

The New Criterion

February 2021

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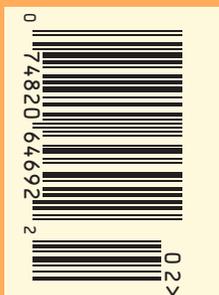
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The New Criterion *February 2021*

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Notes & Comments: February 2021

1776

A nation that neglects its past is in danger of betraying its future.

That, in a line, is the chief burden of the forty-odd-page report issued last month by the President's Advisory 1776 Commission.

This is no ordinary government “white paper,” full of reader-proof verbiage whose chief accomplishment is darkening a quantity of wood pulp. On the contrary, the 1776 Commission's report is an eloquent, closely argued exposition of the distinctively American principles of liberty. It includes an anatomy of major challenges to those principles, historical and contemporary. And it concludes with a sketch of ways in which the idea of America—currently under siege from a variety of freedom-blighting initiatives—might be renewed through a thoughtful resuscitation of civic education and the liberal arts.

Those responsible for this remarkable document include Larry Arnn, the Churchill scholar and president of Hillsdale College; Victor Davis Hanson, the historian and classicist; and Charles Kesler, the author and editor of the *Claremont Review of Books*. No one familiar with their work will be surprised by the depth, authority, and rhetorical power of this report. In part, it is a restatement of the founding principles of the American Creed. At the center of those principles are the truths articulated by the Declaration of Independence, above all

the twin affirmations that “all men are created equal” and that they are “endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights.”

It should go without saying that the equality of which the Declaration spoke is moral equality before the law, not an equality of talent or other natural endowments. (Hence the philosopher Harvey Mansfield's quip about the “self-evident half-truth” that all men are created equal.) Nevertheless, despite the self-evidence of that great truth, the Declaration has accumulated barnacles of cynicism, not least from those who eagerly point out that many of the Founders, including the principal author of the Declaration, Thomas Jefferson, were slaveholders. Does that not render their high-flown rhetoric disingenuous, not to say hypocritical?

No, it doesn't, and the report patiently explains why. We won't rehearse those arguments here. They are familiar to anyone who has bothered to look into the question. The real issue was articulated by Lincoln:

All honor to Jefferson—to the man who . . . had the coolness, forecast, and capacity to introduce into a merely revolutionary document, an abstract truth, applicable to all men and all times . . . that to-day, and in all coming days, it shall be a rebuke and a stumbling-block to the very harbingers of re-appearing tyranny and oppression.

Lincoln's point is this: There have been plenty of revolutionary manifestos throughout his-

tory. What makes the Declaration of Independence special is that it is not simply an affidavit of separation but also an affirmation of a central moral truth, a truth that is universal—“applicable to all men and all times”—as well as prophylactic: a people that embraces the principles of the Declaration has a potent guard against “re-appearing tyranny and oppression.”

The prospect of that reappearance is the sadness inscribed in the Declaration. It is a sadness inscribed also in the human heart. “If men were angels,” Madison observed in *Federalist* 51, “no government would be necessary.” Likewise, he notes, “If angels were to govern men, neither external nor internal controls on government would be necessary.” Hence the ineradicable difficulty in “framing a government which is to be administered by men over men”: “you must first enable the government to control the governed; and in the next place oblige it to control itself.” How is that working out for us today? Madison went on to note that popular sovereignty (“a dependence on the people”) is the primary check on the abuse of government power. But he also noted that the imperfection of human nature—for men are not angels and are wont to seek their own aggrandizement at the expense of their fellows—argues for the wisdom of “auxiliary precautions” against tyranny. This brings us to the incandescent center of Madison’s genius: his elaboration of a system of checks and balances that counterpoises not only the different branches of government but also the contending private ambitions of citizens. “This policy,” he writes,

of supplying, by opposite and rival interests, the defect of better motives, might be traced through the whole system of human affairs, private as well as public. We see it particularly displayed in all the subordinate distributions of power, where the constant aim is to divide and arrange the several offices in such a manner as that each may be a check on the other that the private interest of every individual may be a sentinel over the public right.

One “auxiliary precaution” that was not mentioned by Madison but was assumed by him and

other Founders was education. A sentinel must recognize and appreciate what he is guarding if his watch is to be successful. Fostering this “auxiliary precaution”—educating citizens for liberty, teaching “enlightened patriotism”—is at the center of the 1776 Commission’s report.

Perhaps the most pungent section of the report is its inventory and analysis of challenges to the American ideal. It is wholly appropriate that slavery comes first and receives the most extended discussion. Other challenges that the report enumerates are progressivism, the “ideological cousins” of fascism and communism, and the new racism of identity politics.

Some commentators have expressed surprise that the authors should have included progressivism and identity politics in this roster of toxic challenges to the American idea. But they were right to do so. At the center of the progressive ideology is the idea that truth is relative to historical circumstances. Accordingly, progressivism holds that the principles enshrined in the Declaration and safeguarded by the Constitution are not fixed. What is wanted, as Woodrow Wilson, an early progressive saint, had it, is a “living” Constitution whose principles must be malleable under the pressure of changing historical realities. The doctrine of moral relativity dictates that individual rights give way to group rights and that ultimate sovereignty resides not in the people but in a managerial, bureaucratic cadre of elites. We hear a lot of talk about the “administrative state” today. That Leviathan had its birth in the deeply anti-democratic cult of experts that was (and is) such a prominent part of progressivism. Voters may be ineradicable. But the nuisance they represent can be neutralized to the extent that real power is shifted to unelected, and increasingly unaccountable, bureaucrats.

There is broad agreement—at least, there was until recently—about how fascism and communism challenge the American idea of liberty. Both ideologies explicitly sacrifice the rights of the individual to the state. Lenin promised that under communism the state would “wither away.” He neglected to add that what would

take its place was the suffocating bureaucracy of the Politburo, whose self-imposed mandate was to keep track of everything—and everyone.

There was no subterfuge about creating a “workers’ paradise” in fascism, whose glorification of the state over the individual was as unapologetic as it was thoroughgoing. Identity politics, the conceptual grandchild of Marxists like Antonio Gramsci and Herbert Marcuse, is more cunning. Instead of aiming to overthrow bourgeois institutions like the family, churches, education, and the rule of law directly, it burrows underground to subvert them from within. In the United States, this project took flight in the 1960s, but is only now, with the triumph of doctrines like “Critical Race Theory,” achieving its destructive ends. As with the phrase “social justice,” “identity politics” weaponizes an adjective to paralyze the noun it accompanies. “Social justice” represents not an improvement on justice but its suspension. Just so, “identity politics” is not politics but its demonic parody.

What gives the 1776 Commission’s report its urgency is the extraordinary division that is deepening across the country. “Americans,” the authors note, “are deeply divided about the meaning of their country, its history, and how it should be governed. This division is severe enough to call to mind the disagreements between the colonists and King George, and those between the Confederate and Union forces in the Civil War.” This may seem hyperbolic. Unfortunately, it is a simple statement of fact.

As we write, this report is available on several websites, including the White House site where it was first published on January 18. But on January 20, Inauguration Day, the incoming administration announced that the commission would be dissolved by executive order. That is a pity, for the realities the report illuminates transcend partisan politics. Alas, it is a measure of how much human territory has been ceded to the forces of dissolution that an inquiry so principled and high-minded should endure the censure of thoroughly partisan animus. But so it is. *The New York Times* charged that the report

“defends America’s founding on the basis of slavery,” while CNN cut to the chase and skirled that the “Trump administration issues racist school curriculum report on MLK day.” As it happens, many critical assessments of the report mentioned, with disapprobation implicit or explicit, that it appeared on the holiday commemorating Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. But the irony is that the left-wing media misses the report’s celebration of the ideal that King articulated when he looked forward to “a day when people will not be judged by the color of their skin, but by the content of their character.”

“Freedom,” Ronald Reagan famously observed, is “never more than one generation away from extinction.” It is an achievement that must constantly be renewed if it is to survive and prosper. That is a truth we are in danger of forgetting. It is the indispensable merit of the 1776 Commission’s report to dramatize with rare historical intelligence the dangers to liberty that we face and to uncover the homely but potent resources we possess to reanimate it.

Some family news

Attentive readers will notice a change on our masthead. The name “Cricket Farnsworth,” which has appeared there since February 2003, first next to the title “Assistant to the Editors,” then next to the title “Office Manager,” has vanished. Cricket (whose given name is, we can now reveal, “Nancy”) came to us in the winter of 2003 for two weeks to fill a sudden vacancy. Well, the weeks stretched to months, the months to years, and by the time Cricket hung up her *New Criterion* spurs she had been with us fully eighteen years. Many readers got to know Cricket, telephonically if not in person, and we know that they will be as sorry to bid her farewell as we are. She is not, however, going far, and we know we will be in close touch for the new adventures that await us and her. We are delighted that Caetlynn Booth, formerly Assistant to the Editors, will now assume the reins of Office Manager, and that Jayne Allison has joined us as our new Assistant to the Editors. Farewell, congratulations, and welcome are all in order!

Saint Ted of the Senate

by James Piereson

When Edward M. Kennedy died in 2009, he was eulogized by President Obama as “the soul of the Democratic Party, and the lion of the U.S. Senate—a man who graces nearly one thousand laws, and who penned more than three hundred himself.” Many agreed that Kennedy, after serving forty-seven years in the Senate with many legislative victories to his credit, deserved to be recognized among the greatest figures ever to serve in that body, on a level with the likes of Daniel Webster, Henry Clay, Henry Cabot Lodge, and Robert A. Taft.

