that we don’t know exactly what Lisa is up to, that we never quite understand why Frank’s wife has left him—there are many things not completely explained in the book. The same indeterminacy applies to *The Blue Flower* and to Fitzgerald’s other books as well. The hyperreality of her precisely rendered settings and practical details of daily life form a solid backdrop. Character, motivation, and the meaning of events tend to be left unexplained. It’s a very appealing quality, since the same indeterminacy and ambiguity prevails in our own lives.

Theater

Not yet dead

by Kyle Smith

Shamelessly recreating the talk around my seventh-grade lunch table—thanks to the efforts of my pals and me, “It’s just a flesh wound!” entered the language—*Monty Python’s Spamalot* (now playing at the St. James Theatre) is a bouncy, cheesy, glitzy, altogether lovable revival of the 2005 show, which in turn adapted the 1975 midnight movie *Monty Python and the Holy Grail*. Restaging all of the movie’s funniest scenes, with hunks of dialogue taken verbatim (I know this because I memorized the screenplay as a boy), the stage version is a highlight of a young Broadway season that is taking more and more breaks from didactic identity politics and slowly emerging from this decade of cultural mental lockdown.

Essentially a stage celebration of all things Monty Python, the revival of *Spamalot* comes to us from the Kennedy Center, where it played on a trial run last spring. This brings to one the number of good things that have occurred in Washington this decade. In A.D. 932, Arthur (James Monroe Iglehart), unregally getting around on a pretend horse while his servant Patsy (Christopher Fitzgerald) knocks coconuts together, goes on a search for the grail that will bring him in contact with some of Python’s funniest characters, notably Tim the Enchanter, the leader of the Knights Who Say Ni, and the French Taunter, all of whom are played by *Saturday Night Live*’s Taran Killam in one of the stage’s most laugh-dense acting turns. Both Arthur and Sir Galahad, otherwise known as “Dennis” (Nik Walker), are played by black actors, which yields a fresh opportu-

nity for an unexpectedly good-humored race joke. As in the original movie, the French Taunter (“I unclog my nose at you!”) who claims to be keeping the grail behind his fortress walls refers to the Round Table lads as “filthy English kuh-niggots,” which the black actors take to be a slur. It’s merely the Frenchman’s mispronunciation of “knights,” though, and the double-take earns a cheerful laugh. High spirits all around; no need for anyone to file a complaint to the nearest DEI officer.

Eric Idle, who learned about musical composition from his friend George Harrison, and his writing partner John du Prez—whose association with Python goes all the way back to 1979’s *Life of Brian* (which Harrison personally financed)—have fashioned a brisk two-hour-and-twenty-minute show (including intermission) by padding out the grail story with bits and pieces from other Python routines, such as the opening Michael Palin tune “Fisch Schlapping Song (Finland)” from the troupe’s 1980 *Contractual Obligation Album* (the number, full of Scandinavian joviality, ends abruptly when someone reminds us that we’re supposed to be in England). The showstopper is “Always Look on the Bright Side of Life,” the song that taught us all to keep our chins up in the event of crucifixion, from *Life of Brian*. The original numbers are little more than ditties to provide a canvas for the jokey lyrics, but *in situ*, combined with the roaring good cheer of the cast, they function nicely.

“He Is Not Dead Yet,” sung by a chorus of corpses loaded onto a wagon after being

knocked off by plague, is a spiffy singalong, the mock-ballad “The Song That Goes Like This” (heard twice) is sly and polished, and the jolly “Find Your Grail” (also played twice) contains useful advice to get a purpose in life. All recapture the spirit of childlike glee that attracted me and my grade-school friends. Josh Rhodes, the director and choreographer, devises a series of lively dances and engineers some fresh jokes (there’s a reference to the bounced congressman George Santos that, although it doesn’t quite work, at least is current, as is an Ozempic punch line). The actors, especially Leslie Rodriguez Kritzer as the spotlight-chasing Lady of the Lake (numbers include “The Diva’s Lament,” in which she sings about not having a big enough part), have been instructed to play everything like Excalibur in the stone: to the hilt.

As if to remind us that New York is roughly halfway between England and Las Vegas, the show includes plenty of self-consciously flashy staging, such as pretty chorus girls in glittering bikinis (Broadway’s recent obsession with larding up the chorus with candidates for an Ozempic prescription appears to be fading out) and a very Vegas improvised break when Kritzer does a brief stand-up comedy act in which the riffs leave her fellow actors struggling not to break character and laugh along with the audience. I have only one word of caution to theatergoers: don’t choose seat C101, unless you wish to be part of the show.

Those who have a strong preference for tidiness over disorder would have been well advised to pop an Ativan before settling in for the Roundabout Theatre Company’s world premiere of *I Need That* (which closed December 30 at the American Airlines Theatre). Danny DeVito plays an old codger in New Jersey living amid what might as well be the contents of several Salvation Army stores that got swept up in a cyclone and had their contents funneled into a single living room. Clothes, magazines, books, and a thousand other types of bric-à-brac jostle each other for supremacy on every inch of the stage. For sheer quantity of items, Alexander Dodge’s set design must shatter some kind of record. If a junkyard can be spectacular, Dodge has made it so.

That’s the only memorable element of this insistently mediocre comic play, however. Theresa Rebeck, a longtime television writer (her credits include *NYPD Blue* and *Smash*, which she created and from which she was fired after a year), stands as the most-produced on-Broadway female playwright of this century, and yet if a drama student delivered this play to his professor, a reasonable response would be, “You’ve got potential, keep going,” rather than “I’m in awe. This is a finished work that deserves to be staged at the highest levels.” Producing it at all, much less on Broadway, where new straight plays are scarce, was a baffling choice. The director Moritz von Stuelpnagel does his best with it, but, like many nonprofits, the Roundabout seems to have a less than tenacious grasp of quality.

DeVito, who was superb in a small role on the same stage a few years ago in the 2017 revival of Arthur Miller’s *The Price*, is, as ever, disarming and cute as the widower Sam, who when the curtain rises seems himself a hunk of junk, hidden under a blanket in a room so stuffed with stuff that there is nowhere for a visitor to sit. He is so loath to part with possessions that he even has a bottle cap that’s more than sixty years old. “That’s worth somethin’!” is a frequent comment about his hoarded items to his friend and neighbor Foster (Ray Anthony Thomas), who drops by for the occasional visit with a croissant but is mainly present as an audience surrogate, to give Sam a means of explaining himself. Amelia—Sam’s exasperated daughter, who is competently played by DeVito’s forty-year-old actual daughter Lucy—also visits, to inform her father that things are on the verge of a crisis. Thanks to a nosy neighbor, authorities have been alerted to how Sam lives (that he hasn’t had the grass cut in eight months has also raised eyebrows). So he has only days to clear up the premises lest his home be condemned as unsafe by the fire department, which could force him out of his nest, presumably with the vast majority of his possessions thrown out anyway. In short, the situation is a mess.

Ah, but Sam’s detritus is his collective memory as he enters the final stage of existence. He has a set of board games from his

youth, which he shared with seven siblings. Sorry! and Monopoly preserve his link with them, and with his early years. He tells a story about an engagement ring he found while calling bingo games in a church hall sixty-odd years ago. An electric guitar leads to fond, touching recollections of a soldier Sam once knew who committed suicide and left behind the instrument, autographed by Link Wray (a rocker whose single “Rumble,” a hit in 1958, is sampled in the play). A stack of books? Those belonged to his beloved wife, Ginny, who lost her mind and died years ago. In short, throwing away anything would be throwing away a piece of himself. Rebeck goes so far as to insert a few late lines of dialogue to spell out this theme, which is clear enough without being expressly stated. Even at a single act of an hour and forty-five minutes, the play seems overstretched and tedious. All it really has going for it, besides the set, is the effort DeVito makes to wring comic value out of thin air with his line readings (he makes a feast out of the word “Cleveland,” a city that escapes his admiration, and which he insists even sounds unattractive). The point that Sam’s possessions are his memories does very little to create a dramatic structure and seems obvious anyway. In an especially wan attempt to manufacture significance, Rebeck has characters say “This is America!” every fifteen minutes or so, as if our culture’s supposed materialism is the true villain. Are there no pack rats in Russia, or China? Apparently living in a junkyard is the fault of (American) capitalism, which famously produces lots of stuff, though capitalism is also blamed for producing disposable stuff and the lack of ability to dispose of things is Sam’s chief problem. Rebeck doesn’t delve into the idea to any depth, however, possibly because she senses that it doesn’t lead anywhere interesting, and for that I’m grateful.

In need of something like a plot twist, Rebeck tosses in a couple of late, contrived machinations that reveal Sam’s daughter as more like the old man than she appears—which is completely wrong for the character—and create the potential for a fresh beginning for Sam, which at his age seems unlikely. (DeVito is seventy-nine, and looks it. How many

near-octogenarians are receptive to the idea of rebooting their lives?) The play lurches to a surprise ending.

Did I mention that Rebeck, who is sixty-five, is the most-produced female playwright of the century, at least on Broadway? Her previous credits include *Bernhardt/Hamlet* (2018), *Dead Accounts* (2012), *Seminar* (2011), and *Mauritius* (2007). Never heard of any of them? There might be a reason for that.

Can an entire musical be assembled from the kinds of inspirational sayings associated with throw pillows and kitchen magnets? Michael John LaChiusa gives it a try with *The Gardens of Anuncia* (which was at the Mitzi Newhouse Theater at Lincoln Center through December 31), an almost mesmerizingly bland tribute to an elderly friend of his. Graciela Daniele is an eighty-four-year-old Argentina-born Broadway figure who made her name as the choreographer of such productions as *The Pirates of Penzance* (1981) and *The Mystery of Edwin Drood* (1985) before moving on to directing, among others, a 1999 revival of *Annie Get Your Gun*. LaChiusa, who wrote the book, music, and lyrics for this effort as well as for a long string of forgotten musicals—*Hello Again* (1994), *Marie Christine* (1999), *The Wild Party* (2000; book cowritten by George C. Wolfe)—became friends with Daniele when she directed some of his work for Lincoln Center, where she was director-in-residence in the 1990s. LaChiusa imbibed her stories about growing up in Peronist Buenos Aires without a father but with a loving mother, aunt, and grandmother. LaChiusa is at his best as a composer; by far the best aspect is the show’s score, which as played by a small orchestra isn’t particularly memorable but is pleasing enough, built on a foundation of woodwinds.

As for the story and the lyrics, they seem more like warm tributes to a friend that should have been presented privately rather than wheeled out for public consumption at Lincoln Center. It seems almost impossible that Daniele could be as uninteresting in real life as she is in this well-meaning but pillowy-soft show, which presents her analogue Anuncia as both a wide-eyed teen girl (Kaly West) who

takes up ballet because her mother thinks it will correct her flat feet and as a proud grande dame (Priscilla Lopez) sorting through her memories decades later as she prepares to accept a lifetime-achievement award at the very end of a long career. The garden where she tends her vegetables is, perhaps, LaChiusa's idea of an interesting metaphor for how she has nurtured and cultivated others. Or possibly it indicates the way she cultivates the stories of her life. "Funny how memories pop up randomly," notes Older Anuncia. Creatively speaking, this is fairly stony ground.

The Gardens of Anuncia, which takes place on a stage so sparsely furnished that a deathbed scene actually occurs on a deathbench, is a series of vignettes presenting the people close to Anuncia, broken up by occasional glancing references to the evils of Peronism (at least this is morally correct) and clichés about the alleged miseries of being female. "We live in the fatherland, not the motherland," someone points out. I'm not sure who said it; the three older women are all uniformly wise, spunky, tough, and loving, while Younger Anuncia is so innocent, yearning, passive, and dull that West more or less maintains the same vapid expression throughout, not that the script ever hints that she should be doing anything else. Anuncia's Granmama (Mary Testa) complains about the shortcomings of her estranged husband, a sailor (Enrique Acevedo) who'd "come home with stupid stories of the sea . . .

I hated how he smelled and how he chewed his food." He seems like a reasonably likable fellow, though, calling into question whether Granmama is more of a bitter old scold than an entertainingly uninhibited proto-feminist. Mami (Eden Espinosa) is tight-lipped about Anuncia's father, a cad and a gambler whom we hear about only at the end of the show. At one point Mami was imprisoned for three months on suspicion of working for the anti-Peronists, though this political angle leads nowhere and we don't even learn whether her antagonists were correct in believing she was part of a subversive plot. Anuncia's kindly Tía (Andréa Burns), meanwhile, is on hand to give less than scintillating life advice such as "Listen to the Music" ("listen to the music, try to see the colors . . . listen to the music, listen to your feelings").

To pad out a low-energy and aimless show—which was directed and co-choreographed by its subject, Daniele herself—Older Anuncia recalls whimsical conversations with a free-spirited deer and, after the deer gets killed for wandering onto a highway, with the deer's cynical and dejected brother (both played by Tally Sessions, who has the finest voice in the cast). The cheery deer sings, "Dance while you can," while the morose one, before delivering a less joyous reprise, wonders what the point of living is. To avoid mediocre shows, perhaps? At least this one, running only ninety minutes, is brief.

Art

Studio album

by Karen Wilkin

The 2017 Biennial at the Whitney Museum of American Art was, I recall, a contentious affair. It included a controversial virtual-reality snuff film, which I never saw because of squeamishness as well as the long waits to put on a headset. There was a lot of very noisy handheld video, which I also missed because handheld camera makes me queasy. The most ferociously discussed inclusion was Dana Schutz's improvisation on a photograph of the young lynching victim Emmett Till, a painting more memorable for the vitriol it provoked than for its aesthetic merits. According to the protesters denouncing Schutz and the painting, artists may only make work derived from their own ethnicity and history, a contention that essentially wipes out all of Western art. (Schutz's defense, that as a mother she identified with Till's mother's pain, didn't help; why didn't she say she was horrified by his death and wanted to honor his memory? But that's another matter.) I've forgotten just about everything else in this raucous exhibition, but one group of works remains vivid: Henry Taylor's paintings, especially *The Times They Aint A Changing, Fast Enough!* (2017, Whitney Museum of American Art), an eight-foot-wide canvas that places us inside the car in which Minnesota police shot and killed Philandro Castile during a routine traffic stop. The head and shoulders of the young black victim, an open eye staring, fill the lower part of the canvas, pressed down by a row of blunt window shapes signaling "car interior." A schematically rendered white

hand clutching a gun intrudes from the upper left. The black-green-ochre palette recalls, without imitating, the colors of the African National Congress flag.

This fierce, economically constructed painting is once again a high point of an exhibition at the Whitney, this time in "Henry Taylor: B Side," a retrospective organized by the Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles, where it was seen last year.¹ Curated by MOCA's senior curator Bennett Simpson, "B Side" was installed at the Whitney by the museum's curator Barbara Haskell. Arranged thematically, the show includes early portrait drawings from the late 1980s and early 1990s, made when Taylor, a late bloomer born in Oxnard, California, in 1958, was a psychiatric technician at a California mental hospital. It culminates with an uninhibited, vaguely autobiographical wall drawing made specially for the Whitney iteration of the show. The main body of the exhibition consists of paintings from between 1992 and 2022, plus enigmatic "painted objects," sculptures constructed from unlikely elements, and an installation honoring the Black Panthers. Despite the ironic connotation of the title's "B Side"—the less desirable songs on the record—there's nothing second-best about

1 "Henry Taylor: B Side" opened at the Whitney Museum of American Art, New York, on October 4, 2023, and remains on view through January 28, 2024. It was previously seen at the Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles (November 6, 2022–April 30, 2023).

the tough, exhilarating works on view. On canvas, Taylor has a consistently vigorous, expressive touch. The “painted objects”—a miscellany of small, recycled cardboard boxes with unpredictable images—are quirky and engaging. (The sculptures, mainly large assemblages, are more familiar and less rewarding.) The mood and affect of the included works range from ineffable tenderness to bitter anger. The paintings present us with portraits of the artist’s family, friends, and neighbors as well as celebrations of his heroes in the worlds of the arts, sports, and politics, an eclectic group including Jackie Robinson, Barack and Michelle Obama, Martin Luther King Jr., Steve Cannon (the blind cultural impresario of downtown New York), and the artist David Hammons. Taylor’s people, even when relaxed, can seem watchful, a little suspicious. Occasionally words drift across; like the frequently oblique titles, they reinforce or challenge the implied narrative, making us question our responses to what we are seeing.

Throughout, even in works that appear benign at first encounter, Taylor manifests his rage against the persistent inequities of American society. He has spoken about finding provocation for works in both personal experience and in larger events, including those reported in the news, such as the Philandro Castile incident—the latter category termed in the Whitney installation “History Paintings.” We’re sometimes made uncomfortable, not so much by the nominal subject as by how Taylor has embodied that subject. In the painting about Philandro Castile, the vantage point crams the viewer into the car as the killing takes place. Or is that the corpse of the slain man? Yet whatever other thoughts are stimulated, we are also invariably engaged by energetic brushwork, forthright structure, intense color, and a range of sumptuous brown skin tones.

There’s almost always something—light, space, a fleeting or not-so-fleeting reference—that reminds us that Taylor is a California painter, more specifically a Los Angeles painter. It’s never as obvious as David Hockney’s palm trees, but it’s there nonetheless. Take, for example, an untitled painting made in

2022, in which a terrifyingly low plane hovers over a wide street punctuated by street signs and expedient infrastructure, or *Too Sweet* (2016, Museum of Modern Art), based on a roadside panhandler Taylor encountered. In the latter painting, a bearded man with untended hair holds a wordless sign, elegantly poised against a pale blue sky, a streetlight, and a complicated utility pole; his delicately rendered hand gesture seems echoed by the slender elements of the street furniture. The original sign, we learn, said “Anything helps.” Taylor’s deletion of the words allows the image to be more abstract and open to speculation. The “California-ness” of *Too Sweet* is anticipated by *Fatty* (2006, collection of R. Blumenthal), like *Too Sweet* a half-length “portrait” in an outdoor urban setting. A hefty man, one eye inexplicably obliterated by a strip of blue masking tape, stands in front of a row of low buildings; a large pink rose floats overhead.

Taylor’s paintings about his family are particularly resonant, full of affectionately observed details. A group about his mother includes *the dress ain’t me* (2011, private collection), an arresting imagined portrait of her as a young girl. Hair elaborately arranged, she faces us in a room full of furniture. A woman in bedroom slippers is beside her, almost subsumed by the surroundings. Taylor’s mother’s white dress floats against the ochres and browns of the painting, echoed by her gleaming eyes. The title adds an unexpected layer of discontent to an image that, at first acquaintance, seems to commemorate a cheerful rite of passage of some kind. A very different mood is encapsulated by an untitled work from 2022, in which an attentive father leans in beside a toddler in a highchair, absorbed by her meal. The scattered bright green peas on her pink plate generate a rhyme with the leaves of a distant tree and some essential but mysterious small green circles at the bottom of the canvas, which, in turn, flirt with the pale toenails of the seated man’s bare foot.

Among the most potent and vaguely discomfiting of the family pictures is *The Love of Cousin Tip* (2017, collection of the artist and Hauser & Wirth, Los Angeles). A man,

a woman, three children, and a Siamese cat stand on a porch, embedded in the geometry of the architecture. A horse, a tribute to the protagonist's profession as a horse breeder, is barely visible in a narrow slice of landscape. The woman embraces two little girls protectively. The man's expression makes us keep our distance: we are not welcome. The fortuitous coexistence of "Henry Taylor: B Side" at the Whitney and "Manet/Degas" at the Met allowed for seeing, within a short period, both *Cousin Tip* and Edgar Degas' *Family Portrait (The Bellelli Family)* (1858–69, Musée d'Orsay), a similar psychologically loaded group of adults and children in an emphatically geometric setting. I doubt that Taylor was thinking about Degas's portrait, but the opportunity to compare the two works, both with elusive suggested narratives, was fascinating.

An even more complex meditation on the black family, *Resting* (2011, collection of Martin and Rebecca Eisenberg), confronts us with a young couple relaxing on a sofa. Strangely positioned behind them, a massive third figure seems to sleep, broad back towards us. We begin to examine the delicately painted details: a spray of white lilies, a page of photographs, the young woman's pink sweatshirt emblazoned CALIFORNIA. When we turn our attention to the view out the window behind figures, we are startled to discover the wall of a prison stretching the full width of the painting, with the terrifying message WARNING SHOTS NOT REQUIRED painted on it. The relaxed calm of *Resting* is transformed by this allusion to law, punishment, and incarceration. We encounter the message again in the immense *Warning Shots Not Required* (2011, Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles), described as a "social allegory" centered on Stanley "Tookie" Williams, the founder of the Los Angeles street gang the Crips who was convicted of four counts of murder, incarcerated for twenty-four years and, despite having become an advocate for anti-gang education, finally executed. An image of Williams, based on a photo, looms in the center of the twenty-foot canvas, outside the prison wall. He is surrounded by heads, other figures, and arcane symbols. A horse enters from the right, read

variously as an emblem of freedom and as an allusion to Taylor's horse-trainer grandfather, who was ambushed and killed in Texas. WARNING SHOTS NOT REQUIRED, uppercase and large, is inscribed on top of Williams's image.

Unlike many black painters attracting attention at the moment, Taylor plainly loves his medium, reveling in the responsiveness of paint to the movement of his hand. His images are brushy and fairly loose, with crisp edges played against ragged ones for maximum expressive effect. He activates the entire surface of his compositions, often through enriching details that suggest space, add specificity, or reinforce a subtext. This approach is very different from that of colleagues such as Kehinde Wylie and Amy Sherald who, seemingly following the example of Barkley L. Hendricks (more than a generation their senior), isolate sleekly painted, often frontal figures against neutral or patterned grounds. Taylor's untitled 2021 self-portrait in profile, based on a late-sixteenth-century portrait of Henry V that he saw on a visit to the National Portrait Gallery, London, is an exception to his usual method. He sets a head against an elaborately patterned golden brocade derived from the source. A nod to Wylie? Taylor's enthusiasm for subtly varied, lush brown skin tones is also noteworthy, since it separates him from both his contemporary Kerry James Marshall and the younger Sherald. The uninflected, bottomless black Marshall uses for skin in many of his most powerful works is an aesthetic choice and a potent metaphor for the idea that black people are unseen. I'm not sure what Sherald's relentless gray, which makes most of her figures look embalmed, is intended to mean; it doesn't convince me, visually. Like Marshall's blacks, Taylor's sumptuous browns, usually dark and rich, but different from painting to painting and figure to figure, function as both narrative and aesthetic decision, along the rest of his usually full-throttle, saturated palette.

The handsome catalogue that accompanies "Henry Taylor: B Side," produced by the Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles, doesn't entirely correspond to the

Whitney’s version of the exhibition but reproduces many of the most significant works included in New York, as well as others not seen there. It includes an informative interview with Taylor, plus essays and entries by the exhibition curator, artists, poets, and the director of a nonprofit art space in Los Angeles. Cumulatively, the texts point up many of Taylor’s allusions and the context that provoked them. Yet while we may miss some of the specific connections in these complex works, the paintings speak eloquently on their own. You didn’t have to know the Philandro Castile story to be stopped in your tracks by Taylor’s painting in the 2017 Biennial. You still don’t.

Exhibition notes

“Frans Hals”

The National Gallery, London.

September 30, 2023–January 21, 2024

Frans Hals (1582–1666) is often at the mercy of a value judgment that places him below Vermeer and Rembrandt. Yet he is an emblematic figure of the seventeenth-century Dutch Republic and its cultural flowering or “Golden Age.” Despite his current renown—and the celebrated status Hals achieved as a master painter during his lifetime—many details of his life remain obscure: his date of birth, his movements and those of his family, his artistic training, as well as the reasons for his protracted money woes.

That Hals was a man of Haarlem is, however, certain, and he remained closely associated with the city throughout his life. A consummate portraitist, he rarely signed his pictures, and it is not thought any works on paper or written documents in his own hand still exist. Hals’s commission records are also scarce: he continues to divide scholars on how many paintings he made and their dates, with the estimate of his works ranging from about a hundred to more than three hundred.

“Frans Hals,” the sweeping monographic exhibition now on view at London’s National Gallery, is the first of its scale in over thirty

years, with subjects encompassing Haarlem’s elite and well-to-do, as well as anonymous drinkers and Caravaggesque boys. Of Hals’s known existing works, most are pure portraits, while the rest are group portraits and portrait-style genre works. Many of the faces here are mischievous, others pensive or severe.

Whatever the troubles within Hals’s personal life and the impact of contemporary Dutch society upon him, many of the pieces in this exhibition make clear that, in his art, humor often wins out. Hals was comfortable with weaving the comic into his subjects, whether or not he was indicating a moral lesson. In the first room hangs the portrait of Pieter Cornelisz van der Morsch (1616), who poses with a faint smile and an assortment of fish and straw. Words next to him read “WIE BEGEERT,” or “who desires?” Van der Morsch helped form an amateur dramatic and literary society and was known for playing “Piero,” the fool with acerbic wit. He is pictured here looking towards the viewer in the act of handing out a kipper; that is, he is here to reveal someone’s faults while setting him straight through ridicule.

Hals never visited Italy to see the major Renaissance works. He reputedly had little desire to travel, either to see the world or to study its art. Nonetheless, during a short stay in Antwerp, Hals seized the opportunity to familiarize himself with current Flemish painting, most obviously that of Rubens and perhaps the artist’s collection of Venetian treasures by Titian.

Maybe it was the nature of the Dutch art market at the time that determined Hals’s choices. The demand for his paintings at home remained consistent, with buyers from across the social spectrum. Formal portraiture remained the preserve of affluent patrons, while genre paintings, usually less dear, portrayed anonymous characters and lent themselves to spaces from the tavern to the home and business house.

There is a superb selection of genre portraits here hanging in the room titled “Invented Characters”: figures appear anonymously, casually dressed, or sometimes in costume. Often there is a drink in hand or the happy effects of tipsiness; amusement and frivolity reign. All the alcohol and instruments and

even a jawbone gripped in a fist create something of a bacchanalian air. Just look at the *Laughing Boy with a Wineglass* (ca. 1630) and the beautifully unruly *Malle Babbe* (ca. 1640), probably Hals's last genre piece. It seems that the commercial rather than the aesthetic imperative induced Hals to adopt this subject matter. Post-Reformation convulsions led to a decline in high-end works, and this coincided with Hals's marked production of genre pieces. These desirable works were made at relatively high speed with coarser materials and more cheaply than formal commissioned portraiture.

The Laughing Cavalier (1624), who is *not* in fact laughing, has found his way out of the Wallace Collection and into this exhibition. Whether it's the confidence, hubris, snobbery, or something else, the image has become Hals's *Mona Lisa*. Bedecked in a luxuriously adorned doublet, the figure is thought to be the textile merchant Tieleman Roosterman, who appears again in a later portrait, only with a more somber palette and in three-quarter-length design, his hand again resting on a blade. The only known full-length portrait by Hals is of another prosperous textile merchant, Willem van Heythuysen, who chose Roosterman as the executor of his will. Their ties went further, as the cavalier's youngest sister was engaged to Van Heythuysen before her premature death.

Many of the later works here are more austere: the lion's share are of now-unknown sitters, and the props and joviality of earlier paintings are now absent. With changes in taste following his death, Hals was neglected, then "rediscovered" in the 1860s by the art critic Théophile Thoré-Bürger, whose admiration is credited with bringing about a lasting esteem for the portraitist's oeuvre and who also reestablished the reputation of Vermeer.

If Hals's work is in some sense "modern," it is due to its divergence from academicism and its choice of subject matter. There was also vitality to his technique over a long career. Mallarmé secured for poetry a marked move away from regular speech, and something like the equivalent experimentation in painting developed in the work of Hals. His variety of

admirers is telling: Gustave Courbet, Édouard Manet, and James Ensor were drawn to him, while Vincent van Gogh placed Hals with the titans, likening his feats as a colorist to those of Eugène Delacroix, Diego Velázquez, and Paolo Veronese.

The display and selection of pictures in this show are well judged and representative of Hals's career. Together with the more jaunty and civic-guard pictures, there is generous space allotted to subdued works one may not typically associate with the artist. It's part of Hals's achievement that one artist working solely in variations of painted portraiture found so much opportunity within this relatively narrow range. Subtle changes in technique are constant, culminating in one of the late works, *Portrait of an Unknown Man* (ca. 1660), where the paint handling has loosened to the degree that drips of paint are visible and apparently deliberate. Patches of this painting are not far from the effect of some of Franz Kline's works. Hals's depictions of the imaginary are few; he seemingly chose to paint only those whom he could face, and in this aspect he is our contemporary.

—John Chaves

"Marie Laurencin: Sapphic Paris"
The Barnes Foundation, Philadelphia.
October 22, 2023–January 21, 2024

"Presentism" is a term that has taken on new vitality in recent years. The Oxford English Dictionary cites 1916 as its first published usage in the sense that we now know the word—that is to say, the judgment or interpretation of past events, people, or works of art according to contemporary standards. We've all read or heard about instances in which historical figures have been deemed dubious, villainous, or worthy of censure when considered under the (ahem) elevated mores of twenty-first-century elite culture. Titian encourages rape, Frederick Douglass is a white supremacist, and John Wayne was—can you just imagine it?—a Republican. We know the routine. But is there an equal-and-opposite theory that imagines historical figures pondering how future au-

diences might consider their pursuits? This endeavor is, of course, an intellectual lark or, as a colleague has it, a stoner's question. But there I was, visiting the Barnes Foundation, engaging in some "forwardism" by wondering what the painter Marie Laurencin (1883–1956) might think of her life and work being heralded under the "queer" rubric.

Which is how the Barnes is promoting "Marie Laurencin: Sapphic Paris," an overview of one of the many fascinating figures populating the demimonde of early twentieth-century France. We learn upon reading the exhibition wall labels that "the excessive femininity of her art hinted at its queerness." Writing in the catalogue, Rachel Silveri, a professor of art and art history at the University of Florida, avers that Laurencin's femininity was "strategically coded, enabling her to achieve success in a masculinist art world while nonetheless picturing nonnormative desires." The curators Simonetta Fraquelli and Cindy Kang write of Laurencin's "almost exclusively female aesthetic." Laurencin did state that the "genius of man intimidates me, I feel perfectly at ease with all that is feminine," but she also said that "I have only one desire, that my paintings have more importance than my presence." Fraquelli, Kang, and Silveri press hard on Laurencin's "presence" to the point where we can't help but wonder how much they value the paintings as paintings.

Albert Barnes liked Laurencin's paintings. He placed her among "the best French women painters" and promptly snapped up such pictures as *Still Life with Bowl and Fruit* (1907), *Woman with Muff* (1914), and *Head* (ca. 1921), all of which are on display in the Barnes's permanent collection. "Sapphic Paris," the first U.S. retrospective in over thirty years, is sequestered in the suite of galleries adjoining the main body of the foundation. The works on display span close to five decades, roughly from 1904 to 1950, but concentrate primarily on the heady days of the Parisian avant-garde.

The show is divided into sections with titles such as "Picturing Herself," "In the Thick of It: Paris Before the War," and "Women Supporting Women." Alongside Laurencin's paintings, drawings, and prints, there are corollary objects

and art by André Mare, Jean Metzinger, Francis Picabia, and Max Ernst, but not, oddly, her friends Georges Braque and Pablo Picasso. An integral component of the "bande à Picasso," Laurencin was famously photographed in the Spaniard's studio in 1911, striking a pose. Still, she went on to distance herself from Cubism, stating that it "poisoned three years of my life . . . aesthetic problems always make me shiver."

Laurencin was born in Paris to Alfred Toulet, a government official, and Pauline-Mélanie Laurencin, a domestic and seamstress. Monsieur Toulet visited and supported the offspring of this extramarital dalliance, but Laurencin was raised, in the main, by her mother. The young woman's interest in art was evident early on, and she eventually studied at the Académie Humbert, at which she met Braque and the future illustrator and fashion designer Georges Lepape.

Around 1907, Laurencin encountered Picasso and was subsequently swept into his orbit. She attended the famous dinner held in honor of "Le Douanier" Rousseau, had her work collected by Gertrude Stein, exhibited paintings in a two-person show with Robert Delaunay, and met Wilhelm de Kostrowitzky, better known to history as Guillaume Apollinaire. Laurencin and Apollinaire begin a long and tumultuous affair. Over the years, she involved herself romantically with a variety of men and women. She spent the war years exiled in Spain with Picabia, Stein, Alice B. Toklas, and Albert Gleizes. Laurencin, you see, had married a German baron.