Neal Gabler, the author of this new biography of the youngest son of Joseph P. Kennedy, Sr., endorses this assessment, even after considering the many lapses and indiscretions that would have brought down other public figures not named Kennedy. *Catching the Wind*, largely based upon already published sources and documents, takes the story from Edward M. Kennedy’s birth in 1932 through 1975, a low point for the senator when, following the deaths of his brothers, the successes and then the failures of liberalism in the 1960s, and his own personal scandals, he was uncertain whether he had any constructive role left to play in public life.¹ The author plans a second volume, no doubt as sympathetic and detailed as this one, that will plot Kennedy’s career from 1975 to his death in 2009, a period in which he discovered a new role as one of the Senate’s more effective legislators.

¹ *Catching the Wind: Edward Kennedy and the Liberal Hour, 1932–1975*, by Neal Gabler; Crown, 928 pages. \$40.

The author views Kennedy much like the tragic hero of the ancient Greeks—a man with noble aims (promoting liberal policies), brought down by moral flaws and episodes of poor judgment. This provides an overall theme for the biography, for (as Gabler argues) the rise and fall of Kennedy’s political fortunes during the 1960s mirrored the fortunes of the liberal cause during that period. Liberals sacrificed their “moral authority” as spokesmen for the poor due to the violence and disorder that engulfed the country by the end of that decade, while at the same time Kennedy lost his own moral authority due to his reckless conduct in 1969 in the notorious incident at Chappaquiddick. When the dust settled in the 1970s, Kennedy was left to carry the liberal flag more or less on his own as the country turned in a conservative direction. This is the larger story that the author tries to illuminate through Kennedy’s career: “the shift in the nation’s political tectonic plates from liberalism to conservatism.”

The glamour later attached to the Kennedy name obscures the difficulties and setbacks “Ted” Kennedy experienced while growing up in the middle of a large and highly ambitious family. Joseph P. Kennedy, Sr., the family patriarch, had his own political goals in the 1930s as an FDR ally, but soon projected them on to his two eldest sons, Joe, Jr., and John, leaving Ted and brother Robert as afterthoughts. His family shuffled him around from school to school during his early years, from Bronxville to Palm Beach to Boston and even to London, where his father was ambassador

to the Court of St James. Kennedy found it difficult to make friends at these schools, as classmates ridiculed him for being awkward or overweight or not too bright. Within his own family, he was judged a “lightweight” in comparison to his older brothers, who glided effortlessly through schools and other youthful challenges that the youngest brother never was able to manage. These experiences, according to the author, left young Kennedy with feelings of insecurity that lasted into adulthood and which he sought to overcome by diligent work and attention to details.

Kennedy eventually found his footing at Harvard, where he made friends, passed his courses, and played on the football team, until he was expelled in the spring of his freshman year for cheating on a Spanish exam—in the first of several moral lapses that marked his conduct over the years. He enlisted in the Army and served for nineteen months in a series of administrative and non-combat jobs, even as military action escalated in Korea—much in contrast to his older brothers, who volunteered for dangerous assignments during World War II (Joe, Jr., was killed in 1944 in one such assignment). The stint in the Army opened a path for readmission to Harvard, where he completed his undergraduate education in 1956. When he applied afterwards for admission to the law school at the University of Virginia, he encountered opposition from faculty members who pointed to the cheating episode at Harvard, plus his mediocre grades, as reasons to reject him. It required external intervention from family and a full vote of the faculty to overcome the opposition to his application. In spite of that controversy, Kennedy performed reasonably well as a law student, graduating in 1959 with plans to use his degree as a pathway into politics.

In 1962, Kennedy, now just three years out of law school, ran for the Senate seat vacated by his brother when he was elected to the presidency. *Time* magazine featured him on its cover during that campaign. He won the contest handily for the seat now deemed a family inheritance, campaigning mostly on state and local issues. At that time, Kennedy was far from the liberal he later turned out to

be. He was just thirty years of age, after all, barely old enough to hold that seat. His father and brothers were Democrats, not because they were liberals but because the Protestant elites in the Northeast controlled the Republican Party and would not allow the Irish to advance. Joseph P. Kennedy, Sr., was a tough conservative and anti-communist; and John F. Kennedy said more than once that he was not comfortable with liberals. As the youngest in the family, Ted Kennedy did not receive the political education that his father imprinted upon his older brothers. He entered the Senate as something of a neophyte, lacking strong views and looking to his brother in the White House for political direction. Naturally, veteran members of the Senate mocked him as a lightweight (that phrase continuing to dog him) riding into office on his family’s name.

Kennedy soon discovered that he liked the Senate, with its traditions and rules and distribution of powers among members and committees. His older brother, now President Kennedy, had been a member of the Senate for eight years, but skipped meetings and missed votes, and spent much of his tenure plotting a run for the presidency. Ted Kennedy, by contrast, though dismissed as a dilettante, worked diligently on legislation and committee assignments, studied the issues and avoided publicity, and established good relations with the senior members and committee chairmen who controlled the Senate. He even got along with James Eastland, the reactionary Mississippi Democrat who chaired the judiciary committee (of which Kennedy was a junior member). Naturally, the novice senator supported the program of the Kennedy Administration, including a civil rights bill, which southern Democrats like Eastland usually managed to bury. But Kennedy, like his brother in the White House, was astute enough to see that he came into office at a moment when liberalism was ascending across the country.

The assassination of President Kennedy in 1963 gave new momentum to the civil rights cause and his administration’s legislative program, though it cut off Senator Kennedy’s in-

fluence with the White House and left him bereft of political direction. The two surviving Kennedy brothers, Edward and Robert, responded to that event in different ways—Robert turning himself into a wounded and sentimental liberal speaking for the poor and dispossessed; Edward focusing more intently upon legislative goals in the Senate. Ted Kennedy cooperated with Lyndon Johnson when Johnson sought to capitalize on the assassination by promoting the late president's civil rights agenda, even as Robert Kennedy resented Johnson for usurping the family's rightful control over the presidency.

Ted Kennedy spoke eloquently in 1964 on behalf of the Civil Rights Act, worked to break the Southern filibuster, and led the bipartisan coalition that passed the bill in June of that year. He fought on behalf of President Johnson's Voting Rights Act and supported amendments to eliminate the poll tax as part of that larger bill. The conservative coalition in the Senate killed those particular amendments, but the Supreme Court stepped in the next year (1966) to declare the poll tax unconstitutional. Kennedy, in perhaps his most significant legislative achievement, was the floor manager in 1965 for the Immigration and Naturalization Act, which repealed the national quota provisions of the 1924 Immigration Act and subsequently opened the United States to large-scale immigration from Asia, South America, and Africa. Kennedy viewed all three of these bills as monuments to his late brother's commitment to civil rights.

Kennedy voted reliably for Johnson's domestic agenda but (after 1966) gradually broke with the administration's policy in Vietnam, calling for diplomacy and negotiations, along with a reduction in military forces, to end the conflict, much like other liberals of that era. When Robert Kennedy announced his campaign for the presidency in 1968, fighting for "the soul of the nation," as the author puts it, and to end the war in Vietnam, the younger Kennedy reluctantly signed on, fearing that his brother's candidacy would split the Democrats but also dreading the possibility that it might provoke another assassination attempt. In the event, that is what happened when on the eve-

ning of the California presidential primary, Robert Kennedy was shot and killed, a sacrifice (as the Kennedys believed) in the struggle for civil rights. Robert's death thrust Ted Kennedy forward as the leader of the family and focus of its political ambitions. Democratic leaders urged him to pick up Bobby Kennedy's fallen standard and carry it forward in a campaign for the presidential nomination. But Kennedy, shaken by the second assassination in the family, chose to wait for a future opportunity to pursue the presidency, increasing the odds that Richard Nixon would be elected that year to succeed Lyndon Johnson.

After Nixon's election, Kennedy settled into the role as leader of the Democratic opposition, the "shadow president," as his biographer describes his new position in Washington. Kennedy hoped to save the liberal agenda from "the depredations of the new president" and to protect the "poor and the powerless" from Nixon's neglect. Kennedy won election in 1969 as majority whip in the Senate, defeating Russell Long, one of the Senate's "old bulls," with the plan to use that post to solidify his role as leader of the opposition to Nixon. Nevertheless, Nixon, ever devious, outmaneuvered the liberals by proposing mild reforms in health-care, the environment, and welfare instead of calling for the elimination of those programs altogether. Nixon proposed a domestic agenda of "progressive light" that appealed to moderate voters and complicated Kennedy's efforts to oppose him. Despite those successes, Nixon was preoccupied with Ted Kennedy, following his moves step-by-step, frequently proposing measures to counter them. Gabler argues that it was Nixon's obsession with Kennedy that eventually led to Nixon's downfall via the Watergate scandal.

Kennedy's role as shadow president was short-lived, as things turned out, because the accident at Chappaquiddick in July of 1969 nearly wrecked his career and discredited any idea that he could continue as the moral leader of the Democratic Party. Gabler describes the episode in detail, eventually accepting Kennedy's explanation that he accidentally drove his car off a wooden bridge in the midnight

darkness and into a pond below, and that he fled the scene (leaving his female companion to drown in the car) in a disoriented state of mind. Kennedy accepted blame and received a suspended sentence for leaving the scene of an accident, which the author claims was standard punishment for that kind of violation. Days later Kennedy issued a televised apology to the voters. The voters forgave him—apparently—because they continued to re-elect him for decades afterwards. Nevertheless, Kennedy’s conduct in that situation (as the author writes) left a stain “that no amount of penance could erase.”

Gabler ends this installment of the biography with a telling scene that occurred in Boston in 1975: Kennedy wading into a crowd of white ethnics (mostly Irish) protesting a court ordered integration scheme to bus students between predominantly white and black areas of the city. Kennedy was caught on the horns of a dilemma: on the one side, the protests of those working-class voters who had propelled the Kennedys into power; on the other, his commitment to black voters, civil rights, and school integration. Kennedy remained silent on the issue, and in any case refused to side with the parents. He fled the scene—or, rather, he was chased from the scene, pursued by protesters: “You’re a disgrace to the Irish,” some called out. “Teddy’s no longer welcome here,” a bartender said afterwards, recognizing that Kennedy would sell out the interests of those white working-class parents in favor of liberal moral goals. This episode, which was repeated in cities around the country, reflected the breaking-apart of the old coalition between blacks and working-class whites that was a key element of the post-war Democratic Party. The tried and true formula of the 1960s—the appeal to the poor, the black, and the dispossessed—now lost its moral authority among those ethnic voters. This, as much as any other factor, ended the era of liberal reform that began in 1960 with the election of John F. Kennedy to the White House.

This biography, once completed, is likely to serve as the authoritative account of Ted Kennedy’s long political career in the Senate.

Nevertheless, it must be judged as another installment in a series of Kennedy “hagiographies” that began in 1965 with the publication of Arthur Schlesinger’s *A Thousand Days* and Theodore Sorensen’s *Kennedy* and has continued to the present time through many histories and biographies of the Kennedy brothers that burnish the legend of an enlightened family fighting to save the nation from its darker impulses. In this universe, Kennedy failures are understood as tragedies or lapses or the fault of others, while similar failings by Republicans or conservatives are the result of dark or sinister motives. The Kennedys represent the morally enlightened side of America, and so their failures must be excused, while Republicans like Richard Nixon appeal to “the darkness of the electorate,” in other words, to the “bad” America populated by reactionaries and bigots. This author goes so far as to write that Richard Nixon caused the collapse of liberalism in the 1970s because he exploited divisions in the country—even though he acknowledges that those divisions were created in the first place by liberal policies on crime, welfare, and race.

Gabler also acknowledges that liberals lost their moral authority in the 1970s—exemplified by the busing controversy in Boston—though he is not specific about what that means or how it happened. It is not complicated: liberals indulged their moral sensitivities about race and poverty but expected others to absorb the costs through busing, rising crime, and social disorder. Ted Kennedy and the federal judge who ordered the busing program in Boston lived in exclusive suburbs or sent their children to private schools and were never going to bear the burdens of the policies they supported. Others would have to pick up the tab—which was perfectly fine with Senator Kennedy and other liberals who supported those programs across the country in the 1970s. That is how moral authority is lost—when people call for policies that they know they will not have to pay for. Busing, moreover, was a complete failure, as it promoted white flight from the public schools and left them even more racially segregated than before.

This author mentions the tragic deaths of John and Robert Kennedy and chalks them up

as episodes in the struggle for civil rights—but never mentions the circumstances of the assassinations or the names of the men who committed those crimes. Is this a deliberate omission? That is question worth asking—for the facts of those assassinations cut against the civil rights interpretation of those events. President Kennedy was shot by Lee Harvey Oswald, a committed communist who had defected to the Soviet Union but returned to the United States disillusioned with Soviet communism but newly committed to Fidel Castro's revolution in Cuba. He (probably) shot President Kennedy because he learned in 1963 that the Kennedys were plotting to overthrow or assassinate Castro. Robert Kennedy was shot by Sirhan Sirhan, a Palestinian national living in the United States who was angry with Kennedy because he supported the sale of fighter jets to Israel and was sympathetic to Israel's cause in its regional conflicts. Neither of those events had anything to do with civil rights, instead having their origins in foreign policies supported (justifiably) by the Kennedy brothers. Were John and Robert Kennedy slain due to their support for civil rights? No—but that is an aspect of the Kennedy legend circulated over the years and promoted in this biography.

The account of the Chappaquiddick incident in this biography amounts to a whitewash of Ted Kennedy's conduct on that occasion. The author claims that it was an accident (which it was), that Kennedy panicked in the aftermath and thus failed to report it (implausible), and that the suspended sentence he received was standard treatment for those convicted of leaving the scene of an accident (wrong). Some claimed that Kennedy escaped from the sunken automobile via an open window on the passenger's side, so that he had to climb over his companion on his way out. Kennedy, moreover, had multiple opportunities to report the accident after he escaped from the automobile, and thus perhaps to save his companion. One house, lights on, was just a hundred yards away; several others were within a half mile of the accident scene. He walked past all of those houses (and the Edgartown Fire Department) on his way back to the original

party house to describe the accident to his cousin and a friend, and perhaps to discuss how to handle it—not the sign of a person in a state of panic. They urged him to call the police. Instead, he fled (once again) back to his hotel, where he was thinking clearly enough to change clothes, speak to guests in the lobby, and make several telephone calls to friends and aides before retiring for the evening. Some said he was creating an alibi to claim that Mary Jo Kopechne was driving the car, or that he was buying time to recover from an evening of drinking, or concocting a strategy for dealing with the accident. He was at breakfast in the hotel restaurant the next morning (eight hours after the accident) when he learned that the police were on the scene and had determined that it was Kennedy's car in the water—and that Kopechne had drowned.

Might she have been saved if Kennedy had reported the accident? Perhaps. In any case, he pled guilty to leaving the scene of an accident and received a suspended sentence, which was something of a joke because no one, except perhaps a Kennedy, receives a suspended sentence for leaving the scene of an accident in which someone has died. Such cases are typically treated as felonies, for which the guilty are sentenced to jail time—as should have happened here.

It remains a puzzle as to why so many people claim that liberalism is an enlightened doctrine, or that liberals are on the side of the angels, in view of the wreckage they have inflicted on the nation since the 1960s. Welfare case loads and violent crime tripled or quadrupled in major cities across the country during the 1960s, courtesy of policies promoted by Senator Kennedy. As Daniel Patrick Moynihan said at that time, the reaction of many liberals “was not to be appalled by the disorder but almost to welcome it.” Public schools have collapsed in major cities since that decade, largely due to the power of teachers' unions promoted by Kennedy and fellow liberals. As soon as the Civil Rights Act was passed in 1964, they perverted it into a system of quotas that continues to this day; and in much the same way they turned the environmental movement

into a campaign against industrial society. The Immigration and Naturalization Act of 1965, Kennedy's great legislative achievement, opened the United States to uncontrolled legal and illegal immigration from third world countries, dividing the nation and turning immigration into a heated political issue. Absent opposition from conservatives, liberals led by Ted Kennedy would have succeeded long ago in turning the United States into a modern-day dystopia. They may yet succeed in that campaign, oblivious to where they are headed.

Several weeks before he died in 2009, as Gabler reports in his introduction, Kennedy sent a touching letter to Pope Benedict XVI imploring the Pope to pray for him as he entered his final days. The letter, which was personally delivered by President Obama, read in part:

Most Holy Father,

I am writing with deep humility to ask that you pray for me as my own health declines.

I want you to know Your Holiness that in my nearly 50 years of elective office I have done my best to champion the rights of the poor and open doors of economic opportunity. I have worked to

welcome the immigrant, to fight discrimination and expand access to health care and education. Those are the issues that have motivated me and have been the focus of my work as a United States senator.

This letter surprised many of the senator's supporters who assumed that, as a secular liberal, he had little use for the Catholic Church and its conservative teachings. Family members maintained that, despite departures from orthodox doctrine, he remained a sincere and observant Catholic. But what is most interesting about the letter is Kennedy's assertion that personal salvation can be achieved through liberal politics rather than through individual acts of contrition and charity. Whether or not this is true, Kennedy believed it, as do many others today who view liberalism not as a set of policies to be tested against their consequences, but as a religion or a church that divides the good from the bad, the moral from the immoral, and the enlightened from the unenlightened. That is a key theme running through Kennedy's life and through this biography—and a good statement of what was wrong with Kennedy's career and the kind of politics he championed.

Sybille Bedford at the feast

by D. J. Taylor

Thirty years ago, waiting to take my seat at a dinner at the PEN Club in Chelsea, London, I caught sight of an elderly woman quietly installing herself a place or two down on the other side of the long oak table. Though frail and diminutive, there was something rather formidable about this apparition, something steely and self-possessed, and the sense of inner fires steeply banked increased when she reached into her leather satchel, brought out a bottle of wine, decanted some of it expertly into a glass, and began lapping it up like a cat let loose on a saucer of milk. “That,” the person standing next to me murmured, in the manner of one who draws attention to some rare antique run to earth among a shelf full of low-budget curios, “is Sybille Bedford.”