What Do Young Women Dream Of? (1932) is the title of a scene posited somewhere between *Wuthering Heights*, Greek myth, and the art deco-inspired illustrations of Laurencin's former schoolmate Lepape. It's an emblematic work, with a palette predicated on gray and pink, an overriding mood of arcadian yearning, and attenuated almond-eyed ingenues. Laurencin was as much defined and, in the end, constrained by her stylistic mannerisms as Modigliani. Her streamlined figuration can tend toward picture-book fancies or, as one visitor to the Barnes had it, the "princessy."

The finest canvases are those in which Laurencin bumped up against reality. Portraits

of Helena Rubinstein, Coco Chanel, and Juliette Lacaze, the wife of the art dealer Paul Guillaume, benefit from the specificity that accrues from having to achieve a likeness, of conveying bone, muscle, and personality. Not that all of her clients were amused: Chanel rejected her portrait as playing too fast and loose with the facts. Laurencin summarily pegged the fashion icon as “a peasant from Auvergne” and remained friendly with her all the same. This admixture of the acidic and the convivial is evident in even the dreamiest of Laurencin’s tableaux. What might an accounting of the oeuvre look like without the baggage of identity politics? We may have to wait another thirty years to find out.

—*Mario Naves*

“The Treasury of Notre-Dame Cathedral: From its Origins to Viollet-le-Duc”
Musée du Louvre, Paris.
October 18, 2023–January 29, 2024

On April 15, 2019, the world watched in horror and disbelief as the medieval lead roof, the massive medieval oaken framework that supported it, and the nineteenth-century spire of the Cathedral of Notre-Dame (Our Lady), on Paris’s Île de la Cité, went up in flames. The molten and burned remains of that superstructure brought down parts of the masonry vaults in the nave in the early morning of April 16 as well.

Begun around A.D. 1160 in the Early Gothic style and completed in the early thirteenth century in the High Gothic style, the current Notre-Dame is the crown jewel of France’s medieval architectural patrimony and one of the nation’s most cherished sites. Its restoration began immediately upon the securing of the undamaged parts of the structure and the clearing of the charred wreckage; completion of the project is not expected before December 2024, although the exterior will be fully restored in time for visitors to the Paris Summer Olympics in July 2024.

Unfortunately, the premodern treasury (collection of precious objects) of Notre-Dame was completely obliterated more than two

centuries ago, between 1789 and 1791, at the height of the French Revolution. Although a rebuilding of the treasury began in the early nineteenth century, the riches accumulated by Notre-Dame over the preceding one and a half millennia remain forever lost.

Now at the Louvre, sixty-three objects related to Notre-Dame from French and European collections that escaped the revolutionary partisans—historical documents, manuscripts, paintings, drawings, and metalwork—are brought together to give visitors an idea of what was lost. Those objects are complemented by fifty-five of the post-revolutionary treasury’s highlights. Among the most remarkable of these are the works in precious metals designed by Eugène Viollet-le-Duc (1814–79), the French architect, author, and restorer of Notre-Dame from 1844 to 1869.

A modest space in the Louvre’s Richelieu wing has been retrofitted with five contiguous galleries to accommodate the exhibition. Understated matte-gray walls ensure that nothing distracts viewers from the objects themselves. While a general-admission ticket to the museum gives visitors access to the show, a free timed-entry ticket must also be booked to assure that the relatively narrow galleries do not become too crowded.

The earliest objects in the exhibition shed light on the medieval treasury’s origins and contents. Among the standouts are an early seventh-century copy, remarkably on papyrus rather than parchment, of a bequest between 575 and 584 of a silver plate to Notre-Dame by a Merovingian noblewoman named Erminethrudis or Ermenetrudis and twelve magnificent illuminated liturgical manuscripts written or adapted for use at Notre-Dame that range in date from the twelfth to the fifteenth centuries. One of the twelve, the Breviary of the dauphin Louis, duc de Guyenne (d. 1415), a son of King Charles VI, is opened to the miniature that depicts a procession into Notre-Dame of the golden cruciform reliquary made to house the fragments of the True Cross sent to Notre-Dame in the early twelfth century by Anseau, a canon of the Church of the Holy Sepulchre in Jerusalem.

Fortunately, a number of the lost early-modern treasures of Notre-Dame are depicted

in prints, drawings, and paintings. One is the silver gilt monstrance known as the “Grand Soleil,” made by Claude II Ballin between 1708 and 1710 and given to Notre-Dame by Antoine de la Porte (1627–1710), a canon of Notre-Dame. De la Porte can be seen performing Mass before the imposing object—measuring over five feet tall and weighing more than 110 pounds—in a contemporary painting by Jean Jouvenet.

Fourteen monumental tapestries made between 1638 and 1657 for Notre-Dame that depict the life of the Virgin enjoyed a happier fate: they were sold in 1739 to Strasbourg Cathedral and thereby escaped revolutionary destruction. Being too large for the Louvre exhibition space, the tapestries are represented by two preparatory sketches by the great seventeenth-century French painter Philippe de Champaigne and two painted copies after the tapestries of about 1652 by Charles Poëron.

The rebuilding of the treasury of Notre-Dame was set in motion by two post-revolutionary events. With the concordat concluded between Napoleon Bonaparte—then First Consul of the French Republic—and the papacy in July 1801 and formally promulgated the following Easter, the Catholic Church was officially reinstated in France. The second event was Napoleon’s decision to have himself crowned emperor in Notre-Dame in December 1804. Seven objects made or acquired for Napoleon’s consecration are included in the exhibition. One of the most interesting is the so-called Crown of Charlemagne. While the crown itself was made by Martin-Guillaume Biennais in 1804, its embellishment with classical cameos makes clear Napoleon’s desire to present himself as a new Roman or Holy Roman emperor.

With the reinstatement of the church in 1801, reliquaries, cult statues, and Mass vessels and vestments also needed to be made or acquired. The most impressive in terms of size—it mea-

sures over five and a half feet in height—is the silver repoussé standing Virgin and Child made in 1826 by Charles-Nicolas Odiot.

In 1831, after the sack of Notre-Dame during the July Revolution of 1830, the architects Jean-Baptiste Lassus (1807–57) and Viollet-le-Duc were commissioned to design a new combined sacristy and treasury for the cathedral. Viollet-le-Duc envisioned the new structure as an “oeuvre d’art totale” (*Gesamtkunstwerk*); to realize his vision, he designed an array of complementary liturgical objects in a neo-Gothic style that were executed by other artisans.

Much has been made about Viollet-le-Duc’s mastery of High and Late Gothic forms: the handsome reliquary for the Crown of Thorns made in 1862 is just one of many examples in the exhibition that prove the point. His command of medieval Christian iconography, however, was not as sure. On one of the two *baisers de paix* (medallions for the liturgical Kiss of Peace) that Viollet-le-Duc designed in 1867, the crucified Savior is depicted turning his head to his left. Given the associations of the sinister side with the devil and eternal damnation that have lasted even into the modern era, it is not surprising that Jesus is almost never depicted looking leftward from the cross in medieval art. Instead, he turns his head rightward, toward his mother at the foot of the cross and toward those souls granted admission to heaven in depictions of the Last Judgment.

The Louvre show and its exhaustive and beautifully produced catalogue reconstruct the treasury of Notre-Dame as fully as possible even as the cathedral itself is being restored after the disastrous fire of 2019. Said exhibition and catalogue also open a window onto fifteen hundred years of French art, history, and culture. If he were still with us, Victor Hugo’s Quasimodo would surely ring the bells of Notre-Dame to celebrate all these endeavors.

—Gregory T. Clark

Under pressure

by James Panero

Max Beckmann reflected the traumas of the First World War from his own German perspective. As a volunteer medical orderly in East Prussia in 1914, he wrote to his first wife, Minna Beckmann-Tube, that he “experienced dreadful things and died myself with them several times.” A year later, he suffered a nervous breakdown while serving in Belgium. An exhibition now at Neue Galerie looks to what the show calls Beckmann’s “formative years,” from 1915 through 1925, following this wartime service, in a focused presentation that helps us better locate one of the last century’s more enigmatic artists.¹ Curated by Olaf Peters, a professor at Martin Luther Universität Halle-Wittenberg, “Max Beckmann: The Formative Years, 1915–1925” brings together one hundred works by the artist to present the decade-long period when Beckmann broke away from an Impressionist-like style to pursue what became known as *Neue Sachlichkeit* (New Objectivity).

For Beckmann, the trenches of the Western Front mirrored something of his own pitched battles with French modernism. He called Henri Matisse, for example, one of the “untalented persons” of contemporary art. As Peters notes in the exhibition catalogue, “Max Beckmann adopted early on a position against the artistic avant-garde and did not shy away from public controversy when doing so.” In the face of Fauvism, Primitivism, Expressionism, and the other -isms of modern painting, Beckmann looked to create his

own distinctly Germanic contemporary art, one influenced by Wilhelm Leibl, Max Liebermann, Adolf Menzel, and other “instructive artists,” as he put it, of the late nineteenth century.

Even as Beckmann worked certain elements of cubist fracture and expressionistic draftsmanship into his compositions, he pushed past modernism’s surface interests to remain focused on the depth of pictorial space. “As for myself,” he wrote in a statement titled “The New Program,” “I paint and try to develop my style exclusively in terms of deep space, something that in contrast to superficially decorative art penetrates as far as possible into the very core of nature and the spirit of things.”

Beckmann’s powers of penetration are on display in the exhibition’s compressed opening gallery on Neue’s second floor. The presentation begins with three self-portraits—a drypoint print, a drawing in pen and ink, and another drawing in pencil, all from 1916 and 1917 (on loan respectively from the Museum of Modern Art, New York; the Art Institute of Chicago; and the Kupferstichkabinett, Staatliche Museen zu Berlin). Gaunt and sickly, with hands bony and clutched, the faces here seem “almost too awake,” notes Peters, revealing Beckmann’s alien-like “diagnostic gaze.” Far from romanticized, they are Germanified self-images, ones that turn to the horrors of sight and choose not to look away.

Those horrors are reflected in Beckmann’s angular and emaciated biblical images to their right—*Descent from the Cross* (1917, Museum of Modern Art, New York), *Christ and the Sinner* (1917, Saint Louis Art Museum), and *Adam and*

¹ “Max Beckmann: The Formative Years, 1915–1925” opened at Neue Galerie, New York, on October 5, 2023, and remains on view through January 15, 2024.

Eve (1917, Neue Nationalgalerie, Staatliche Museen zu Berlin). “I saw some remarkable things,” Beckmann said of his time at the front. “In the semidarkness of the shelter, half-naked, blood-covered men that were having white bandages applied. Grand and painful in expression. New visions of scourgings of Christ.”

Beckmann’s great gift was to understand how the urgency of contemporary art should be reflected in the substance of painting rather than in its style. Distancing himself from the many movements of modernism—even including the *Neue Sachlichkeit* with which he became closely associated—Beckmann came to be seen as a “defender of a traditional art oriented around representational skill,” writes Anna Maria Heckmann of Berlinische Galerie, “which is why a reputation as a reactionary clung to him from the perspective of his avant-garde colleagues.”

Nevertheless, in the originality of his vision, unencumbered by any one style, Beckmann ended up outflanking his more radical peers. Compare the classical roundedness of *Portrait of Senior Medical Officer Prof. Dr. Philaletes Kuhn* (1915, private collection) with the grotesqueries of *Adam and Eve* (1917, published 1918, Museum of Modern Art, New York). Or contrast the loftiness of *Landscape with Balloon* (1917, Museum Ludwig, Cologne) with the airlessness of *Women’s Bath* (1919, Neue Nationalgalerie, Staatliche Museen zu Berlin). As he sought to “build a tower in which humanity can shriek out its rage and despair and all its poor hopes and joys and wild yearning,” Beckmann allowed his draftsmanship and composition to range in unexpected and startling ways.

Upstairs at Neue, the exhibition’s third floor explores this range in greater detail. Some of his portraits, for example the image of his wife from 1924 (Pinakothek der Moderne, Bayerische Staatsgemäldesammlungen, Munich), reveal a Raphael-like softness. Yet even these elegant paintings convey a certain unease. Beckmann’s *Portrait of Elsbet Götz* (1924, Museum Behnhaus Drägerhaus, Lübeck) depicts a young woman in a green dress in front of a red background, looking out with a reserved gaze. The backstory of this painting, described in the exhibition, contains its own horror. Götz met Beckmann

through her brother, a student in art history who worked at the Städel-Museum in Frankfurt am Main as an assistant to the director Georg Swarzenski. She was a kindergarten teacher who founded her own school. Within a decade of sitting for this portrait, due to the rise of National Socialism, as a Jew, Götz was prohibited from teaching non-Jewish children. Despite worsening circumstances, she remained in Germany to care for her mother. In 1942 she was deported to Theresienstadt. In 1944 the Nazis shipped her to Auschwitz, where she was killed. “The figure situated in a warm red backdrop radiates a statuesque calm that testifies to her self-confidence and self-determination,” writes Peters of her resolve to stay in Germany, “thus giving the National Socialists the opportunity to murder Elsbet Götz.”

Even without the benefit of such hindsight, in Götz’s blank stare, her pursed lips, and her folded hands, Beckmann reveals the underlying anxiety of the Weimar years. Political uncertainty and economic upheaval undermined the sophistication of the age and ultimately gave way to graver terrors. The same goes for *Paris Society* (1925/1931/1947, Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum), one of the highlights of the exhibition, just to the left of these portraits. Beckmann worked on this assembly of figures multiple times over a twenty-year period, adding famous faces, such as that of Jean-Paul Sartre, along the way. And yet much is off-kilter in their interactions as they look in different directions, pushed together in unnatural proximity. This composition in circus-like colors tilts as though it were the last cocktail party on a sinking ship. Hidden in the lower-right corner, hand to head, Beckmann includes a profile of himself.

Beckmann never abandoned pictorial depth. Instead he placed the content of compositions under ever greater pressure as he squeezed his figures together. “Most important for me is volume,” he said, “trapped in height and width.” In the confines of the picture frame, as he wrote in his “Creative Credo” of 1918–20, “I try to capture the terrible, thrilling monster of life’s vitality and to confine it, to beat it down and to strangle it with crystal-clear, razor-sharp lines and planes.” Far from seeking transcendence, “in my paintings I accused God of everything he has done wrong.”

The darkness of Beckmann's vision is best seen in the drawings and suites of prints spread across Neue's upper floor. Exceptional among these is his *Hell* portfolio of 1919 (Museum of Modern Art, New York). Originally published in an edition of seventy-five signed copies by J. B. Neumann Verlag, *Die Hölle* depicts the chaotic scenes of the post-war city, where battles continued to rage over Germany's future. On the cover Beckmann offers a grotesque self-portrait set in a frame. Beneath he includes a message written in script: "We ask the esteemed public to step up. It has the pleasant prospect of not being bored for perhaps ten minutes. Anyone who is not satisfied will have his money returned."

The carnivalesque invitation opens onto the hellscape of the German street, as figures are pushed and crushed in a stampede of images. Rifles and machine guns are fired into the crowds. Hungry children pray around a barren table. Prostitutes expose themselves by candlelight. Drunk veterans sing patriotic songs. In a final plate, titled *The Family*, Beckmann again depicts himself. As Beckmann points away, his child in a soldier's helmet plays with toy grenades while his wife holds up her hands. The playacting must go to sleep.

Neumann published a thousand smaller lithographic booklets of this series, which were offered for two marks each, but not a copy was sold. The hell was all too real in inflationary Weimar. Nevertheless, the grotesqueries of the series, framed by Beckmann's own self-image, helped inform the artist's paintings in the 1920s. Repeatedly presenting himself in high-style reserve, Beckmann here becomes the elegant ringleader for his circus of Weimar excess. He looks directly out through tired eyes, often with cigarette in hand, in his *Self-Portrait on Yellow Ground with Cigarette* (1923, Museum of Modern Art, New York), *Self-Portrait in Front of Red Curtain* (1923, private collection), *Self-Portrait with White Cap* (1926, anonymous), and *Self-Portrait in Tuxedo* (1927, Harvard Art Museum).

Displayed alongside these self-portraits are Beckmann's dense ensemble compositions, often arranged in a chaotic vertical format that takes time to absorb in full. Here the fun of his garishly colored beach scenes and carnival visions are cut through with dread. In *The*

Trapeze (1923, Toledo Museum of Art), arms and legs have been twisted in a knot as a breast is seen falling out of its costume. In *The Dream* (1921, Saint Louis Art Museum), musicians have become tangled around their instruments as a figure with amputated hands embraces a fish. In *The Bark* (1926, private collection), passengers founder in an overloaded boat, while in *Lido* (1924, Saint Louis Museum) the swimmers seem to have been cut in two by the waves and their own jagged costumes.

Beckmann's claims for a particular German art did not stop him from losing his teaching position in Frankfurt and being labeled a degenerate by the Nazi regime. In 1937 he went into self-imposed exile in the Netherlands where he tried to obtain an exit visa to emigrate to the United States. As he became trapped in Amsterdam for the next ten years, he painted his most well-known work—the haunting triptychs that merged his vertical formats with an increasingly enigmatic iconography to speak to his spiritual and physical isolation. It was only in 1947, three years before his death at age sixty-six, that Beckmann was able to move away, joining the St. Louis School of Fine Arts and teaching at Washington University and the Brooklyn Museum.

It is a loss for this focused show that we do not see something of Beckmann's late work for which he is best known. It would also have been illuminating to include some examples of his younger production, such as his *Sinking of the Titanic* of 1912–13 or his *Self-Portrait (Laughing)* of 1910, which we only find in reproduction in the exhibition catalogue. If "Beckmann only achieved a unique artistic style because of the war," as Olaf Peters writes, it helps to get some sense of what came before as well as a better appreciation of what is to come.

"It's stupid to love humanity," Beckmann said, "nothing but a heap of egoism (and we are a part of it too). But I love it anyway. I love its meanness, its banality, its dullness, its cheap contentment, and its oh-so-very-rare heroism." In capturing what he called "transcendental objectivity," which he saw as coming "out of a deep love for nature and humanity," Beckmann displayed his own heroics. He fought for painting and won his victories on his own terms.

Music

New York chronicle

by Jay Nordlinger

A cello recital is rare enough—but a solo-cello recital? That is, one that is unaccompanied, sans piano? Almost unheard of. Often, a cello recital includes a solo piece—a Bach suite, of course. Or the Kodály sonata. But a cellist does not go a whole evening without a piano (unless he is playing all six Bach suites).

A solo-violin recital is rare, too. Maxim Vengerov played one in Carnegie Hall in the 2002–03 season. Last season—which is to say, twenty years later—Midori did the same. She played her recital in Zankel Hall, whereas Vengerov had played his in Carnegie’s main hall, which is dubbed “Stern Auditorium” (for Isaac).

Carnegie has a third venue: Weill Recital Hall, the smallest. That is where Sheku Kanneh-Mason, the young Brit (twenty-four), played a solo-cello recital. It is just the right hall for such an evening—intimate, cozy, yet at the same time elegant and formal.

Kanneh-Mason began with a Bach suite, as is natural. He played the one in D minor. Later, he played a Britten suite (No. 1, Op. 72). To close the printed program, he played Cassadó’s lone suite. Gaspar Cassadó, remember, was the Spanish cellist and composer who, like Kreisler, penned “hoaxes”—pieces that he passed off as rediscovered works by Frescobaldi and other “ancients.” But he wrote music under his own name, too: music such as his suite.

So, Kanneh-Mason played those three established suites. But he also played new music, by three different composers. Before getting to that, I will say a general word about the young man’s playing.

It is very good. Kanneh-Mason has technical facility and musicality. He communicates directly with an audience, making his instrument talk. He achieves a balance of freedom and discipline. He is not apt to do anything eccentric; he is not apt to do anything dull either.

When he plays, Kanneh-Mason looks like a rocker: biting his lip, looking skyward, shaking his head. It could be that Yo-Yo Ma has paved the way to free physical expression for all cellists.

After the opening Bach, Kanneh-Mason took a microphone to talk to the audience. Uh-oh. He had already talked with his cello so well. Throughout the recital, he talked, briefly. He said what he had just finished playing and what he would play next. Musicians routinely do this—as though we, in the audience, didn’t have programs. Kanneh-Mason did not do any lecturing; he did not engage in music appreciation. Mainly, he announced. I had the feeling that his heart wasn’t in it—that someone had asked him to do it, explaining it was *de rigueur*. But maybe that is wishful thinking on my part.

The Bach suite was followed by a piece written in 2021 by Gwilym Simcock, a Brit born in 1981. Simcock is both a classical musician and a jazzman. He plays in the Pat Metheny Quartet. In my experience, Metheny (one of the most prominent of jazz guitarists) is admired by classical musicians.

Simcock’s piece for solo cello is *Prayer for the Senses*. It is woozy, slidey, and twangy. Also a little Bachian. What does the title mean? I’m not sure, and I’m sure it doesn’t matter. It is

a piece without words—and a good musical mind is behind it.

Kanneh-Mason began the second half of his recital with a sonata by Leo Brouwer, the Cuban composer born in 1939. (He is not to be confused with Leo Sowerby, the American composer who lived from 1895 to 1968.) Brouwer is the grand-nephew of Ernesto Lecuona, of *Malagueña* fame. He wrote his Cello Sonata No. 1 in 1960. He wrote his Cello Sonata No. 2 a cool sixty years later—and wrote it expressly for young Mr. Kanneh-Mason.

Our program notes for the evening included a statement by Brouwer: “It is really very difficult for me to talk or write about my music; I prefer to compose it and not explain it.” That is one of the most likable and endearing statements I have ever heard from a composer.

This sonata—the Cello Sonata No. 2—is in three movements, without markings. It is tautly written and has something to say.

Before closing the program with Cassadó’s suite, Kanneh-Mason played Five Preludes for Solo Cello, written by Edmund Finnis in 2021. Finnis is another Brit, born in 1984. These little pieces are smart and varied, with touches of minimalism. The final one ends modestly rather than showily. This ending is even self-effacing—which, in a way, is daring.

Sheku Kanneh-Mason played one encore. I thought he might play one of Cassadó’s “hoaxes.” Then again, did he write such a piece for *solo* cello? I can’t remember. In any event, Kanneh-Mason played a piece of his own devising: a transcription of a Bob Marley song, “She Used to Call Me Dada.” In Kanneh-Mason’s hands, the song was delicate, beautiful, and nonchalant.

This was a satisfying recital. And it is always good to hear worthy new music. (It can be a relief, too.) I must say, however, that I found a solo-cello evening just a little monotonous (varied as the music was). Irving Berlin wrote a song called “I Love a Piano.” So do I, I guess.

In the late 1990s, James Levine started the Met Orchestra Chamber Ensemble. (Levine was at the helm of the Metropolitan Opera from the mid-1970s to the mid-2010s.) The ensemble played its concerts in Weill Recital

Hall. Interesting music was heard, in interesting combinations. The tradition continues under the Met’s current capo, Yannick Nézet-Séguin. The ensemble appeared in Weill the night after Kanneh-Mason’s recital.

First on the program was Strauss’s Serenade for Winds in E flat, Op. 7. The composer wrote it when he was seventeen. That’s the age at which Bizet wrote his Symphony in C. Mendelssohn has them beat, in a sense, given that he composed his Octet in E flat—a masterpiece—at sixteen. But who’s counting, really?

In the opening week of the Carnegie Hall season, Riccardo Muti led the Chicago Symphony Orchestra in Strauss’s *Aus Italien*, which is sort of a starter symphony—a work that the composer himself called a “symphonic fantasy.” He wrote it at twenty-two, inspired by a trip to Italy. In *Aus Italien*, you can really hear Richard Strauss—the hallmarks are there.

Can you hear him in his Serenade for Winds? Only if you squint. And even then, it may be your imagination. In any case, it is a well-wrought, impressive piece.

The Met players’ concert continued with a piece by Santos Cota, a Mexican composer born in 1960. This was his *Elegía* for English Horn, Bassoon, and Strings, composed in 2012. The piece had never been heard before this evening, eleven years later. Why? I don’t know—a curious lag. Cota’s is a worthy, affecting piece.

Our program notes quoted the composer: the *Elegía* is “a lament on the disappearance of Bertrand, the son of some acquaintances of mine and one of the hundreds of ‘desaparecidos’ that vanish every year in Mexico.” The bassoon and the English horn represent Bertrand’s parents.

Because I had read the program notes, I listened to the piece with the background, the intention, in mind. And if I had not read the notes? If I had been ignorant of the background and intention? Honestly, I’m not sure I would even have found the elegy especially sad. Such is the way with music without words.

Gabriela Lena Frank is an American composer born in 1972. In recent years, she has written a work called *Conquest Requiem* and an opera about Frida Kahlo and Diego Rivera.

The Met has announced that it will present both of those in coming seasons. In 2001, Frank wrote a string quartet titled *Leyendas: An Andean Walkabout*. The first half of the Met chamber concert concluded with that.

Leyenda is Spanish for “legend.” There are six of them in Frank’s work, “told,” or musicalized, in six movements. I read about the legends in our program notes. Therefore, they are what I “heard.” But without the aid of program notes? All bets are off. The music, at any rate, is intricate, transparent, and flavorful. It includes some humor—an ingredient not often enough used by today’s musical chefs. In my judgment, the piece is overlong, but regular readers will know that this is a frequent judgment of mine.

The second half of the concert comprised just one work, an American masterpiece: the suite from Copland’s *Appalachian Spring*. The ballet is scored for thirteen instruments (including a piano). The suite, originally, had the same scoring. Copland later made a version for full orchestra. In Weill Recital Hall, we heard the suite as originally scored. I prefer this. The full-orchestra version, I think, can sound too rich, big, and lush.

While I’m on the subject: I like *Verklärte Nacht* as Schoenberg originally wrote it—for string sextet. But the piece really flew ’round the world when he arranged it for string orchestra. *À chacun son goût*.

Yannick Nézet-Séguin presided over this evening with his familiar combo of qualities: heart, taste, commitment, and sheer love of music. A good combo.

Three days later, Maxim Vengerov came to Carnegie Hall for a recital. Unlike twenty years ago, he was accompanied, or partnered—by the pianist Polina Osetinskaya. Same as last season in Carnegie Hall. This season, the two of them played a program of German Romanticism in the first half and Prokofiev in the second.

The first began with the Three Romances, Op. 22, of Clara Schumann. They are good pieces. But let me ask a rude question: would they be played if they weren’t by Robert’s wife? Next on the program was Brahms’s Scherzo from the “F-A-E” Sonata.

This was followed by Schumann’s—Robert Schumann’s—Violin Sonata No. 3 in A minor. Let me ask another rude question: if this sonata weren’t by Schumann, a great composer, would it be played? Was he compos mentis—composer mentis—when he wrote it?

Speaking of rudeness: Vengerov did not acknowledge applause or even look at the audience between the three works. He was treating them as a unit. I thought this was dubious—and Vengerov has long been one of the warmest and most ingratiating personalities on the stage.

Ms. Osetinskaya is a remarkable pianist. Outstanding among her abilities is legato—a fluidity, a seamlessness. She can sing on a piano. She matches the violin with violinistic phrases. You can hardly sense the hammers moving up and down. About Vengerov, there is little left to say. We have said so much, over the last thirty years. He is one of the great musicians of our time. And he was in good form on this Sunday afternoon in New York.

The Prokofiev pieces were the Five Melodies and the Sonata No. 2 in D. Vengerov and Osetinskaya brought everything you need for Prokofiev: simplicity, childlikeness, danger, spikiness, lyricism, nuttiness, lovability . . .

They played three encores, three Russian chestnuts (in the fondest, least pejorative sense): the Vocalise (Rachmaninoff), the March from *The Love for Three Oranges* (Prokofiev), and the Eighteenth Variation (Rachmaninoff again). This was an afternoon of first-rate musicianship. It had the ingredient that is hard to define but that we hint at in the word “charisma.”

The Met staged an opera by Daniel Catán, a Mexican who lived from 1949 to 2011. It was his *Florencia en el Amazonas*, which premiered in 1996. The libretto is by Marcela Fuentes-Berain, also a Mexican, who studied with Gabriel García Márquez. There is indeed magical realism in the story (a story original to the librettist). A cast of characters is on a ship, carrying them through the Amazon. They are working out their various problems.

As an American, I could not help thinking of *The Love Boat*, the television series of yore. The evening’s captain, David Pittsinger (a

bass-baritone), even looked a little like Gavin MacLeod, who played Captain Stubing on the show.

The opera's title character, Florencia, is a diva, a singer, like Tosca and Adriana Lecouvreur. (Granted, the latter is an actress, but she is still a diva.) The story is a little screwy—then again, this is an opera. (Said André Previn about *Rigoletto*: “A girl in a bag? Really?”)

Catán's score is colorful and cinematic, with streaks of the exotic. It has a sheen and a sparkle. It is also heart-on-sleeve. The score is “old-fashioned” in that it has arias, duets, and other traditional elements of opera. It welcomes, and expresses, passion. Daniel Catán obviously had a heart for opera.

Singing Florencia was Ailyn Pérez, the American soprano. The Metropolitan Opera House is maybe too large for her (as it is for most people), but she portrayed her character with great dignity, skill, and persuasiveness. Yannick Nézet-Séguin was in the pit, all commitment and care, as usual. He treats contemporary operas—or any—as if he were conducting *The Ring*. That is a very good quality in a maestro.

The production is overseen by Mary Zimmerman, the American stage director. It is as colorful as the score. “The stage looks like a cockatoo or a toucan,” I thought—or like the Amazon (in the popular imagination). Utterly fitting, and enchanting.

Afterward, I talked to a man who did not like the opera. “Too nineteenth-century,” he said, “rather than twentieth-century,” to say nothing of the twenty-first. “It sounded like Puccini or Strauss.” I thought of something I once heard from my grandmother in another context: “You say that like it's something bad.”

Daniel Catán earned his Ph.D. at Princeton University, where he studied with, among others, Milton Babbitt, a modernist's modernist. But you have to compose the music that is in you. Evidently, Catán did that—for which, bravo.

It should not take an Estonian conductor to show us a worthy Estonian composer—but that is a service that Paavo Järvi rendered when he conducted the New York Philharmonic. He opened the program with a piece by Veljo Tormis (1930–2017). Tormis is known, if he is known at all, as a choral composer, but, in 1959, he composed his Overture No. 2. What's it an overture to? Nothing: it is a concert piece. It is exciting, neatly constructed, and storytelling. But what story is it telling? That is left to a listener's imagination.

Järvi conducted the overture as he conducts most things: with tightness (in a positive sense), exactitude, and what I will call a “bristlingness.” Music often bristles under his baton. Fritz Reiner would have loved Paavo Järvi.

He ended the overture with perfectly timed—and tricky to time—notes. He then smiled at the orchestra as if to say, “Yes. Good.”

Alena Baeva took the stage to play the Britten Violin Concerto. She has had a tempest-tossed life. It began in Kyrgyzstan, in 1985. Her family fled to Kazakhstan. Then she studied in Moscow. Today, she is a citizen of Luxembourg. In the Britten concerto, she was liquid, agile, and interpretively alive. She has a touch of the Gypsy about her, as every violinist should. I wondered which Bach sarabande she would play as an encore. Throwing a curveball, she played Ysaÿe: the first movement of the Sonata No. 5.

After intermission, Järvi conducted a Prokofiev symphony: the Symphony No. 6. He did so with his accustomed qualities—qualities that may be particularly well suited to Prokofiev. The Sixth Symphony is seldom heard. Valery Gergiev conducted his Mariinsky Orchestra in it at Carnegie Hall in November 2017. I believe I stand second to none in my admiration of Prokofiev. He has been a happy constant of my life, as of many. But I have never been sold on the Symphony No. 6. Maybe someday.

The media

Meritless meritocracy

by James Bowman

The best analysis I've seen of the 2023 off-year election results came from the California-based Substacker Chris Bray:

In 2019, the Republican candidate for governor in Kentucky got just short of 705,000 votes. In 2023, the Republican candidate for governor in Kentucky got 627,000 votes. There are a dozen ways to explain this 12 percent loss of Republican support in a red state at a moment when the repulsive and insane Democratic Party is the party of mutilating trans kids and prosecuting the political opposition, and the explanations have been widely discussed elsewhere, but I want to suggest the possibility of a different reason: What if Republican voters are just getting really tired of the Republican Party? Let a couple of examples stand in for the whole list: The DOJ is obviously politicizing American justice, and congressional Republicans are tweeting about it really hard. The border is wide open, and congressional Republicans have written a number of strongly worded letters. And so on. Merrick Garland and Alejandro Mayorkas have considerable job security, which is pretty remarkable. What if endless Republican weakness has just turned a growing percentage of Republican voters toward complete indifference? What's the future of a political party that has no approach but going along to get along?