At this stage in her long and eventful life, Bedford (1911–2006) was luxuriating in the success of *Jigsaw* (1989), which, somewhat implausibly, had been shortlisted for the previous year’s Booker Prize for fiction. The implausibility lay in the book’s autobiographical tendencies—a tethering in the circumstances of the author’s rickety early life in Continental Europe so pronounced that it seemed odd that no judge had wondered whether calling it a novel was an offense against the Trade Descriptions Act for a work whose every other character has an alter ego purposefully at large on the wrong end of the pre-war French Riviera. “I thought, you know, that novelists were supposed to make things up,” Kingsley Amis once complained, when the full extent of his friend Anthony Powell’s failings in this line

were revealed to him, and the same charge could be leveled at the little old lady of the PEN Club.

When it came to cannibalizing her own life for the purposes of fiction, Bedford, like Powell, was a serial offender, a kind of literary anthrophage forever feasting on her own lightly grilled bones. In her comprehensive and admiring biography, *Sybille Bedford: A Life*, Selina Hastings notes that in *Jigsaw*, subtitled “An Unsentimental Education,” her subject’s fourth novel, “the difference between reality and imagination is almost impossible to discern.”¹ But the same critique can be made of her second, *A Favourite of the Gods* (1963)—“a mirror image of Sybille’s adolescence” according to Hastings. It hangs ominously over her third, *A Compass Error* (1968), large parts of which simply recapitulate material from the previous volume, and it doubtless explains the distressing family sit-down of 1956, when, after publication of her debut, *A Legacy*, a posse of Sybille’s German relatives turned up in London to protest at the pain that this “ghastly book” had caused them.

Sybille, in short, was not only an autobiographer *manqué*, but a recycler and a re-animator, to the point where her work, seen in the round, sometimes looks like a gigantic palimpsest, a constantly re-stitched piece of embroidery, a single idea endlessly refashioned and refurbished, the same remorseless tocsin

1 *Sybille Bedford: A Life*, by Selina Hastings; Knopf, 432 pages, \$32.50.

clanging away above her readers' heads. All this suggests that the experience on which her books were based is of a highly unusual, or highly stylized, kind, and that the living of it at once defined her as a creative artist and yet channeled that creativity into a groove that she could not have escaped even had she wanted to. There were to be no flights of fancy, capricious experiments, or attempts to break new ground—all the random ballast by which the average literary life is sustained—for the ground already broken was quite fanciful enough to begin with.

So what is *Sybille Bedford: A Life* actually about? As well as covering the ups and downs of a high-end twentieth-century literary career, it is, necessarily, about locales and journeys and sensations: driving across the Italian border to Alba, let us say, for the truffle season; taking “a nice walk into empty Belgrave Square”; looking for “a quiet refuge where one can work undisturbed through the summer.” Given the subject’s enthusiastic lesbianism, practiced ceaselessly over a period of nearly seventy years, it is, naturally, about women—Alannah and Eda and Esther, Betsy and Lesley and Anne—and about being taken up, taken out, and intermittently taken in. It is about food and drink—white wines with a good smoked salmon mousse and hot toast, *entrecôte grillé*, *pommes frites*, and Fleurie served *fraîs*, goose *foie gras*—and frequently about judgment (“Life is so much less joyful when you are not there”), even if the most rigorous eye of all sometimes seems to be trained on the *table d’hôte*. Happily the *foie gras* mentioned above turns out to be “almost unbearably good. . . . It was like a pain to eat the last of it.”

But Hastings’s account of this extravagant journey through a succession of gentlewomanly bedrooms and enticing *trattorie* is something more than a sapphic carousel with Michelin stars attached. It is also a study of bohemianism, and what happens to bohemianism when it grows old. Even more important, perhaps, it is a book about two, or possibly even three, demographics that no longer exist. Simultaneously, it offers a series of glimpses into an

Old Europe so recondite that to examine it in detail is the social equivalent of inspecting the collection of objects laid out on the rare showman’s table at a Victorian gypsy fair. If Bedford is invariably herself—sharp (at any rate in her later days), self-willed, and self-preserving—then she is always, in her highly individual way, a representative of several older worlds that every so often loom into view like slides dragged under a microscope. Like a foregrounded figure in a medieval frieze, her existence is undetachable from the backdrops she seems to dominate.

One of these backdrops is the landscape of her upbringing as the daughter of what Hastings calls “an eccentric Bavarian baron” on an estate south of Munich. The patronym was “von Schoenebeck,” but there was Jewish blood, acquired through her mother, Lisa, and a fair amount of paternal eccentricity. Keen on *objets d’art*, but notoriously hard-up, the baron seems to have survived on handouts from the wealthy parents of his dead first wife. Certainly, Hastings’s accounts of life at the schloss at Feldkirch in the aftermath of the Great War sound as if they were robbed wholesale from a novel by Joseph Roth. The von Schoenebecks did not get on, and they divorced in 1922. Raised mostly by her father, and transferred to her mother’s care after his death, Sybille found herself confronted with both a new parent and a new lifestyle. Having spent the first stretch of her teens in the sequestration of a South German village, she spent the second half as a sort of cosmopolitan vagrant, either following Lisa around various European watering holes or being farmed out as a paying guest on people she barely knew.

Eventually mother and daughter fetched up at Sanary-sur-Mer on the French Mediterranean, not far from Saint-Tropez but cheaper and less fashionable. And here a second lost landscape looms into view—the world of the interwar artists’ colony, populated by Continental drifters drawn south by sunshine, a favorable exchange rate, and a place to work, or to pretend to do so: the kind of place where the car pulled up outside the bistro is pretty sure to contain Aldous Huxley and his wife Maria, and Cyril Connolly is rumored to be

staying in the next village. It takes the description of Sanary, and all the other places in which Sybille spent her peripatetic adolescence, to establish just how odd this early life was, how random, how infinitely detached from 1930s convention. Large parts of it were spent on her own, the solitary girl hunkered down over a book (or the wine list) in the corner of a out-of-season hotel while Lisa mooned after Nori, the man who became her second husband, or in London bedsits under the notional eye of English friends. If Sybille relished her independence, then she was also aware of some of its problems. *Jigsaw*, in particular, is weighed down with stealthy intimations of disquiet, sometimes amounting to menace. Here are some specimen sentences:

France became the nearest thing I'd ever known to a home.

I accepted what I found.

Circumstances allowed me to make a choice when I was still incapable of weighing what the choice involved.

That was the beginning of a time of confusion, sudden journeys, new places—waiting—where did we go, and in what order? And who went and who came?

She stayed away for what seemed a long time.

“She,” predictably, is Lisa. In each case, you sense that Sybille is pulling her punches, twisting inference around a formal statement of the facts, letting the reader burrow down to the emotional disturbance that lies beneath. If some of the friends she made in the Sanary wine bars were high-caliber eminences from the world of arts and letters (the Huxleys, Klaus Mann), then others were scene-swelling scamps such as Brian Howard, the part model for Anthony Blanche in Evelyn Waugh's *Brideshead Revisited* (1945). After one particularly raucous evening ended in a brawl, Howard sent Sybille and her current paramour a verse apology that began: “With humble gratitude and lowered eyes/ Aware of folly, swearing to be wise/ No

longer tipsy, ribald or inept/ The beastliest men in England, we accept.” Meanwhile, one or two of the implications of Sybille's status, or rather her non-status, were becoming uncomfortably clear. As a Jew, her German citizenship was revoked by the Nazis in 1935. Walter Bedford, whom she married in London in 1935, sight unseen, was employed at a gentleman's club in St James's. His later activities are unrecorded. The marriage, contrived by well-placed friends as a way of furnishing Sybille with a British passport, was very nearly forestalled by the Home Office. There were other anxious moments five years later when she and her lover Alannah Harper found themselves stranded on the Riviera as the German tanks sped south. Weighed down by a baggage train that included Alannah's nineteen suitcases and a pet poodle, they managed to escape into Italy and board the last passenger ship leaving Genoa for the United States. Also stowed in *SS Exeter's* hold alongside Alannah's compendious impedimenta was half the Italian gold reserves.

It is not the fault of Selina Hastings, always a resourceful and diligent sleuth, that the second half of this four-hundred-page biography is a bit less interesting than the first, and its subject not quite so alluring a figure. Perhaps it is just that the gaining of experience nearly always has the edge on its conjuring into print. Back in Europe, not without procedural difficulty (three Dexedrine a day at one point) or emotional distraction (“falling rather madly in love”), she began her literary career with a Mexican travelogue (*The Sudden View*, 1952). Celebrity fans of *A Legacy*, four years later, included Nancy Mitford and Waugh, who wondered, teasingly, who this “Mrs Bedford” could be (“A cosmopolitan military man, plainly, with a knowledge of parliamentary government and popular journalism, a dislike of Prussians, a liking for Jews, a belief that everyone speaks French in the home”). There was a new lover, Eda, a successor to an Evelyn, who had showered Sybille with excruciatingly twee love letters, in which the pair masqueraded as tortoises, hares, and other fauna (“and all time thinking lovingly of his dearest creature . . . his GREAT BEAST.

so kind”). Sybille also took up a lucrative side-line reporting on such high-profile court cases as the trials of the alleged serial killer Dr. Bodkin Adams, the Profumo affair’s Stephen Ward, Lee Harvey Oswald’s killer Jack Ruby, and the jailers of Auschwitz.