He's making a similar point here, I think, to the one I made in this space two months ago (see "Therapeutic hatred" in *The New Criterion* of November 2023) by recommending that

the Republican would-be rivals of Donald Trump should withdraw from the presidential contest and hie them to the place where the party obviously already is—by supporting the former president as he comes under continual and unprecedented legal persecution from his political enemies. It's the issue of a lifetime for the party to campaign on, and yet the party is all but completely ignoring it.

Well, that advice obviously fell on deaf ears. Instead, the remaining Republican presidential aspirants continue, as I write, to pretend that the country cares more about them and their plans for exercising power they will never possess than about what the Democrats are doing to the country, its institutions, and to the only man, on present showing, who has a chance of stopping them. It is a testimony to the seemingly infinite capacity of highly ambitious people for self-deception that these hopeful leaders cannot see what the great mass of ordinary people apparently can—namely, that it is not just President Trump that the Justice Department, Democratic prosecutors, and their media allies are seeking to destroy but the whole political tendency he represents and has given voice to over the last eight years.

For better or for worse this tendency is known as *populism*—a word that, like most political words these days, can mean whatever the speaker or writer wants it to mean. In recent weeks it has been applied in the media to Geert Wilders in the Netherlands and Javier Milei in Argentina, who have little in common beyond their remarkable hair and their

winning of elections unexpectedly. Come to think of it, they also have these things in common with Donald Trump and Boris Johnson, two other politicians who have been labeled as populists—mainly, I think, because they stand outside the political mainstream in their respective countries and espouse policies with considerable crossover appeal to voters in the other party.

That must be why they are so hated by the go-along-to-get-along faction in both parties, though in Messrs. Trump and Johnson’s case, at least, strategic application of the media’s scandal machine has ensured that there has never been any shortage of excuses for such hatred available to the haters. In America that hatred has been extended to Trump supporters since their anathematization as a “basket of deplorables” by Hillary Clinton during the 2016 campaign. She thus embodies the political class foreshadowed by Christopher Lasch’s *Revolt of the Elites* (1994), a class that likes to think of itself as a “meritocracy.”

Like the late Angelo Codevilla, I don’t mind the idea of a meritocracy in theory; I just dislike the one we’ve got, which consists of overeducated and cosmopolitan pseudo-aristocrats who have more sense of solidarity with their counterparts in other countries than with their fellow countrymen of the *populus*. To these elites, those who sport banners proclaiming “Make America Great Again” are self-condemned; as the ex-governor Andrew Cuomo once put it, America “was never that great” to begin with.

Not so long ago, such a saying would have been political suicide, but, like Mrs. Clinton, Mr. Cuomo must have recognized that his party’s constituency, consisting of his fellow meritocrats and the various notionally oppressed minorities of whom they claimed to be the protectors, no longer has room in it for the great mass of patriotic Americans. These patriots, after all, were the notional oppressors. Such class snobbery also has its appeal to Republicans of the NeverTrump persuasion, some of whom certainly must have expected to solidify their always-precarious position among the governing elite by joining with the Democrats in looking down on vulgar Trumpists.

The strategy of the Democrats and the media has long been to take advantage of this class anxiety among Republicans. The aim has always been not just to drive Mr. Trump from public life but also to marginalize his whole party until it has become indeed what they constantly tell us it already is: an “extremist” fringe with which no decent or respectable person could ever have anything to do. The Republican demoralization referred to by Chris Bray is the measure of their success in thus identifying their left-wing ideology with the common decency said at the time of Joe Biden’s election to be represented by his “Decency Agenda.”

There are reasons for thinking, however, that this success has not much longer to run—and not only because of populist successes in other parts of the world or Mr. Trump’s lead in the polls, at this writing, over his Republican competitors as well as Mr. Biden. Since October 7 Middle America has been witness to the true ugliness of our elite college campuses’ privileged youth, all of them presumptive future members of the meritocracy themselves, harassing and intimidating their Jewish classmates while demonstrating in favor of a pack of vicious terrorists and murderers and against one of America’s longest-standing and most loyal allies. If there have hitherto been lots of people who failed to recognize that hatred by the ruling class for “MAGA Republicans” is really hatred of *them*, then there won’t be quite so many, I fancy, in the future. Maybe even the odd Republican NeverTrumper will feel disgusted enough with his de facto allies among the elite to rejoin his separated brethren.

In the United Kingdom, which is always less reticent than the United States in recognizing class distinctions, the Conservative party has now been in power for nearly fourteen years under five different prime ministers and is similarly riven by the mutual hostility of populists and anti-populists. And just as it is for the GOP, the party establishment is largely anti-populist while the party’s constituency, or what’s left of it, grows increasingly populist. Moreover, like the GOP establishment, the Conservative establishment seems

determined to ignore the wishes and, indeed, the very existence of its populist faction for as long as it is possible to do so.

Here, for instance, is a letter to the editor of *The Daily Telegraph* from Dr. Martin Henry of Good Easter, Essex, written after the customary opening of a new session of Parliament with a speech in which the monarch outlines the government's program for the next Parliament in words written for him by his ministers:

Yesterday's King's Speech was rather like those low-fat spreads that pretend to be butter. Did it really contain what people are asking for? The smoking ban, panic over AI, abolishing A-levels, driverless cars—I am not sure these are the things people want to hear about. The things they do want, however, were barely mentioned by the King: lower taxes; cheaper food; better roads; an end to the relentless persecution of motorists and landlords; a more robust police force; tougher sentencing for shoplifting and eco vandalism; tougher laws to combat hate crime; facing up to the absurdity of the proposed gender and trans laws in Scotland; a more efficient NHS; a self-sufficient, long-term energy policy; not to mention stopping the profligacy of giving millions to India and China—or, nearer to home, HS2 and net zero. A golden opportunity to close the gap with Labour before the next general election has, I fear, been lost.

He doesn't even mention immigration, which is the liveliest of live issues in Britain, as it is elsewhere in Europe. It is also the issue that no mainstream party seems willing to exploit. The Tories make the right noises about "stopping the boats," but they have so far had little to no success in actually doing so. The one member of the cabinet willing to show a robust attitude toward stemming the migrant tide, Suella Braverman, was sacked by the prime minister, Rishi Sunak—who is, like her, of Indian immigrant descent—a few days after the King's Speech. Suella Braver-than-the-men then wrote a blistering letter in reply to Mr. Sunak, accusing him of reneging on four promises, two of them concerning immigration, that he made to her in return for her support in the leadership election that

brought him to power in 2022—support she had offered "despite [Mr. Sunak's] having been rejected by a majority of party members during the summer leadership contest and thus having no personal mandate to be prime minister."

Ouch. Interestingly, however, what finally did poor Suella in was not the immigration issue that had embroiled her in so much controversy in the weeks leading up to her dismissal. Instead, according to some observers, what sunk her was an article she had written for *The Times* ahead of last year's Armistice Day ceremonies, which some supporters of Palestine—which is to say, of Hamas—were threatening to disrupt. In the article she wrote that "there is a perception that senior police officers play favorites when it comes to protesters." That was putting it about as mildly as possible, even though it would have been popular with Conservatives (and conservatives) in the country simply to have banned the pro-Hamas march. Ms. Braverman had some support in the media, but the preponderance of media opinion was better represented by Sir Keir Starmer, the leader of His Majesty's Opposition, who wrote for *The Telegraph* that "Suella Braverman has set herself against the very values Britain fought for."

I would give a great deal to know what the British dead of the Great War, who are honored specifically on Armistice Day, would have made of this idea of "the very values Britain fought for" according to Sir Keir. Would the right of the Jew-hating demonstrators to spew their poison in the public streets on any day, let alone one of the most solemn days in the calendar of British nationhood, have been among those values? I very much doubt it. Those soldiers seldom or never spoke of fighting for "values" at all. They fought for the honor of king and country—or thought they did—and for their own honor. And who should know better about such things than themselves? Certainly not Sir Keir, whose adherence to respectable political opinion in this instance means that at least he, like Mr. Sunak, cannot be faulted for opportunism.

As for the rights and wrongs of the Hamas-friendly marchers, the great and good Mark Steyn wrote this:

Whether hijacking Armistice Day should be legal or illegal, it would not, in a healthy polity, be considered seemly. That's why I always quote the otherwise wholly forgotten Lord Moulton, the director-general of the explosives department during the First World War, and his observation that the health of a society is determined not by what is permitted or prevented by law but by what is self-regulated by the citizenry in "the realm of manners." In the realm of manners, the citizenry don't need a law forbidding competing groups from swamping and desecrating Armistice Day because you couldn't find enough people willing to do anything so obviously inappropriate. But multicultural diversity rots out the realm of manners—because the population no longer has enough in common to sustain social cohesion, and so you need an ever bigger and more powerful state to mediate the competing interests of different identity groups.

I remember that, many years ago, my old friend the eminent scholar Noel Malcolm—now Sir Noel, I'm happy to say—wrote that for reasons of class consciousness the British don't vote for "the man in the saloon bar," however much they may sympathize with his views. Those views would presumably be called populist today, like those of Nigel Farage, the founding leader of the U.K. Independence Party and now of Reform U.K., a man who has become a national celebrity (and is now appearing on British television in that role in the reality-television show *I'm a Celebrity . . . Get Me Out of Here!*) despite never having been elected to the British Parliament—and whose career is thus a testimony to the truth of Sir Noel's observation.

Mr. Farage, it must be admitted, is much hated by the British ruling class, who only last summer attempted to bar him from holding a British bank account. But I don't think their hatred for his followers and supporters is anywhere near as intense as the hatred of America's ruling class for Mr. Trump's.

In a recent post, Chris Bray cited a tweet by General Michael Hayden, the director of the CIA and the NSA under George W. Bush,

suggesting that "Americans with guns and Bibles are indistinguishable from Islamist suicide bombers." As Mr. Bray writes,

The point of endlessly locating all threats of authoritarianism in the body of a single Scary Orange Man is that it ends all discussion about the actual sources of burgeoning authoritarianism in a metastasizing security state. But there it still is, growing in size and power, led by people who are increasingly unguarded about how much they hate the people they govern.

That hatred was also on display, shockingly, in the arrogance and contempt shown by the presidents of Harvard, MIT, and the University of Pennsylvania, in testifying before Congress, toward Republican questioners asking: "Does calling for the genocide of Jews violate [your university's] code of conduct or rules regarding bullying or harassment?" Their answers were evasive ("It depends on the context") but clearly added up to *No*. As with the pro-Hamas demonstrators, the shamelessness of this defiance of hitherto all-but-universal standards of decency in this country shows what they think of their fellow citizens who still cling to such standards.

We in America sometimes still pride ourselves—if we pride ourselves on anything anymore—on being a "classless society," but such open contempt for the vast numbers of Americans excluded from the cognitive elite must mean that the class-based fault lines of the Old World are still there, albeit with a new rationale. Now it's the ruling class's conceit of itself as a "meritocracy" that is used to justify keeping the less credentialed of their fellow citizens, and those with no ideologically validated claim to victimhood, in their place. It's a place to which those of what the pollsters call the "some college" cohort have been particularly anxious to avoid relegation and social ostracization by their betters—their inevitable fate should they dare to support the likes of Messrs. Trump, Farage, Wilders, or Milei. Indications are that that may no longer be the case, going forward.

Books

Carlyle in sickness & in health

by *Simon Heffer*

On November 19, 1812, Jane Baillie Welsh, aged eleven, wrote to her aunt by marriage Mary Welsh (addressing her as “My dear Mrs Welsh”—none of that familiarity nonsense with close relations in those days) “to address to you a few lines.” She mentioned that “I have not begun Geography yet but I expect I will soon.” The letter, eight lines long in the complete Duke-Edinburgh edition, is, as the editors note, “without punctuation.” It is also the opening salvo in what has become a fifty-volume edition of *The Collected Letters of Thomas and Jane Welsh Carlyle*, a massive, historic, and scholastically magnificent enterprise whose first volume was published in 1970 and whose last has just appeared, fifty-three years later.

The project was conceived in 1952. It is a triumph of mainly British (but also some formidable American) scholarship made possible mostly by American money, mainly from a host of foundations. It would probably not happen now: those of a certain disposition who have studied Carlyle, and who find merit in applying the standards of today to the society of nearly two hundred years ago, tend to regard him as a prime candidate for cultural cancellation. One cannot see—at the current moment—beneficent foundations, trusts, and philanthropists in America, or in Britain, readily handing over money to promote the work of a man now regarded by some as a proto-fascist (after all, Goebbels read Carlyle’s *Frederick the Great* to Hitler in the bunker), a racist, a white supremacist, and a sexist. The

fact that he was a genius and for a time the single most influential man in contemporary thought and letters counts, they feel, for little in that context.

Few would have room for the fifty volumes, or indeed the resources to buy a set, but Duke’s other great contribution to civilization and the advancement of knowledge is that the university has put the whole lot online, and they are there for everybody with a sufficiently enquiring mind—exhaustive footnotes and all. Only one of the collaborators survived the entire course of those fifty-three years from the first to the last volume: Ian Campbell, who became Professor of Scottish and Victorian Literature at Edinburgh University and whose own distinguished biography of Carlyle captures the essence of the man without emulating his occasional prolixity; *Frederick the Great* amounts to no fewer than eight volumes in the Centenary Edition, published at the end of the nineteenth century, but for all that is mostly a rather good read, thanks to Carlyle’s idiosyncratic, and always arresting, prose style and the lack of fear or reluctance that he had when it came to interpolating his own opinions.

Our first meeting with the Sage of Chelsea (born in 1795) in that initial volume comes directly after his future wife’s unpunctuated effort and is dated June 24, 1813. The letter is to his Edinburgh University friend Thomas Murray, who (a footnote tells us) was the first person to make Carlyle realize he might earn his living through literature. He did, but what a struggle

it was. That letter, which includes much gossip about their shared acquaintances, comes from Carlyle's modest house in the village of Ecclefechan, in Dumfriesshire, just over the border from England. Carlyle's origins were humble: his father was a stonemason and then a farmer, but he had a thirst for self-improvement. The family took education seriously. The glories of the Scottish education system of the early nineteenth century meant that someone dismissed as an "Annandale peasant" could attend Edinburgh University (albeit living a hand-to-mouth existence) and aspire to joining the middle classes. As readers of *Jude the Obscure* (1895) know, no such opportunities existed in England until the twentieth century, with the waste of human capital and resources consequently being catastrophic.

Jane wrote from Haddington, a genteel town twenty miles east of Edinburgh, on the main Great North Road than runs down Scotland's and then England's east coast to London, nearly four hundred miles away. Her father was a doctor, and she was born ensconced in polite society. Eventually, in 1826, these two married despite their social differences and concerns from her family, and in 1834 they settled down for the rest of their lives in Chelsea, almost on the Thames embankment, in a little terraced house that became one of the hubs of the capital's literary society—Dickens, John Stuart Mill, Tennyson, and Ruskin were to be among the regular visitors. Mill remained welcome despite his housemaid's having burned the first draft of Carlyle's *French Revolution*, left dumped by an armchair while the great philosopher accomplished yet more important work with his mistress, in March 1835. "The miserablest accident (as we name such things) of my whole life has just befallen me; almost the only *accident* of any magnitude I had ever to complain of," Carlyle told James Fraser, his publisher:

I learned last night that my whole first volume, by the silliest oversight and mistake (not on my part or my wife's) had been destroyed, except some three or four bits of leaves; and so the labour of five steadfast months had vanished irrecoverably; worse than if it had never been!

He did not name the culprit, but said he had "a far deeper sorrow than mine," and consoled himself with the notion that "it is purely the hand of Providence." Such was Mill's anguish that he offered Carlyle £200, equivalent to around £25,000 today, untaxed. Such was Carlyle's rectitude that he accepted only £100. He duly rewrote the first volume and considered the result superior.

The editors' decision to include Mrs. Carlyle's letters was entirely correct. She was her husband's intellectual equal in many respects, and in London and British literary life they hunted as a pair. Her letters give a superb insight into their domestic and social life, and into her husband's character. When he was working himself into the ground writing *Frederick the Great*, which took him the best part of a dozen years and was completed shortly before her death, he would lock himself into his soundproofed room at the top of their house. When he could write no more, he saddled his horse and went for a thirty-mile ride, often to Croydon (now in London's farthest southern suburbs) and back. She hardly saw him. In March 1859, not quite halfway through this calvary, she wrote to a woman friend that "Mr Carlyle is hard at work as usual, and the house would be dull enough if it were not for the plenty of people—often more than enough—who come to see me in the forenoons . . ." These were not, she discloses elsewhere, always great literary figures stopping by to take coffee with her, but mostly a succession of tradesmen: such was the glamour of her life. Her health became precarious and she took to her bed more and more frequently: she said to a friend in 1863 that "you were quite right in thinking things must be wrong with me," but said it was all down to servant trouble. That June, while taking a cure on the south coast, she told another woman friend that "it is so pleasant to be nursed, and made much of! My only regret is, that I must go home on Saturday and take up with the opposite of all that!"

Four volumes later, *Frederick* is finished, but so is poor Jane. She sent a lively letter of gossip to her husband, who was visiting Scotland, hours before her sudden death. The news was

sent to him by his friend John Forster in a telegram. Carlyle replied that “the stroke that has fallen on me is immense; my heart is as if broken.” Even the Queen conveyed her sympathies; he replied to her lady-in-waiting, in a letter filled with gratitude, that “I can write to nobody; it is best for me, at present, when I do not even speak to anybody.” Writing on May 20, 1866, a month after his bereavement, to his patron Lady Ashburton, he said: “I am very quiet, as much as may be, silent; a dreary leaden sky of sorrow lying over me, *whb* [*sic*] will not abate, or soften into calm.” His epitaph to his wife was “the light of his life, as if gone out.” Jane had reacted with fury to her husband’s friendship with Lady Ashburton, which had no sexual side to it at all (it is far from clear that the Carlyles’ marriage was ever consummated: we shall never know, but on the morning after the first night of his honeymoon he went into the garden of the house where they were staying and trashed all the flower beds). As the letters show, Jane not only calmed down about it but became a devoted friend of Lady Ashburton too.

Carlyle’s devastation at his wife’s death stands uneasily with the best joke ever made about the couple—indeed perhaps the best joke ever made about nineteenth-century people of letters: Samuel Butler’s observation that “it was very good of God to let Carlyle and Mrs Carlyle marry one another, and so make two people miserable and not four.” They did quarrel, and their shared disputatiousness comes across throughout many of the volumes, but there is no doubt that they had an emotional dependence on each other. Carlyle could be ferociously miserable—he famously described the period of writing his *Latter-Day Pamphlets*, in 1849–50, as one of “deep gloom, and bottomless dubitation”—and she could be scolding; one suspects their marriage is only unlike countless millions of others through the ages in that it is so well documented. These fifty volumes contain the most important documents.

The penultimate volume, published in 2022, began with Carlyle in late 1873, aged almost seventy-eight, apparently back to his old self in many regards: such as in praising Bismarck for

a robust foreign policy in regard to the pope, who had complained about the limited rights of Catholics in the Second Reich.¹

Would to Heaven there were any English Minister now extant, or soon likely to be, who durst stand up in the name of this country (which was once the country of Cromwell, and protestant to the bone) and tell the accursed son of Chaos a similar story!

Nothing had diluted Carlyle the worshipper of heroes, of the strong man, of might is right. He was comforted in his widowerhood by his niece Mary Carlyle Aitken, who lived with him and cared for him. Ruskin frequently visited and wrote to him daily when abroad. John Forster (whose life of Dickens he greatly admires—“the narrative flows on with limpid clearness, soft harmony, perfection of phrase . . .”) and James Anthony Froude, who within a decade will be his biographer, were regulars, Froude the more so after he was widowed in 1874, leaving him “drowned in such black deluges of woe as no other man in London.”

We used to learn the most intimate details about Carlyle in his letters to his wife; now we benefit from the extensive correspondence he has with his brother John, a doctor. Thomas suffers from “the genius of indigestion” and “the genius of dyspepsia.” He asserted to his brother in November 1873 that “I am still as idle as ever,” yet explained that he does

nothing but read (poorish books, alas); walk daily a 3 or 4 miles[;] talk the while, if I have any company;—have always, alas, to spend so many hours out of my four and twenty in mere sleeping, misdigesting, and drearily endeavouring in vain to manage not insupportably the wretched dilapidated clay house where I have still to linger till the term come.

He added that “in general my mood is mournful; but seldom or never to be called quite mis-

1 *The Collected Letters of Thomas and Jane Welsh Carlyle, Volume 49: October 1873–November 1875*, edited by Ian Campbell and David R. Sorensen; Duke University Press, 356 pages, \$30.

erable; occasionally strangely wonderful, tender and even solemn.” His reading and writing (mainly of letters) remained prodigious: he was working on a history of the early kings of Norway, with niece Mary as his amanuensis.

Carlyle may have been without “the light of his life,” but he was relatively rich (he had £2,779 10s 9d in his bank in January 1874, a typically excellent footnote tells us, a sum equivalent to around £350,000 today), and he was heaped with honor. He learned of the kaiser’s intention to award him the Prussian Order of Merit, in recognition of his work on Frederick the Great, by reading of it in a newspaper that same month. On St. Valentine’s Day he told John he had received from the German Ambassador

all the Documents and Insignia connected with our sublime elevation to the Prussian order of merit. . . . The star or symbolical decoration is really very pretty; a bright gold thing like a wheel with spokes about the size of a crown piece hung with a black ribbon, with silver edges.

Acclamation soon came from closer to home. On December 27, Benjamin Disraeli—whom at the time of the reform agitation in 1867 Carlyle had dismissed, in *Shooting Niagara—and After*, as a “superlative Hebrew conjuror”—had written to him stating that “A Government should recognise intellect. It elevates and sustains the tone of a nation,” offering him a high rank of knighthood (the Grand Cross of the Order of the Bath) and a pension. Carlyle admitted “great surprise” at this “magnanimous and noble” offer “unexampled . . . in the history of governing persons towards men of letters at the present.” Yet he went on to say of “your splendid and generous proposals” that “must not any of them take effect.” He considered “titles of honour” to be “out of keeping with the tenour [*sic*] of my own poor existence” and a potential “encumbrance” and said his own means were “amply abundant, even superabundant,” so the pension was not necessary. Nonetheless, the offer showed just what a successful journey Carlyle had had: even if the twenty-first century cannot see it, or bring itself to see it,

this was, as Disraeli knew, the most influential writer and thinker in the literary world of the nineteenth century.

The fiftieth and final volume opens in December 1875, as Carlyle is marking his eightieth birthday amid “a complete whirlwind of birthday gifts and congratulations,” though he told John he felt it would be his last.² Mary was now writing his letters for him, and he says how much he dislikes dictating. To reach eighty in the 1870s signified attaining great and remarkable old age, but Carlyle’s astonishing constitution was slowly packing up, however vigorous his mind remained. What meant most was that Bismarck wrote to him: “no honour could have been done to me, which I should have valued so much, or which shall live more brightly in my thoughts for the rest of my times in this world.” The correspondence with John intensified, though he was in decline too and predeceased his brother in September 1879, having (the editors tell us) earlier that year described the painful tumors in his stomach. Carlyle’s exhortation, the previous March, to “keep hoping, dear brother!” was sadly fruitless. The last letter Thomas directly composed was that month; the editors quote his friend William Allingham observing how, then aged eighty-three, he became “alarmingly weak” and began to sleep much of the time. In February 1881, he went into a coma and died. The last section of the volume contains letters from Mary about her uncle’s declining months; in November 1879 she informed a friend that despite reports of Carlyle being “dangerously ill” he was in fact “alarmingly well.” By July 1880, however, he was “exceedingly weak, hardly able to walk fifty yards without help.” It was a life of “lying on the sofa, reading in his easy chair, and smoking the occasional pipe.” At 2.30 p.m. each day he would be taken for a drive in his carriage, then come back to sleep on the sofa until dinner and an early bed. The end arrived not long after.

² *The Collected Letters of Thomas and Jane Welsh Carlyle, Volume 50: December 1875–February 1881*, edited by Ian Campbell and David R. Sorensen; Duke University Press, 264 pages, \$30.

Throughout all fifty volumes of these letters the scholarship of the editorial team is simply stupendous. They have created one of the greatest historical resources in existence. Even if most libraries cannot run to acquiring the entire set, the letters' availability online is the most generous act of academic philanthropy imaginable. These letters require no great grounding in the history and correspondence of the nineteenth century to be understood and enjoyed: they provide that very grounding. They are about the human condition and tell their own remarkable story. Everyone should read them.

Public disservice

Philip K. Howard

Not Accountable:
Rethinking the Constitutionality of
Public Employee Unions.
Rodin Books, 160 pages, \$21.99

reviewed by John Steele Gordon

In 1906, President Theodore Roosevelt, unwisely reading Upton Sinclair's muckraking novel *The Jungle* (1905) at the breakfast table, was so revolted by the depictions of what went on in the meatpacking industry that he flung the book out the White House dining-room window.

You will be tempted to do the same with Philip K. Howard's new book, *Not Accountable: Rethinking the Constitutionality of Public Employee Unions*. The impulse will be due not to horror but to anger at what public service in the United States today has become. For, as Howard makes all too clear, it is now a veritable conspiracy between elected officials and public-service workers to defraud the taxpayers.

The system siphons off billions of dollars a year to its beneficiaries—the members and officers of public-sector unions—while giving very short shrift to the public at large. The nation's children, all too often trapped in schools that are organized strictly for the benefit of the teachers, suffer the most.

It is an old maxim in political science that "today's reform is tomorrow's problem." When

new rules are put in place to eliminate corruption, people find ways to exploit the new situation and corruption begins to creep back into the system in new ways.

The Founding Fathers, aware of how entrenched bureaucrats made government inefficient and corrupt in Europe, hoped that democratic elections would prevent such entrenchment in this country. Elections, however, did not prevent a descent into malfeasance, and by the 1820s, as Howard notes, "Federal jobs had little turnover and . . . had become sinecures rife with inefficiency and corruption."

When Andrew Jackson became president in 1829, he tried to reform the situation by introducing what he called "rotation in office." This measure, he hoped, would align the bureaucracy with the country's majority party and prevent bureaucratic deadwood. But it soon degenerated into the spoils system, where each change of parties in the White House resulted in a wholesale turnover of government jobs, which were filled by people chosen for their party loyalty and not their competence.

Demands for reform began to build again, especially after President James A. Garfield was assassinated by a disappointed office seeker in 1881. The new president, Chester A. Arthur, shepherded the Pendleton Act through Congress in 1883. It created a civil-service system that was supposed to remove politics from public service, allowing public employees to keep their jobs regardless of party as long as they performed adequately. In other words, it was emphatically not a tenure system. The president retained the power to fire employees who did not do their jobs.

At first, the civil-service system applied to only about 10 percent of the federal workforce. But later presidents, in order to lock in their own appointees to federal jobs, kept expanding the system to cover more and more employees. The various states, plagued with the same problems, also began adopting the civil-service model.

Without the discipline imposed by the need to make a profit, few public employees will ever be as hardworking as those in profit-seeking corporations. But the system worked reasonably well. Then, beginning in the 1960s, the

federal government as well as many state governments made the worst public-policy mistake of the twentieth century. They began to allow public employees to unionize and collectively bargain over wages (although not in the federal government) and working conditions.

Franklin Roosevelt was decidedly pro-labor, and the passage of the National Labor Relations Act of 1935, often called the Wagner Act for its chief congressional sponsor, Senator Robert F. Wagner, gave the labor movement a major boost. By the early 1950s, unions in the private sector represented about 35 percent of all workers (today that figure is down to about 6 percent). But FDR adamantly opposed the idea of allowing public employees to unionize, as did George Meany, the head of the AFL and the AFL-CIO after the merger of the two labor organizations in 1955.

In the private sector, management and labor collectively bargain, in effect, over how to divide the profits both sides worked to create. But governments don't create profits. So at best, when government and public employees bargain over wages, they are deciding how much of other peoples' money (i.e., the taxpayers' money) to spend. And as Milton Friedman famously pointed out, no one spends other peoples' money as carefully as he spends his own.

Worse, in the private sector neither management nor labor has any influence over who sits on the other side of the negotiating table. But public-service unions can, and frequently do, make massive campaign contributions to politicians. They expect, and receive, a handsome return on their investment. As governor of New Jersey, Jon Corzine told a rally of government workers that "We will fight for a fair contract!" having apparently forgotten that his job was to minimize the state government's labor costs.

But public officials are elected by taxpayers, and so salaries offered in collective bargaining are limited by public opinion. The public, however, pays much less attention to fringe benefits, such as pensions and health care, because the economic consequences are down the road, not up-front.

As a result, pensions in the public sector are now much more generous than in the private sector, which has largely converted from defined-benefit to defined-contribution plans anyway.

Retirement in the private sector is usually at age sixty-five. In the public sector it can be much earlier. Some firefighters and policemen can retire with full benefits after twenty years of service. Often these early retirees go right back to work for government and end up getting double pensions, known as double-dipping. After one village official in Illinois finally retired for good, he was the recipient of no fewer than three pensions.

In the private sector, unused sick days expire at the end of the year. In the public sector they often accumulate and can be used to pad pension benefits. It is common for public workers in their last year on the job to run up extensive overtime in order to maximize their pensions still further, their pensions being based on their final-year compensation.

In order to keep up current services, many governments have put off funding future pension benefits. The city of Detroit was forced into bankruptcy in 2013, when unfunded pension liabilities made up 40 percent of its \$18 billion debt. Howard reports that "Illinois' state pension liability (not even including municipal pensions) was so high that every household in the state would have to pay \$65,000 to cover the difference."

Besides negotiating outsized pay and benefits, public-employee unions have been able over time to impose work rules that run up costs. It costs two to three times as much to collect garbage in Chicago as it does in other cities with fewer union-imposed rules. And these rules have essentially ended the most powerful tool any management has to require employees to do their jobs: the power to fire those who don't.

Howard provides many examples of the results of these work rules. For instance, in 2017 Reuters compiled a list of police officers who had repeatedly abused innocent people. One officer had severely beaten a college student who was guilty of only the minor infraction of drinking beer in public. Reuters showed how

the officer had been the subject of no fewer than forty similar complaints. But he could not be dismissed, for the union contract required that prior complaints be expunged from the record after only a few months. So, Howard says, “it’s almost impossible for supervisors to terminate repeat offenders.” A *Washington Post* report on police departments in thirty-seven large cities calculated a dismissal rate of only two-tenths of 1 percent.

Among teachers, the dismissal rate is even lower in many places. In New York City in 2006–07, only eight teachers out of 55,000 were terminated for poor performance. Why? Because as one supervisor said, “Dismissing a tenured teacher is not a process. It’s a career.” New York City has a number of teachers who, unfit for the classroom but not subject to termination, sit all day in what are called “rubber rooms,” doing nothing while receiving full pay and benefits.

As Howard explains,

Public unions have created a modern spoils system. Just as the spoils system ran government for the benefit of campaign supporters of the winning party, public unions control government for the benefit of public employees. Like the old Tammany machine of New York, public unions have consolidated their political might to advance policies aimed at keeping public employment as a sinecure, unmanageable and unreformable.

But it is even worse than that. Under the spoils system the people could, from time to time, “throw the rascals out.” The public-union spoils system, however, is “encased in legal entitlements and powers.”

What can be done? In 2011, the Republican governor of Wisconsin, Scott Walker, with large majorities in both houses of the legislature, was able to ram through—over ferocious opposition from Democrats—reforms that limited public-sector collective bargaining to base pay only.

Howard points out that public-sector collective bargaining violates both the U.S. Constitution and all state constitutions in at least two ways.

First, it violates the non-delegation doctrine, which forbids either the executive or legislative branches from delegating the powers given them by the people under the Constitution. When a labor contract goes to arbitration, it is the arbiters, not the government, that make public-policy decisions, such as pay scales.

Further, Howard thinks that public-sector collective bargaining violates the “Guarantee Clause” of Article IV of the Constitution, which guarantees to every state a republican form of government. James Madison defined such a government as one “which derives all its powers directly or indirectly from the great body of the people . . . not from . . . a favored class of it.” The Supreme Court has usually shied away from ruling on whether something was a “republican form of government,” saying that the issue is a political one and thus nonjusticiable. But Howard notes that in *Baker v. Carr* (1962), which enshrined the doctrine of one man, one vote, the court ruled that the “nonjusticiability of such claims has nothing to do with their touching upon matters of state governmental organization.”