Did success spoil her? Alannah certainly thought so, and Hastings quotes a pained letter from the early 1970s in which she complains that “You were much nicer and funnier years ago Sibbie, before all the *femme de lettres* stuff” But it may be that this glacial, disdainful side, which other friends also came to bemoan, was a product of Alannah’s own sage counsel. Having introduced Sybille to one or two notabilities in Rome in the 1950s, Alannah protested that she could not

understand why you behave like a maid being interviewed when you first meet people. . . . Behaving with ease and a certain boldness on meeting new people, whoever they are . . . [is] a class thing, and for a person of your breeding and obvious upper-class and even aristocratic family . . . [your manner] is impossible. It gives people the wrong impression about you.

Clearly lessons were learned as the grand manner which Sybille seems to have adopted by her middle years brought impressive results. Publishers, for example, were consistently cowed by her refusal to be edited, work to deadlines, listen to polite suggestions, or submit to all the other minor inconveniences of this exacting trade. Commissioned by *Life* to cover the Auschwitz trial in 1965, she lamented that

there is this new thing of interfering with writers which is taking on truly frightening dimensions. Have we forgotten that it is writers, original writers not hirelings, who change and make and breathe life into language, not the editors with their levelling tools who limp behind?

Robert Gottlieb, the American publisher who commissioned her life of Huxley (two volumes, 1973–74), was bombarded with snooty letters demanding an advance commensurate with “my standing as a writer”

and a veto on any editorial intervention whatever. (“No nagging . . . no showing of sample chapters . . . no hurrying.”) As a final insult Sybille called in a literary agent halfway through the writing and instructed him to renegotiate the contract.

Another of Sybille’s sticking points was having to pay for the expenses racked up while writing “the biography of one of the world’s most distinguished men of letters.” Once the book was out, she turned suddenly world-weary and indifferent. (“This whole business of publication . . . is more shocking than I expected. One feels exposed.”) *Life* backed down, agreed that Sybille could write at the length she chose, and even upped the fee from \$3,500 to \$5,000. But not everyone was prepared to act as the *en bas* to Sybille’s *de haut*, and Hastings offers a choice account of an evening spent with the artist David Hockney in 1978 at the close of which, after being commanded to ferry her home and being further instructed that the corner of Old Church Street wouldn’t do (“You will drive me to my door”), he returned to ask his host, “Who the fuck is that old bitch?” Meanwhile, the life, now being lived in London, went on as it always had done. There were more girls—Jenny and Annie and Carla and countless others, as undifferentiated, for all Hastings’s best efforts, as the faces in a chorus line—and even excursions to a low-rent lesbian club where the talent made itself available by the hour. Asking one of the girls what she did, Sybille was told that she worked “on the forecourt” Was this something to do with the Inns of Court, her patron enquired? No, the girl replied, it was a gas station.

There was also a lot more food. Plates of it, banquettes of it, buffets of it, a kind of eternal restaurant groaning with bouillabaisse, racks of lamb, cunningly finessed artichokes, roulettes of fillets of sole, and sea urchins in aspic. You can forgive Sybille her relish of the high style of these latter days (much of it financed by wealthy friends) as it contrasts so painfully with the insecurity of what had gone before. There is, frankly, something inevitable in a trajectory that finds the onetime bohemian

expatriate rooting for Mrs. Thatcher, the friend of all those mid-century modernists disliking their postmodern successors (see some wounding remarks about the “pedestrian and resentful Indian writer” Salman Rushdie), and the émigré from Nazi Germany deciding that “some races are superior or inferior to others in terms of human development.” It is all of a piece with the Coutts & Co. bank account, the Companionship of the Royal Society of Literature, and the *daube à la provençale* with pasta *macaronade*.

If the white wine is nearly always passable, the *entrecôte grillé* impeccable, and the partridges perfectly roasted, then with Bedford herself a final judgment hangs slightly out of reach. No point in assailing her hankering for the

high life, for sybaritism of this kind has to be worked at, and *la dolce vita* never came easy. Her writing is full of odd, subdued half-lights, the meaning somehow fugitive and ulterior, little hints of bygone unhappiness and life not taking the shape that imagination has wished on it. *Jigsaw* is crammed with these moments—“Billi” (Sybille) on the beach with her mother at Naples, as the pair of them wonder if “Alessandro” (Nori) will ever come back. For the first time, the narrator decides, she “felt the sting of compassion. I never forgot that afternoon by a grey Mediterranean.” As for *Sybille Bedford: A Life*, with its stupendous cuisine, its tortoises, hares, and great beasts, its disdain for sample chapters and its certain boldness, if not perhaps setting out with this aim in view, Selina Hastings has written a comic masterpiece.

American heretic, American Burke

by Allen C. Guelzo

There are some biographies which are almost impossible to write. Sometimes this is because the subject is guilty of such monstrosities that the empathy required to write a worthwhile biography can undermine the moral judgment a difficult subject demands. Ian Kershaw, at the beginning of his two-volume biography of Adolf Hitler, admitted that “any biographical approach” to a character like the Nazi fiend has the “inbuilt danger” of requiring “a level of empathy with the subject which can easily slide over into sympathy, perhaps even hidden or partial admiration.” Any attempts to understand Hitler as something other than a consummate devil—as an opportunist, a hypnotizer, an anti-Bolshevik, a social revolutionary, or a Weberian charismatic—all have lurking within them the “potential for a possible rehabilitation of Hitler” as some version of a national hero, if only his “crimes against humanity” could be somehow contextualized.

Yet, context is as much a necessity in biography as judgment; the one, in fact, has no meaning without the other. “The biographer’s mission,” wrote Paul Murray Kendall, “is to perpetuate a man as he was in the days he lived—a spring task of bringing to life again, constantly threatened by unseasonable freezes.” But context is itself a slippery task, and contextualizing a difficult subject sets up a different hazard for the biographer, that of being misunderstood as a co-conspirator in the subject’s project, so that both the subject and the biographer are heaped with opprobrium by a drone of self-congratulatory criticism.

For such a task, the great literary critic John Gardner laid down this rule: *No true compassion without will, no true will without compassion*. Without the will to judge, as Kershaw recognized, any empathy is suspect, and will be regarded that way. Without compassion, however—without a deep understanding of motives, times, places, losses, sorrows: context, again—the result will never rise above sanctimonious caricature. In fact, without biographies of difficult subjects, it might not be possible to write biographies at all.

John Caldwell Calhoun is one of those difficult subjects, something which the Baylor University historian Robert Elder acknowledges in the title of his new Calhoun biography, *Calhoun: American Heretic*.¹ Born in 1782, at almost the close of the American Revolution, Calhoun was the offspring of that wave of two hundred thousand Scots-Irish immigrants who crossed the Atlantic in the five decades before Independence. The first Calhoun—John’s grandfather—arrived in Pennsylvania in 1733, but like so many of the Scots-Irish, the Calhouns kept on moving. Young Patrick Calhoun—John’s father—settled in the Shenandoah Valley in the late 1740s, but a decade later pushed on to the South Carolina hinterlands, surviving warfare with the Cherokee and eventually acquiring 2,100 acres of land—and sixteen slaves.

South Carolina was, from the very start, a different world from the rest of America. In the

¹ *Calhoun: American Heretic*, by Robert Elder; Basic Books, 656 pages, \$35.

1790 census, its population had the closest to racial parity between white and black (140,000 to 109,000) of any American state, virtually all of the latter enslaved; forty years later, whites were a minority (237,000 to 265,000), and by the eve of the Civil War whites were outnumbered four to three. It was also a state with a dramatic political divide between lowcountry elites, loyal to the Federalist party and clustered around Charleston and the coast, and backcountry landowners, tied to Thomas Jefferson's Democratic-Republicans and deeply resentful of the way the lowcountry ruled the legislature by appointing the governor, the state's federal electors, and almost all the state offices.

Young John Calhoun's education was a confirmation of all of the back-country's Jeffersonian predilections: at age thirteen, after his father's death, he was enrolled in a classical academy run by his Presbyterian brother-in-law, Moses Waddel; then, in 1802, he entered the junior class at Yale College, where he stubbornly clung to the Jeffersonian persuasion despite the Federalism breathed into the Yale atmosphere by the college's president, the devout and devoutly Jefferson-hating Timothy Dwight. He was "one of the very few, who dared to speak out in College in 1803-04 when Federalism was so prevalent at Yale," remembered one fellow student; forty years later, another classmate could congratulate Calhoun on being "the same true and undeviating republican, in principle and practice, that you were forty years ago."

Or so it seemed. Calhoun added another Connecticut year in 1805 by studying law at yet another Federalist stronghold, the Litchfield law school established by Tapping Reeve. (An abiding rumor was that Calhoun had stopped *en route* in Washington to pay homage to Jefferson, and perhaps to reinforce his Jeffersonianism before facing another blast of Federalism). When he returned to South Carolina in December, 1806, he opened a law practice in Abbeville. But he admitted feeling "a strong aversion to the law," and soon enough turned to politics. The turn was almost too easy. Elected to the state legislature in October 1808, he waited only two years before successfully running for Congress. He was just twenty-eight years old.

Once there, however, Calhoun found it more difficult to play the true Jeffersonian. Although Jefferson's political heir, James Madison, still presided over a Jeffersonian-dominated administration, Jefferson's party was fracturing. One faction, led by the Kentuckian Henry Clay, was chafing at Jeffersonian policies on trade, banking, and tariffs, while a stubborn band of Jeffersonian purists, the Tertium Quids (the "third something" after the Federalists and the Clay faction), headed by the razor-tongued Virginian, John Randolph, angrily demanded "taxes repealed; the public debt amply provided for, both principal and interest; sinecures abolished . . . public confidence unbounded." Calhoun found himself drawn almost at once to Clay, and with Clay, he voted for bills to establish a new federal bank, protect manufacturing through tariffs, and fund an ambitious program of government-sponsored infrastructure projects. And he won personal prominence by bearding the raspy John Randolph on the floor of the House. When James Monroe succeeded Madison as president in 1816, Monroe had no hesitations in inviting Calhoun to join his administration as Secretary of War.

The Monroe years, from 1816 to 1824, enjoy the appellation "The Era of Good Feelings." Calhoun's tenure at the War Department, however, was not exactly easy going. His staff consisted of just thirty-four clerks and eighteen agents who administered the government's entire Indian policy, and much of his time was consumed with supervising the not always kindly enforcement of tribal removal treaties. Calhoun had even more grief with the behavior of over-mighty white aggressors, especially the über-popular Andrew Jackson, whom he flatly condemned for his unilateral occupation of Spanish-owned Pensacola.

By 1824, Calhoun was ready to make a presidential bid, advertising himself as a moderate who stood "on the great Republican cause, free alike from the charge of Federalism or Radicalism." He had to settle for the vice-presidency, under John Quincy Adams, and in many respects this marked the climacteric of his political career. Although Adams was opposed to slavery and Calhoun was by now

a substantial slave-owner, Calhoun's relations with Adams had always been cordial. He had been willing to condemn the transatlantic slave trade as an "odious traffic," and, in the midst of the great controversy in Congress over the admission of Missouri as a slave state in 1820, Calhoun had agreed that Congress had jurisdiction over legalizing slavery in the Western Territories. It is not inconceivable that he could have even become a leader in the Whig party that Clay formed in 1834 to combat Andrew Jackson and promote a program—an "American System"—for tariffs, banking, and infrastructure. Moving in that direction, he might have (like Clay) espoused some strategy for gradual emancipation and colonization.

Instead, from 1824 onwards, Calhoun was under the pressure of mounting criticism from his South Carolina constituents that he was going soft on slavery, and feeling the intellectual influence of the hard-line Jeffersonian John Taylor of Caroline. Rather than accommodation, Calhoun now swung hard away from Clay. He cast his first vote against tariffs (as vice-president) in 1825, then turned against federal infrastructure funding. When Andrew Jackson evicted John Quincy Adams from the presidency in 1828, Calhoun was picked to remain as vice-president. But he was now deeply committed to resisting federal authority, no matter who was president, and between 1828 and 1832 he directed a political war against federal tariff legislation that asserted South Carolina's authority to nullify federal laws within its own boundaries. Since tariffs generated 94 percent of the federal government's revenue, this amounted to a practical veto over all federal authority, and that generated a ferocious backlash from Andrew Jackson, who threatened to march federal troops into South Carolina to enforce federal authority. But it was clear that Calhoun's real concern was not the tariffs *per se*, but federal power to touch slavery. Tariffs were only "the occasion, rather than the real cause of the present unhappy state of things," Calhoun wrote in 1830. It was "the peculiar domestic institution of the Southern States" he wanted to protect; tariff nullification was only a skirmish line.

From that moment, Calhoun never had any real hope of the presidency. Having directly challenged Jackson over the tariff, he resigned his vice-presidency. He was triumphantly returned to the Senate to represent South Carolina for the next two decades, but his energies were now poured into political philosophy, and the formulation of an alternative republicanism. Beginning with his *Exposition and Protest* of December 1828, and running through his *Fort Hill Address* (1831) and his posthumously published *Disquisition on Government* and *A Discourse on the Constitution and Government of the United States*, Calhoun developed a new American political theory, built around four principal points.

First, his repudiation of the Declaration of Independence and the natural-law principles it embodies. Calhoun went straight to the root of American political self-understanding by insisting that the Declaration of Independence, by taking inalienable natural rights as its fundamental premise, was an enormous mistake. "There had never been a proposition of such dangerous import, or which had been so misunderstood, or been productive of so much evil" as the notion that "certain inalienable rights" had been conveyed to anyone, much less life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness. The idea of natural rights was only a "hypothetical truism," and "nothing can be more unequal than the quantum of liberty assigned to each individual." Liberty, for instance, is not an inherent right, hard-wired in equal proportions into every individual human nature, but "a reward to be earned, not a blessing to be gratuitously lavished on all alike." Those people who were "too ignorant, degraded and vicious, to be capable either of appreciating or of enjoying it" should not have liberty handed to them.

Second, his advocacy of white racial supremacy. Nothing was more obvious to Calhoun but that Africans were far, far below the bar of such political privileges. "I appeal to facts," he declared in an 1837 speech. "Never before has the black race of Central Africa, from the dawn of history to the present day, attained a condition so civilized and so improved, not only physically, but morally and intellectually" as it

has under American slavery. For that “Central African race” slavery was not a labor system to which power had assigned them, but “a positive good” which benefited it, and until some sign appeared that “the black race” had moved beyond ignorance, degradation, and viciousness, in slavery it should stay. “I hold [slavery] to be a good, as it has thus far proved itself to be . . . and will continue to prove so if not disturbed by the fell spirit of abolition.”

Third, his romantic glorification of historical process. Not only were the Declaration and natural law wrong, they were also historically irrelevant. “If we trace it back,” Calhoun declared before the Senate in 1848, “we shall find the proposition” about equality “expressed in the Declaration of Independence” had been “inserted in our Declaration of Independence without any necessity.” The real origins of the Revolution were evolutionary, as British colonists used, developed, and asserted traditional English liberties. “Breach of our chartered privileges, and lawless encroachment on our acknowledged and well-established rights by the parent country, were the real causes—and of themselves sufficient, without resorting to any other, to justify the step . . . in constructing the governments which were substituted in the place of the colonial.” It stood to reason, then, that historical process would not stand still, either, but continue to reveal itself in new developments, in different places, among the relations of different peoples. The Constitution contained more than one “case of mission,” and relied on “slow and successive experience” for “correction and adaptation.” It was only to be expected that “preservation is perpetual creation.” Calhoun was, in that sense, the first living constitutionalist.

Fourth, his critique of the North’s commercial society. The offense of Clay’s “American System” of tariffs, banking, and federal infrastructure was not solely a matter of federal authority; a greater offense lay in how Clay’s program benefited commerce, trade, and free labor at the expense of Jeffersonian agriculturalists. The “manufacturing interest” was primed to “rear up a moneyed aristocracy” in America, Calhoun warned, and though Americans might at that moment see freedom

and slavery as the primary national problem, dividing “the manufacturing States” and “the Agricultural States,” Calhoun (like Malthus, Ricardo, and ultimately Marx) foresaw that “the time will come when it will produce the same results between the several classes” and “the contest will be between the capitalists and operatives.” The plantation system, by contrast, preserved what Calhoun imagined was a humane balance between labor, capital, and the environment. Every “plantation is a little community of itself,” Calhoun believed, where generous-minded white men cared for contented and grateful black slaves in a quasi-medieval idyll. “Property in our slaves,” he argued, “is but wages purchased in advance including the support and supplies of the laborers, which is usually very liberal.” And “it ought to be a principle of morals and patriotism,” he wrote to Edmund Ruffin in 1835, “that no gain is legitimate that does not leave the land as productive as it was before it was taken.”

Calhoun did not, however, underestimate the determination or the numbers in the anti-slavery movement, especially after the shock of the Missouri statehood controversy in 1820. Northern free-labor political power was growing, and it would only be a matter of time before anti-slavery majorities wrested control of the federal government out of the hands of Southerners and destroyed his little slave communities. To preserve them, Calhoun bent his political energies to a reconstruction of the Constitution which would insert guarantees for minority identity rights into the legal system. “What was this body but a community of states, united for the purpose of maintaining their separate institutions?” Calhoun asked. To keep it that way, he argued in 1828, states should possess a veto over federal legislation, in the form of state nullification. When that possibility withered in the teeth of Andrew Jackson’s unforgiving rage, Calhoun proposed as an alternative the doctrine of “concurrent majorities,” which required the assent of a majority of the states, as states, to federal law and not simply assent by the general population as represented in the House of Representatives.

“Government of the people is the government of the whole community,” not merely the “government of the absolute majority.”

Calhoun did not live to see the full flowering of his philosophy. He contracted the scourge of the nineteenth century, tuberculosis, probably in 1845, and died of it on March 31, 1850, even as he was conducting a stubborn campaign to open the Western Territories to slavery and defeat Henry Clay’s effort to strike a compromise to contain slavery’s spread. Calhoun’s admirers in South Carolina raised funds to erect a monument to him in Charleston; it was still unfinished when South Carolinians opened fire on Fort Sumter in Charleston harbor and began the Civil War.