Philip K. Howard has written a short, important book on an urgently needed reform that gets only more urgent with every new labor contract negotiated by governments and public-sector unions. For, as the late economist Herbert Stein noted in his famous “Stein’s Law,” “if something cannot go on forever, it will stop.”

Death by disinformation

Joshua Kurlantzick

Beijing’s Global Media Offensive:
China’s Uneven Campaign to
Influence Asia and the World.
Oxford University Press,
560 pages, \$32.99

reviewed by Gordon G. Chang

Su Chii-chenng, the director-general of the Osaka branch of the Taipei Economic and Cultural Office, committed suicide on September 14,

2018. He was the victim of a Chinese disinformation attack on the government he served.

One of Beijing's "content farms" had manufactured a news report that China had sent buses to rescue Taiwanese tourists stranded by a typhoon at the Osaka airport after Su's office, the de facto Taiwanese consulate in the city, had failed to do so. In fact, Osaka's Kansai Airport had sent the buses. The Taiwanese diplomat believed the fabricated report, however, and took his life over the shame of abandoning the tourists.

I had heard of China's rescue of the Taiwanese tourists at the time but didn't fully realize the report was false until I read Joshua Kurlantzick's *Beijing's Global Media Offensive*.

"Of all the places in the world, Taiwan is probably the one where China's disinformation tactics have become the most sophisticated," writes Kurlantzick, a senior fellow for Southeast Asia at the Council on Foreign Relations. The false report about the stranded tourists, as he explains, appeared both credible and damaging to Taiwan's reputation. And the reporting was widely distributed: it was read around the world after being "laundered" by China's Guancha.cn website and the Communist Party's *Global Times* tabloid.

Beijing's ambitions go well beyond convincing the twenty-four million people of Taiwan that they want to be annexed by Chinese communists. As Kurlantzick states at the beginning of his important book,

China increasingly and openly wants to reshape the world in its image and is using its influence and information efforts to promote this brand of technology-enabled authoritarianism . . .

China is more totalitarian than authoritarian these days, but in any event Beijing's more assertive propaganda approach has coincided with the ascension of Xi Jinping, who became the Communist Party's general secretary at the end of 2012. Xi, more than any other leader since Mao, has explicitly tried to export the "China model" of governance and societal organization to the entire world.

In the two decades before Xi, Beijing merely tried to burnish its image in other countries

with information campaigns. Under Xi, the regime's claims about itself have become grander and its tactics to push narratives more coercive. Moreover, the Chinese party-state under Xi has gone on the propaganda offensive, tearing down perceived adversaries and enemies, including the United States. The Chinese leadership sees information as a worldwide "battleground."

China during this time moved from its "charm offensive"—a phrase taken from the title of Kurlantzick's 2007 work, *Charm Offensive: How China's Soft Power Is Transforming the World*—to the use of "sharp power," disinformation, misinformation, and other covert tactics. Beijing made the move in part because its "soft power" approach had first "stumbled" and then was "torpedoed" by its handling of COVID-19.

The world, therefore, can expect more Chinese disinformation of the type that drove Su Chii-chen to take his life. "China has come to rely more on sharp power than on soft power, and it is likely Beijing will lean even harder on sharp power in the 2020s as it improves its information and influence campaigns," Kurlantzick writes in his comprehensive book of 367 pages of text and 138 pages of footnotes. China, unfortunately, has copied Russia's successful influence efforts, and Beijing has proven to be a "fast learner." Moscow and Beijing have vowed to "tell each other's stories well," so China is spreading Russian disinformation about the war in Ukraine through its own channels. "The assault on truth" now has two large allies.

Perhaps make that two large allies and a smallish partner: China, Russia, and Iran have been "increasingly converging on disinformation narratives about the United States." The Chinese correctly believe that the constant reinforcement of messaging over time will be effective.

China has expended considerable resources to increase what it calls "discourse power." No other state comes close to its spending on Communist Party and state media. Chinese outlets, as a result, are giants. China Global Television Network, better known as CGTN, can claim, based on access to households, to be "the world's

biggest television network.” China Radio International is the world’s second-biggest radio broadcaster. Xinhua News Agency had 181 bureaus in early 2021 and since has opened more. “As a result,” Kurlantzick tells us, “Chinese outlets have a growing bullhorn to blast out news on issues Beijing cares about.”

Yet China’s media organs are not as dominant as they look. Yes, CGTN’s English-language page has more than 117 million Facebook followers, and no other media company has more. That does not translate into influence, however, because the presence of Chinese outlets on social media is “inorganic.” For one thing, “the amount of real, authentic engagement seems low,” *Beijing’s Global Media Offensive* notes. Most of the content “generates few comments in response, raising suspicions about how many real followers they have.” Investigations reveal that Facebook followers come from “click farms.”

CGTN needs all the help it can get because, among other things, the network has an insoluble dilemma. It could appeal to foreign audiences with certain propaganda narratives, but those narratives are, in the words of James Palmer as quoted by Kurlantzick, “anathema to the people the station answers to back home.” Palmer, who once worked for a Chinese state media organ in Beijing, tells us that avoiding “political errors” is more important to media officials than anything else.

In general, it would seem that China has two successful state media models to choose from: Qatar’s Al Jazeera and Russia’s RT, once known as Russia Today.

Qatar has allowed Al Jazeera to produce “a high degree of excellent reporting” without interference except on a few subjects, notably Israel and Saudi Arabia. For the most part, the Qatari government has little interest in the general state of the world. China’s regime, however, wants to control the storylines about everything and therefore imposes tight controls on all subjects. Scratch Al Jazeera as a model for China.

RT has been popular because it is “disruptive, hypercontrarian, controversial.” China has increasingly employed Russia’s “flame-thrower approach,” but this effective tactic

has only limited utility for an ambitious Beijing. China wants to be seen by the world as “a different type of power from the United States and other leading democracies,” because, it argues, it understands “developing states’ needs” and is sensitive to their “political and cultural norms.” Therefore, “going full crazy, Kremlin style” is not in the cards for Chinese leaders, Kurlantzick perceptively writes.

China, therefore, has no successful model to follow. Most of its media efforts are failures, and only Xinhua News Agency is successful, in large part because this official outlet often plays it straight with content-sharing deals, which give some but not much propaganda benefit for the Communist Party.

As *Beijing’s Global Media Offensive* continually points out—the book is repetitious—China’s media efforts are undermined by Xi Jinping’s aggressive policies and tactics. Chinese propaganda cannot sell a narrative that people do not want to buy and which they suspect is not true.

Yet America has a dilemma too: “Washington is undercutting its promotion of global internet freedom by presiding over declining online openness at home.” Kurlantzick cites a Freedom House study showing American internet freedom declining for three straight years, the result of surveillance by law enforcement and the spread of disinformation by both foreign and domestic actors. Yet he does not answer a crucial question: wouldn’t the scrubbing of disinformation, especially that created by Americans themselves, reduce that prized openness? The recent effort of the Biden administration to create a Disinformation Governance Board, for instance, almost certainly would have run afoul of the First Amendment and was in any event extremely disturbing. Democracies like America have yet to resolve competing factors. Kurlantzick, after raising the crucial issue, should have done more than merely dismiss the matter as democracies suffering from “self-inflicted wounds.”

So what should America and free societies do in the face of China’s media blitz? Chinese media outlets will only learn and improve, and Kurlantzick in his final chapter offers

recommendations. Many of them are sound. He wisely urges democracies to focus their energies on countering what Beijing is doing well and not bother trying to capitalize on its many failures.

One of Beijing's most important failures occurred in Taiwan, where recent Chinese efforts have begun to fall flat. Kurlantzick chronicles how China engineered the phenomenal rise of the Kuomintang's Han Kuo-yu, an "undistinguished" politician. Aided by favorable Chinese publicity, Han came out of nowhere in 2018 to win the mayor's seat in Kaohsiung, a traditional stronghold of the Democratic Progressive Party, and that victory propelled him to the nomination of his party in the 2020 presidential election.

"Beijing often puts out clunky, unnuanced false media reports, many of which are easily traced back to China and, when exposed, wind up alienating the citizens of the place Beijing was trying to influence," Kurlantzick writes. "China has built a giant influence and information apparatus but currently wields it clumsily and often poorly."

China's maneuverings in Taiwan were in fact exposed and created a backlash in the election, leading to the result that Beijing did not want: the ignominious failure of Han and the landslide reelection of Tsai Ing-wen in 2020.

A little more than a year after the tragic death of Su Chii-chenng, Beijing suffered a historic defeat in Taiwan—largely at its own hands.

Steel City scenarist

Patti Hartigan

August Wilson: A Life.

Simon & Schuster, 544 pages, \$32.50

reviewed by Paul Devlin

Patti Hartigan's comprehensive *August Wilson: A Life* is the first biography of the playwright (1945–2005), who seems to have been simultaneously the quirkiest and most ordinary guy (as if in alternating paragraphs, and not unlike many of his characters)—a mysterious artist who conjured the Hill District of

Pittsburgh into a layered, coherent myth even as he obsessed over current events. Hartigan admires Wilson and seems to understand him intuitively while finding vantage points for measured, relevant critiques. She has created a balanced portrait of a man who liked to write (and/or talk and/or chain-smoke) in diners and coffee shops late into the night, made many human mistakes, and transmuted the communities he knew into an enduring contribution to literature and the performing arts.

Hartigan is a former theater critic of *The Boston Globe* who interviewed Wilson several times over the years, including extensively for a profile in 2005. The Huntington Theatre in Boston staged several of Wilson's plays en route to Broadway (along with the Yale Repertory Theatre and others), so she was present at key moments in his career. It is surprising that no professor of English, African American studies, or theater studies has ever written (in the eighteen years since Wilson's death) a biography of arguably the most famous and successful American playwright of the last quarter of the twentieth century.

Yet Hartigan's professional background is ideal for the task—she knows the theater business and the review business (far more important to a play than to a book or movie) and saw the plays as they appeared. On the premiere of Wilson's masterpiece *Joe Turner's Come and Gone* (1984) at the Huntington Theatre in 1986, Hartigan writes that

Boston, with all its universities, boasts a sophisticated audience, and many in the house that night were stunned and mesmerized by the bones scene that ends Act I, when the juba ends and Loomis falls into a paroxysm of tremors.

(She notes that Wilson said if he had never written anything else, *Joe Turner's Come and Gone* would have been enough.) But Hartigan does not overdo it with her own reviews or eyewitness reportage. She appropriately quotes from the make-or-break reviews (e.g., Frank Rich's in *The New York Times*).

Wilson's story is about as unlikely as could be imagined. A natural autodidact who did not care for school, he briefly served in the army (of which no records survive) and then

lived in Los Angeles before returning to Pittsburgh in 1963. There he was involved in the local poetry scene until he moved to St. Paul, Minnesota, in 1978 to write children's plays about dinosaurs for a museum—hardly an obvious move for an aspiring playwright at that (or any) time. He claimed he did not attend a professionally produced play until he was thirty-one.

Yet less than a decade later, Wilson won the Pulitzer for *Fences*, which made a 1,000 percent profit for its Broadway producers over 525 performances, becoming (according to Hartigan) the most successful drama of all time. There were considerable artistic disagreements about *Fences* backstage (so to speak) involving formidable personalities (Lloyd Richards, James Earl Jones) and pressure on Wilson to change the ending, which he refused to do. Hartigan's narration of this material is riveting; she is especially skilled at relaying such tangled history. She also documents Wilson's artistic struggles, such as the difficulty of crafting a play with a strong central character (*Fences*, 1985) and of writing believable, multidimensional women dealing with serious problems (Tonya in *King Hedley II*, 1999). No fan or scholar of Wilson's work should dream of skipping this book.

The book is not authorized by the Wilson estate, which means that "Wilson's intimate letters and early plays and poetry are paraphrased." Nevertheless, Hartigan seems to have had access to Wilson's calendars or appointment books and much other private material, such as contracts. She is meticulous and thorough on the years Wilson was a public figure, roughly 1982–2005. Her account of this period takes up 80 percent of the book and is surely definitive.

Where the historical record is less robust, the story feels a little spotty, mythic, and anecdotal, such as in early chapters about Wilson's ancestors on his mother's side, from North Carolina. Hartigan has even less information on his father, Frederick Kittel, a white man from Germany who had served in the U.S. Army in World War I, with whom his mother, Daisy, and the family in general had a rocky relationship, yet who left \$659.01 to each of his children when he died in 1965. Wilson

was born Frederick August Kittel, was called Freddy in his youth, and started going by the name August Wilson soon after his father died. He changed it legally in 1981. His siblings kept the Kittel name.

Hartigan conducted extensive interviews with friends, family, actors, and directors and has an eye for little details that serve to expand Wilson's dimensions. James Yoshimura recalls that it was *on the day* of Wilson's second wedding that Wilson asked him to be his best man; Wilson, Oscar Hijuelos, Lou Reed, and "an HVAC technician" would gather to watch boxing in New York at Hijuelos's place; Wilson befriended an eccentric street-haranguer in Seattle, and when the old-timer died, Wilson looked into paying his debts—yet he turned out to be solvent. The book abounds in such gems.

The major professional tensions in Wilson's life also receive detailed analysis, such as the falling-out with his mentor Lloyd Richards and the feud with his long-running antagonist Robert Brustein, which culminated (and fizzled) in their famous debate at New York's Town Hall Theatre about race and the theater world. This came about after Brustein's response to Wilson's headline-grabbing speech at a conference at Princeton that shocked people for its hardline racialism. Hartigan misses or does not mention what I would consider the most astute critique of Wilson's speech, an uncollected and never reprinted essay by Stanley Crouch in the journal *Theater* for a roundtable feature called "Beyond the Wilson–Brustein Debate." Incidentally, Crouch criticizes Wilson for ignoring the dramatic potential in the lives of successful African Americans. Wilson's *Radio Golf* (2005) may have been written partially in response.

Hartigan is refreshingly candid at times and unafraid to make difficult points. She bluntly calls the 2020 Netflix adaptation of *Ma Rainey's Black Bottom* (1982) "flawed." While working on *King Hedley II*, his play set in the 1980s, Wilson did not understand hip-hop and could not find the time to learn about it, so he decided it was an extension of the blues (maybe a little, but not really). Hartigan does not shy away from problems

such as Wilson's unthinking slander of two respectable local businesses in *Two Trains Running* (1990), West Funeral Home and Lutz's Meat Market:

In *Two Trains*, Lutz refuses to give Hambone his ham as payment for a job well done. But in real life, Karl Lutz, who was white, was a beloved fixture in the Hill community, and most of his employees were Black, which was rare for white-owned businesses in the area at the time. His prices were fair; his meat was high-quality. But again, Wilson just picked the name; he was not writing about that particular business owner. The nitpicking frustrated him. "I never consciously modeled a character after anyone," he said.

Wilson was not trying to critique either business; he simply did not feel like changing the names. But he created real sorrow and distress for real people, such as Thomasina L. West of the funeral home family—distress, moreover, that he dismissed. Why would someone with such a singular and special imagination not employ it on the simplest details?

Hartigan deals frankly with Wilson's extramarital affairs in his first marriage and reports of his short and explosive temper. I was most surprised to read about Wilson's apparent problem with coat-check workers. This hang-up (sorry) was witnessed by many. I was reminded of Elisabeth Sifton's reminiscence of Saul Bellow, published in *Slate* in 2005: "We wondered what ancient injuries required this generous, wise person to turn skittishly mean." Yet Wilson was a lavish tipper in restaurants, Hartigan reports, and a beloved customer at his favorite coffee shop in Seattle, where he lived after 1990. He also seems to have been a superb father to his two daughters.

Aside from Wilson, Hartigan admires many in his orbit, and it is often a pleasure when the actor Anthony Chisholm (1943–2020) pops up in the book. Another backstage page-turner is the story of how Wilson's penultimate play, *Gem of the Ocean* (2003), made it to Broadway (barely) in 2004. Amid doubts by the backers about the play's viability, a question arose over who would play Solly Two Kings, the ornery

yet funny former Underground Railroad conductor (who named himself after King David and King Solomon) eking out a meager existence in 1904 but still in possession of the adventurous spirit of his youth. Would it be Chisholm, a Wilson regular who originated the role in regional theaters, or Delroy Lindo, who played Herald Loomis in *Joe Turner's Come and Gone*, and who the producers felt was a bigger star? Lindo got the part initially (with Chisholm relegated to the lesser role of Eli), but his vision for the character was too much at odds with that of Wilson and others, and the memorable role (which helped generate great reviews for the Broadway production) went back to Chisholm:

Chisholm was in place, ready to start, when Wilson bounded onto the stage, carrying Solly Two Kings's walking stick. "He stuck it in my chest and started crying like a baby. I am telling the God's truth. He said, 'Forgive me, man. Forgive me for taking your role.' I had to peel him off me. I said, 'Come on, man. Any role you write is a piece of fruit on the tree.'"