Calhoun stands today, as he did in his own time, as the premier defender of white racial supremacy, of slavery as a legitimate labor system, of the triumph of minority factionalism, and ultimately as the intellectual spark to disunion and civil war. He was the anti-Washington, and, for that matter, the anti-Madison and the anti-Lincoln, of American history. When the Supreme Court, in the notorious *Slaughterhouse Cases* judgment in 1873, successfully crippled the Fourteenth Amendment’s extension “of the common rights of American citizens under the protection of the National Government,” Justice Stephen Field’s dissenting opinion stigmatized that conclusion as “the opinion of Mr. Calhoun and the class represented by him.” Henry Wilson’s *History of the Rise and Fall of the Slave Power* (1875) pinned “the dissolution of the Union” on the “wrong position” in which Calhoun had “placed the South.” Calhoun’s first major biographer, Herman von Holst, condemned him in 1882 as “interested in nothing outside slavery,” whose defense he raised to the level of “abstraction, as a principle.” W. E. B. Du Bois denounced Calhoun in Calhoun’s own home state of South Carolina in 1946 as one of those “men whose names must ever be besmirched by the fact that they fought against freedom and democracy in a land which was founded upon democracy and freedom. . . . This class of men must yield to the writing in the stars.” And the late Harry Jaffa, defending to the last

syllable the reputation of Abraham Lincoln, fingered Calhoun’s writings as “a landmark in the transition from individual rights to group rights” and a repudiation of “constitutionalism and the rule of law.” Calhoun was, for Jaffa, “reminiscent of Hegel” in seeing that human history is the product of “not human art or reason but human passion.”

The most recent turn around Calhoun’s memory has been iconoclastic. In 2017, Yale University renamed the residential college it had called Calhoun College eighty-four years before; this past summer, Clemson University removed Calhoun’s name from its honors college; in June 2020, the Charleston City Council voted to remove the statue of Calhoun which stood on a pedestal in Marion Square as a gesture toward “racial conciliation and for unity in this city”; and Fort Wayne, Indiana, is at this moment debating renaming Calhoun Street as a “constant symbol of an oppressive past.”

This makes the task Professor Elder sets for himself in *American Heretic* a steep one, for while he fully recognizes that “to many Calhoun seems to represent the antithesis of the American idea of equality, inclusion, and popular democracy” and “was to some even in his own lifetime, a heretic,” Elder cannot entirely escape the seduction, even at the distance of a century and a half, of Calhoun’s commanding persona and the singular consistency of his political logic. “There are dangers inherent in the ritual of proclaiming heretics,” Elder insists, “who often go to the stake to expiate the anxieties of those who watch them burn.” Whether this sympathy is best applied to Calhoun, or to the abolitionists beaten and murdered by pro-slavery mobs, or to the fugitives hunted down and condemned by kangaroo courts under the Fugitive Slave Law of 1850 is a question Elder does not answer, but it is the kind of problem posed by all biographies of difficult subjects.

Elder’s caution in dealing out judgment is mirrored in his detailed lope across the landscape of Calhoun’s life. *American Heretic*, at 656 pages, dwarfs all the major studies of Calhoun in the last fifty years (Irving Bartlett’s 1994 *John C. Calhoun: A Biography* weighs

in at 416 pages, John Niven's 1988 *John C. Calhoun and the Price of Union: A Biography* at 367 pages). Mercifully, it rarely drags, even though much of it is devoted to a fastidious walk through the development of Calhoun's political ideas. Unhappily, that also makes for a certain flatness, especially when Elder deals with the moments in Calhoun's career which coruscate with dramatic collision. The famous Jefferson's Birthday dinner of 1830, when Calhoun hoped Andrew Jackson would join in a carefully orchestrated round of toasts that would signal Jackson's cooperation in nullifying the tariff, is passed by in two bland paragraphs. This reflects Elder's doubts that Jackson's surprise toast—"Our Union, it must be preserved"—really represented some symbolic rending of the Democratic temple's veil. But it's also symptomatic of Elder's low-key approach to anything that threatens to become exciting. It's true that there has been significant debate over the actual importance of the dinner and the toasts; yet the moment itself was theatrical enough to deserve more from Elder (as indeed it has from H. W. Brands in *Heirs of the Founders: The Epic Rivalry of Henry Clay, John Calhoun and Daniel Webster*, Robert Remini's *Andrew Jackson: The Course of American Freedom*, and even in my old high-school favorite, Paul Wellman's *The House Divides*).

Congenial as Elder's style is, the book is not without the occasional pothole. James Somerset, the focus of Lord Chief Justice Mansfield's famous judgment against slavery in the British Empire, was not "a Virginia slave" but was from Boston; the oft-quoted dictum of "the Mississippi legislature" in 1818 which denounced slavery as "condemned by reason and the laws of nature" was actually the judgment of the state supreme court in *Harry v. Decker & Hopkins*; the description of a British bombardment of Alexandria in 1813 is confused with a subsequent description of the British occupation of Washington in 1814. And then there are a number of annoying stylistic tics—the use of "on account of" as a substitute for "because" and the peculiar failure to set out Calhoun's birth date (March 18) and death date (March 31). Still, Elder has the decency of compassion and never under-

estimates or burlesques Calhoun. He is frank about Calhoun's family troubles (especially with his sons), about Calhoun's confusion in dealing with unruly slaves who failed to obey the script for little communities, and about his mismanaged finances that, by the 1840s, "were in a magnificent shambles," as Calhoun robbed Peter to pay Paul by borrowing "money simply to pay the interest and payments on his other debts."

If there is a singular flaw in *American Heretic*, it is the failure to place Calhoun in any larger context than antebellum politics or the demotion of his reputation after the grim Civil War years. Elder briefly notes that Calhoun enjoyed a minor resurgence of respect in the last decades of the twentieth century among political theorists in the Netherlands, Northern Ireland, and South Africa, where concern for minority rights were major issues. But he misses an opportunity to draw an important historical connection between Calhoun and Edmund Burke, for if Calhoun cannot exactly be called the American Hegel, he almost certainly deserves to be thought of as the American Burke. This oversight is all the more odd since Calhoun himself lauded Burke as the "greatest of political philosophers" and the "greatest of modern statesmen." In the same way that Burke understood the British constitution to be a collaboration of centuries of experience unique to the British peoples, Calhoun applauded the Constitution as a product of historical incident, malleable to historical change. Like Burke, he had no use for any transcendent or universal political principles; and just as Burke imagined the British Empire as "the aggregate of many states under one common head," Calhoun believed that "so far from the Constitution being the work of the American people collectively, no such political body, either now, or ever did exist." But Calhoun was wrong about the American people and the American Union, and wrong about the intentions and vision of the Founders, and one suspects that his mistakes throw a doubtful shadow backwards onto Burke, too. Alas, that it cost us a civil war and 750,000 American lives to learn this.

Solzhenitsyn & the engine of history

by Robert D. Kaplan

It is a conceit of the modern world that history is governed by reason. Reason is like an axe to the living, growing tree of history, with its convoluted branches, each cell and molecule emerging as a matter of sheer contingency, one building upon the next—so that great events arise from innumerable plots and threads. Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn wrote a series of exhausting books, totaling thousands of pages, about unreason in history and the subsequent creation of the modern world, in which the axe of reason, as he puts it, is rare, and when it does fall sometimes creates absolute terror.

The Red Wheel, with its “discrete” “nodes” or “knots,” is composed of *August 1914*, *November 1916*, *March 1917*, and *April 1917*, with *March 1917* alone accounting for several long volumes. This is the principal work of the Nobel laureate’s life, to which Solzhenitsyn dedicated several decades and into which poured all his thoughts about the senseless chaos of the modern and postmodern worlds, all told through the prism of that most contingent of events, the Russian Revolution. That signal event begins with a complex and bungled war and ends with a shaky Bolshevik coup that set in motion a death machine virtually unrivaled in history. And none of this might have happened had Russia’s resolutely effective and moderate prime minister, Pyotr Stolypin, who pursued a “middle line of social development,” not been assassinated in September 1911 at the Kiev opera house.

“When things are too clear, they are no longer interesting,” says one of the author’s

characters. Solzhenitsyn, far more than other writers, uses his characters to announce counterintuitive and unpopular truths. He knows that a bundle of passions can decide a seemingly clear-cut and rational action, to say nothing of the most consequential decisions that can be decided by a momentary mood. Hindsight is lazy in this regard, Solzhenitsyn intimates, since it reduces complexity to a counterfeit clarity. He replaces hindsight with a multitude of characters thinking and acting in the moment, so that at the beginning of World War I, “The clock of fate was suspended over the whole of East Prussia, and its six-mile-long pendulum was ticking audibly as it swung from the German to the Russian side and back again.” Indeed, the life and death of whole battalions of men, as the author vividly demonstrates, can be effected by a misplaced pencil movement on a general’s dimly lit field map.

Solzhenitsyn’s dissection of the Russian defeat at the Battle of Tannenberg, which occupies much of the action of *August 1914*, should be studied at every military war college. Without that failure, there might well have been no Romanov abdication, no Lenin, thus no twentieth century as we know it. Solzhenitsyn’s presentation of the battle over hundreds of pages is panoramic, immersive, and masterly, the equivalent in typewriter ink of Pieter Brueghel the Elder’s *Fight Between Carnival and Lent*. As with any writer of great epics, Solzhenitsyn knows many disparate things: the technicalities of artillery formations and

field maneuvers; the mental process by which semi-starving, over-extended, and ill-led soldiers become looters; how small changes in terrain affect forced marches; as well as the placement of the stars in the night sky and the names of many Orthodox saints.