Hartigan seems especially fond of Chisholm, who grew up in Cleveland during the years Wilson was growing up in Pittsburgh and who often took cigarette breaks with him during rehearsals. He is quoted many times, often as saying something poetic and insightful. If she did enough interviews with Chisholm to produce a book or article, it would be a tribute to a fine actor who had a knack for bringing Wilson's characters to life.

Wilson died at sixty and would be seventy-eight if he were alive today. What would the author of the prescient *Radio Golf* (partially about gentrification) have made of Obama and the 2008 crash and tsunami of gentrification that was only getting started when he wrote that play? His stern opposition to color-blind casting was national news in 1997. Would he have come around on the topic, or would he have been appalled by its current ubiquity? Would he have gone viral on TikTok for dressing down a coat-check worker? Would the plays he would have written

in his sixties and seventies have removed any doubts about the “American Shakespeare” moniker he often garners?

While there is more work to be done on Wilson’s early life and intellectual development, Hartigan’s treatment of the evolution of the plays and their productions (often seamlessly interlaced with the events of Wilson’s life) as they hopped from regional theaters to Broadway will be a per-

manent resource. Wilson’s papers found an institutional home only in 2020, at the University of Pittsburgh, and (having inquired about this for my own research) I can report that the collection remains mostly unprocessed as of late 2023. Welcome and necessary future books will emerge when scholars have had a chance to study this archive, but none of them will be able to avoid or overlook Hartigan’s contribution, not just to Wilson scholarship but to American cultural history.

Forthcoming in *The New Criterion*:

The role of the Thames *by Jeremy Black*

Heaney two ways *by Paul Dean*

The importance of Homer *by Joshua T. Katz*

Unmodern Bach *by John Check*

The British army between the wars *by Leo McKistry*

The lost Homeric

by Edward N. Luttwak

The *Iliad* famously starts *in medias res*, as Horace said, and it ends inconclusively with nothing settled: Achilles is still alive, Troy still untaken, and no Trojan horse in sight. Yet Aeschylus, Sophocles, and Euripides all wrote tragedies that presumed an audience familiar, as we are today, with the entire story of the Trojan War, from Zeus's decision to reduce the world's overpopulation and the judgment of Paris that started the strife, to the mustering of the expedition and the battles and the duels that lasted ten bloody years, and finally the vicissitudes of the heroes' homecomings, most notably swaggering Agamemnon's death at the hand of his envenomed wife Clytemnestra and Odysseus's fittingly cautious return to his own long-neglected wife Penelope. Episodes from the full story are depicted on countless Greek ceramics and sculptures, either surviving as such or as Roman copies. In fact a fairly detailed rendition of the entire story could be derived from them alone.

So even if Aeschylus called his plays "slices from the banquet of Homer," the fact remains that the stories he and other tragedians relied upon are not found in the *Iliad* or *Odyssey*. But the narrative consistency between all the tragedians certainly implies common textual sources. This was indeed the case: traceable to the end of the sixth century B.C., and in some cases earlier, are six epics that complemented the *Iliad* and *Odyssey* to tell the whole story of the Trojan War as we know it. These are the *Cypria*, whose text started the tale that leads to the *Iliad*; the *Aethiopis*, which began with the

funeral of Hector that ends the *Iliad*; the *Ilias Mikra* (Little Iliad) that recounted the preparations needed to defeat Troy; the *Iliou Persis* (Fall of Troy), which told of the destruction of Ilium (another name for the city); the *Nostoi* (Returns), detailing the homecomings of the victorious, save Odysseus, who already had his own eponymous tale; and the *Telegony* tacked on last, in which Odysseus, bored in stony Ithaca, sets off again for adventure, acquiring a new wife and a child before he returns home and is finally killed by Telegonus, his own son birthed by Circe, who knows not his father.

By the fourth century B.C., all eight epics were jointly known as the Trojan *epikos kyklos*, or epic cycle. (There was also a smaller Theban cycle, comprising the *Thebaid*, the *Epigoni*, the *Oedipodea*, and the *Alcmeonis*.)

Of the eight Trojan epics, only the *Iliad* and *Odyssey* have survived down to our own days as full texts, each divided into twenty-four books by Alexandrian editors, exemplars of Hellenistic scholarship at its glorious best. Of the other Trojan epics we have brief plot summaries in what is left of the *Chrestomathia* (Useful knowledge), generally attributed to the Neoplatonist author Proclus (fifth century A.D.), and in the *Bibliothēkē* (Library), which was passed down under the name of Apollodorus of Athens (second century B.C.) but was likely written by an imitator. There are also brief extracts from the lost epics, mostly just short phrases, that survive as citations in the extant writings of other ancient authors. The curious reader can consult the

great Homer scholar Martin L. West's *Greek Epic Fragments* (2003) for a compilation of what remains of the Trojan epics, presented alongside relevant summaries or extracts from Proclus, Apollodorus, and other sources. But the reader may be disappointed to find that these meager remainders amount to little more than verbal cartoon strips.

The lost Trojan epics are but a tiny fraction of the lost works of Greek antiquity. To take Greek historians as an example, only the writings of Herodotus, Thucydides, Xenophon, and Polybius have survived, along with a few Greek-language histories of Rome by Diodorus Siculus, Dionysius of Halicarnassus, Josephus, Appianus, Dio Cassius, and Zosimus—ten historians in all. But an authoritative survey counts 856 other Greek historians and chroniclers of which nothing survives save fragments embedded in other works.

Ancient texts disappeared when they lacked enough readers to keep them alive by procuring new copies to replace the manuscripts lost to the inherent fragility of papyrus, to the destructive over-writing of parchment, and to fires, floods, and simple oblivion. To reach us across the span of centuries, these texts therefore had to survive the vagaries of taste before they could reach the safe harbor of the printing press. When Aldus Manutius printed Euripides' *Iphigenia in Aulis* in 1507, for example, with his marvelously legible typeface in a small octavo format that scholars and even students could afford, he produced more copies than had previously existed in the world. It was the Romans of the Eastern Empire which the popes enjoyed calling Byzantine who read and copied Euripides often enough over a millennium to preserve the text till it reached Venice as Constantinople was declining. The teaching of Greek had started in Florence by 1400, but texts were very scarce until the printing press of Manutius revived Greek literacy in Europe, and hence the study of Greek science that was to launch the Scientific Revolution. (Manutius should be ten times more famous than he is today.) But while printing ensured the survival of ancient texts in danger till then,

it also destroyed manuscripts: early printers burned them to preclude competing editions.

In any case, we owe it to the non-readers of the intervening centuries that we have only the summaries of the *Cypria*, *Aethiopsis*, *Ilias Mikra*, *Iliou Persis*, *Nostoi*, and *Telegony*, which might perhaps have offered us delightful poetry had they been preserved.

The *Cypria*, the lost Trojan epic whose plot we know in greatest detail, was originally in eleven books attributed to one Stasinus. It contains the main action that will start the Trojan war: conferring with Themis, the she-Titan who upholds the just balance of things, Zeus plans a war because the earth is groaning under the weight of overpopulation. This is not so absurd as it sounds, because many parts of Greece were already well inhabited while the Greeks knew little of the world beyond the Mediterranean.

The needed provocation was supplied by the goddess of strife, Eris: she arrives at the wedding of the mortal Peleus to the nymph Thetis that will produce Achilles and starts a dispute between Hera, Athena, and Aphrodite as to which of them is fairest. At the command of Zeus, the three goddesses are led by Hermes to Paris (a.k.a. Alexander), the son of King Priam of Troy, on Mount Ida for his decision. Paris, won over by the promise of receiving Helen in adulterous marriage, decides in favor of Aphrodite.

Odysseus, who would never have chosen the least powerful of the three goddesses, also proves his worldly wisdom in the *Cypria*: when Agamemnon and Menelaus send heralds around Greece to summon kings and heroes to the fight, Odysseus feigns insanity to avoid joining the expedition and drawn-out war (it was widely known that Troy's walls had been built by gods). What catches him out is a hostage-taking: the herald Palamedes snatches the baby Telemachus from Penelope's bosom, whereupon Odysseus has to shed his pretense and intervene. (He takes elaborate revenge for this indecency in the *Palamedes* of Euripides.) The *Cypria* also details a more successful ruse for avoidance: one Cypriot ruler promises on oath to send fifty ships but then, as Proclus tells us, "he sent one . . . but

the rest he shaped out of clay and launched them to sea.”

Odysseus makes another inglorious appearance in the *Cypria*'s most consummately tragic episode: Agamemnon's daughter Iphigenia must be sacrificed at Aulis to appease the divine hunter Artemis, who was offended by Agamemnon's boast that he exceeded her in skill when he killed a deer. Iphigenia is fetched from Mycenae by Odysseus with the cover story that she is to marry Achilles. In his own version, Euripides has us watch in fascinated horror as the innocent girl discovers too late that she is not to be wedded on arrival, but butchered.

The *Cypria* does dutiful service for the *Iliad* by providing the needed introductions of the protagonists, and of the *casus belli*: Helen, or rather the possession thereof. When Telemachus sets out to find news of his missing father in the *Odyssey*, he finds Helen seamlessly restored to her husband Menelaus after her interlude as the adulterous lover of not one but two Trojan princes (as we will see).

In the first post-Iliadic epic, the *Aethiopis* in five books, Odysseus fights off the Trojans while Ajax rescues the body of Achilles after he is killed at the Scaean gates of Ilion by the arrows of Paris and Apollo. (In Homer, the bow is the coward's weapon; hence Paris is doubly dishonorable in relying on a god's intervention and the bow.) In the ensuing funeral games, Ajax and Odysseus quarrel over the god-made arms and armor of Achilles that they had jointly saved from the Trojans.

It is in the next epic, the partly overlapping *Ilias Mikra*, that Athena intervenes to award the armor of Achilles to her favorite Odysseus. Ajax, maddened by impotent fury, slaughters the looted cattle and countless Greeks, and then kills himself. Odysseus next ambushes and captures the Trojan seer Helenus, the son of Priam and brother of Cassandra, who discloses the preconditions for the conquest of Troy.

The first condition is that the famed archer Philoctetes must be brought back to take part in the siege, along with the bow he inherited from Hercules; in book II of the *Iliad*, he

was abandoned on Lemnos, snake-bitten and gangrenous. Odysseus, joined by his steadfast partner in adventure Diomedes, fetches him and the bow. Philoctetes is healed by Machaon, the son of Asclepius the god of medicine, and it is he who kills Paris, leaving Helen a widow—but only briefly, because Deiphobus, Priam's most valiant son after Hector, quickly marries her.

The next requirements are the capture of the Palladium, the wooden Pallas Athena that was Ilion's protective deity; the recovery of the bones of Pelops from Peloponnesian Pisa; and the recruitment of Neoptolemus, the son of the dead Achilles, to join in the war. Other sources tell us that Achilles came by his only son in a manner that anticipates the gender fluidity that is all the rage these days: while living on Scyros disguised as a girl under mother's orders—Thetis was trying to save him from certain death in the Trojan War—he impregnated the local princess he roomed with.

Others fetch the bones of Pelops, but Odysseus does the heavy lifting of conveying Neoptolemus to besieged Ilion and presenting him with the arms and armor of Achilles. With his sidekick Diomedes, he also brings back a bitterly resentful Philoctetes, and with Diomedes again he enters Ilion disguised as a beggar to steal the Palladium. Helen recognizes him but, as if already the Helen encountered in the *Odyssey* living in matronly domesticity with Menelaus, does not raise the alarm.

It is in the *Ilias Mikra* that the story of the wooden horse is recounted, from its construction by Epeus and the ensconcing of the thirteen leading heroes, to the feigned departure for home of the Achaean fleet, which stops in nearby Tenedos once out of sight. The triumphant Trojans themselves breach the insurmountable walls to bring in the wooden horse, their trophy.

In the next epic, the *Iliou Persis* (originally in two books), the Trojans have their doubts but finally disregard the warnings of Cassandra and Laocoön, and they turn to revelry in celebration of their deliverance. The Achaeans sail back from Tenedos to link up with the heroes that emerged from the wooden horse

to open the great gates, and the slaughter of the Trojans ensues. When the citadel falls, Neoptolemus kills Priam and takes Hector's widow Andromache as his own prize, while Menelaus collects Helen, unperturbed by her very fresh remarriage to Deiphobus after the death of Paris. "When Menelaus glimpsed Helen's bare apples," one scholiast drily noted, "he dropped his sword, I believe."

In the *Iliou Persis* the killer of Hector's infant son Astyanax is Odysseus, whereas in the *Ilias Mikra* it was Neoptolemus: "after seizing him from the bosom of his nurse . . . holding him by the foot, [he] flung him from the battlement." That was foul child-murder certainly, but for singer and audience it would not condemn either man: one could hardly be expected to live out his later years in perpetual fear of the obligatory revenge of Astyanax, still today a son's highest duty in the Albanian mountains if not in downtown Athens.

Finally, in the *Nostoi* (in five books), Agamemnon sails to his fate at the hands of Clytemnestra and her lover, and many Achaean ships sailing straight across the Aegean are lost to storms; Menelaus with Helen is wind-driven all the way to Egypt. The *Nostoi* avoids retreading the events of the *Odyssey*, but Odysseus does appear briefly when Neoptolemus meets him in Thrace, at Maronea, which Odysseus has already looted, of course, having sailed up coastwise on ships that must have already been heavy from Ilium's loot. One could never have too much *kleos*, heroic renown, the ultimate index of true worth, and very sensibly Homeric heroes measured it in tangibles: desirable captives and valuable metals, silver, gold, and worked iron most of all. The Iron Age was still fresh; novelty outdid scarcity.

Of the literary qualities of the lost epics we can know little from their abbreviated summaries, and hardly anything from the very brief extracts that survive in other works. Scholars have long wondered how they stacked up against the *Iliad* and *Odyssey*. Aristotle remarks that it would be hard to extract even one tragedy from the *Iliad* or *Odyssey*, while several tragedies have been made from the *Cypria* and more than eight from the *Ilias Mikra*, among

which he then cites the *Hoplion Crisis* (Award of arms) of Aeschylus (of which little remains), the *Philoctetes* of Sophocles, the *Eurypylos* of Sophocles (also cited by Plutarch but lost), and the *Trojan Women* of Euripides. Aristotle takes this as evidence of the superior poetic unity of Homer's work. Yet if the other, divisible Trojan epics had not proven so fertile to tragedians, we would know a good deal less about the stories they told.

In the West, the extinction of all the Trojan epics, the *Iliad* and *Odyssey* included, became inevitable once the easy bilingualism that defined educated Romans was lost in the decline and disintegration of the empire along with most other attributes of civilization. Small Greek-speaking minorities persisted in isolated villages in Calabria (in southern Italy) and Catania (in eastern Sicily), even into modern times, but in the formerly "classical" world of Europe, the *Iliad* and *Odyssey* were gone from the scene by the time of the humanist revival. In his day, Petrarch (1304–74) was deemed the most cultured of Europeans and his library was much admired, but he had no copy of the *Iliad* until a Byzantine envoy gave him one (it survives in Milan's Biblioteca Ambrosiana). He tried to learn Greek in order to read his treasure but did not succeed. It would have been reasonable to expect that the relentless shrinking of the Eastern Empire where Greek texts were still read and still recopied would soon extinguish Greek literature altogether, reducing it to fragmentary survivals in the manner of Akkadian or Ugaritic.

But soon after Manutius started publishing Greek texts in the late fifteenth century, an ever-increasing number of Europeans achieved the Greek literacy that eluded Petrarch and which would soon become the prerequisite for higher education. For many scholars of ancient Greek today, it can be hard to imagine a time when even those relatively few texts we have were not available *en masse* in print editions; if anything, we are too busy bemoaning what has been lost. But the fate of the Trojan epic cycle should also remind us that, if we are not careful, someday our own great books could likewise be lost to the vagaries of taste.