War between Russia and Germany begins in a whirlpool of emotion. Elation was general, especially in Moscow and Petrograd. After all, this was one war you “could not reject.” “Historic obligations” to Slavic brothers in Serbia were sacred. “A European war cannot be a prolonged conflict.” Of course, the popular naïveté preceding World War I is an old story that is the stuff of many books. But Solzhenitsyn goes on to illuminate in his saga how the same innocence will carry through the entire revolutionary process in Russia, in which phrases like “war” and “revolution” meant very different things to a people whose frame of reference extended only to the end of the nineteenth century. Thus they had no conception of how history could wildly swerve in a new technological age, so that the new military conflict would be nothing like the Franco-Prussian War of 1870–71, and the revolution to come would yield nothing like the French one of 1789, which even with its Reign of Terror was altogether benign compared to what was in store for Russia. People sleepwalked backwards into the horrors of the twentieth century, blindly slashed by its revolving blades. Solzhenitsyn doesn’t tell us this; he illustrates it through dozens of fully realized characters.

World War I on the Eastern Front begins with the uneasy specter of culture conjuring itself up. Solzhenitsyn concentrates on deterministic aspects of reality that our policy and intellectual elite want to avoid. To wit, a Russian soldier is amazed at the tidiness of the German landscape the moment he crosses the frontier: the neat regimentation of the brick houses, the pigsties, and the wellheads. The electric lighting deep in the rural interior and the well-kept roads through the clean, practically shaven forests bespeak an “inhuman cleanliness” and “parade-ground order” shocking to a Russian peasant accustomed to the filthy dreariness of his home and village.

From this flows dozens of pages of description of Russian military disorganization and slovenliness, with a chain of command and general officer corps corrupted by a thoroughly rotten czarist system. Russian generals make alcoholic toasts over heavy lunches in the middle of a campaign. A withdrawal is ordered after gaining ground in a horrific battle to protect a general’s reputation in the expectation of further losses. At the highest levels there is almost always the avoidance of risk and the rewarding of mediocrity.

Solzhenitsyn’s sympathy is rather with the middle-level officers, who “all bore the indelible impress of a similar background: army tradition, long spells of garrison service in a world isolated from the rest of society; a sense of alienation, of being despised by that society and ridiculed by liberal writers.” Throughout these pages Solzhenitsyn reveals himself as the ultimate patriot and reasoned conservative, who, with a deep belief in an Orthodox Christian God, recognizes the primacy of culture and empathizes with the military, even as he must expose every aspect of a decadent and autocratic imperial system that has failed its own people. Solzhenitsyn’s uniqueness—that is, his greatness—rests on his deep political conservatism, married to a narrative genius akin to Tolstoy’s, encompassing, like the earlier master, just so many universes: from the horrors of the Romanian front, to the exaltations of falling in love in middle age, to the fantastic dinners in private rooms, with masses of smoked salmon and sturgeon, bouillon, sour cream, and rowanberry vodka.

Solzhenitsyn sees an unnecessary war that chain-reacts within a society—spread across half the longitudes of the earth—that for some years already has been crumbling into chaos: with inflation; food shortages; complete bureaucratic dysfunction; a dynasty bordering on sheer “helplessness” and “irresolution”; and a rowdy Duma given to endless, flowery, and directionless speeches in the worst of parliamentary traditions. Here is the very texture of anarchy, with crowds assaulting police with stones and chunks of ice, while the police are in turn afraid of the cossacks. Meanwhile, congeries of parties and factions within parties

are left to debate among themselves. Loose, drunken talk postulates that if only the government would change, everything would become better and more humane. There is almost a romance about the future, about any fate save for the present. The author isn't so much writing a series of novels as unloading everything he knows and thinks about pre-revolutionary Russia, and constructing a tight philosophical argument about it, which glints through multiple layers of description.

The opposite of anarchy is hierarchy, from which order emanates. And it is the melting away of hierarchy that Solzhenitsyn describes in almost tactile terms. Institutions like the royal family, the imperial bureaucracy, the Duma, and the police gradually cease to function, or even to answer properly to each other in the course of these novels. Solzhenitsyn is a deeply moral man of liberty, as the political philosopher Daniel J. Mahoney has observed. Yet as a man of liberty he realizes, as all conservatives do, that without order there is no freedom for any man. And the greater the disorder, the greater the repression to follow.

For in this entire revolutionary process, what pierces most through the intelligent reader's consciousness is the madness of crowds coupled with the romance and irresistibility of extremism, so that a minority ends up moving history. Just listen to Solzhenitsyn's timeless words:

For a long time now it has been dangerous to stand in the way of revolution, and risk-free to assist it. Those who have renounced all traditional Russian values, the revolutionary horde, the locusts from the abyss, vilify and blaspheme and no one dares challenge them. A left-wing newspaper can print the most subversive of articles, a left-wing speaker can deliver the most incendiary of speeches—but just try pointing out the dangers of such utterances and the whole leftist camp will raise a howl of denunciation.

Nobody interferes with the mob, least of all the polished and oh-so-civilized intelligentsia, who see the radical Left as composed of a purer and distilled archetype of their own values, and only awake from their dreams when it

is too late. For, as it is said, people who have lost faith in God believe in nothing, and they will therefore believe in anything. Richard Bernstein, a former book critic for *The New York Times*, in referring to campus multiculturalism, calls this larger phenomenon “the dictatorship of virtue,” something that took firm root in twentieth-century totalitarianism, in which the perfect race or system becomes the absolute destroyer of everything good. In this way Solzhenitsyn's story is a timeless one, aptly suited for our own age.

Tyranny is inseparable from the mob. Elias Canetti, the Bulgarian-Jewish Nobel laureate in literature, made this the theme of his 1960 masterwork, *Crowds and Power*, traumatized as he was by the mobs he had seen in Vienna in the decade prior to Hitler's takeover. The crowd, Canetti suggests, emerges ultimately from vulnerability and the consequent need of the individual for conformity with others. Thus the lonely individual exerts dominance through participation in a crowd that speaks with one voice. Once that crowd has achieved a sufficient size, others are coerced to join it, or at least not to interfere with it. From lockdown, to isolation, to loneliness, to explosion in the streets, that is: one contingent event leading to another, as in the expanding branches of a tree. Obviously our own society has institutional breaks and barriers that pre-revolutionary Russia utterly lacked. Think of our contemporary drama as a much subtler yet relevant deviation of Solzhenitsyn's story.

“The crowd!” Solzhenitsyn writes. “A strange special being, both human and inhuman . . . where each individual was released from his usual responsibility and was multiplied in strength.” The psychology of the crowd, or mob, is thus: “show us who [next] to tear to pieces.”

And the mobs that are the most lethal for civilization are composed of the young. Listen to one of Solzhenitsyn's characters:

Idolized children despise their parents, and when they get a bit older they bully their countrymen. Tribes with an ancestor cult have endured for centuries. No tribe would survive long with a youth cult.

The problem with youth, as the aging travel writer Paul Theroux, among others, has explained, is that there is a place where it cannot go, but which its parents and grandparents have experienced in all its vividness: the past. The young have never seen the past and therefore have no intimate realization of it. Having lived enough years in the past makes one humble, unsteady, aware of the imperfections of life and of fate, and therefore more immune to ideal solutions for society. To trust youth blindly, to see in youth the answer to our own sins and imperfections, may hold some appeal, but it is also dimwitted. Youth can break down an institutional order, but building a new one is another story, especially as the mobs seeking to ransack the dotty Romanov royal house had no idea about how technology in the twentieth century would assist repression in the new regime aborning.

Solzhenitsyn's mind seethes with all these realizations and revelations. His answer is a fictional protagonist, Colonel Georgi Mikhailich Vorotyntsev, the very embodiment of human agency. Vorotyntsev, as a colonel, comprehends all the details of grand strategy yet also experiences the peasant grunts in their filthy trenches getting ripped apart by German bullets. He sees above and below him, in other words, a trait common to upper-middle-level officers in any military. Battle plans obsess him; sleep and mastering his own impatience he finds impossible. He despises the czarist courtiers and mediocre generals, but also loathes the revolutionary nihilists in the streets and plotting abroad. And all his emotions arise out of an exalted yet practical patriotism. He is the ultimate good man, in other words, who struggles to have an effect—a less consequential version of the murdered prime minister Stolypin. But Solzhenitsyn, ever the novelist, understands that even the best men are made out of flesh and not out of granite, and so saddles Vorotyntsev with an extramarital affair, which distracts him and undermines his effectiveness.

There is another protagonist in the story, though not a fictional creation, who is never distracted and who *is* composed of a block of

granite, as a contemporary of his once put it, someone who has no humanity and is permanently focused on a problem: Vladimir Lenin, whom Solzhenitsyn captures in exile in Switzerland in the pages of *November 1916*. This émigré world of Russian revolutionaries is, of course, most brilliantly depicted by Joseph Conrad in his 1911 novel, *Under Western Eyes*. Conrad's characters resemble, as one critic observed, "apes of a sinister jungle," in which Conrad announces that "the spirit of Russia is the spirit of cynicism. . . . For that is the mark of Russian autocracy and of Russian revolt," so that revolutions begin with idealism and end with fanaticism. Solzhenitsyn is not cynical about Russia the way that Conrad, the Pole, is. But his portrayal of Lenin is, nevertheless, quite jarring:

All that Lenin lacked was breadth. The savage, intolerant narrowness of the born schismatic harnessed his tremendous energies to futilities—fragmenting this group, dissociating himself from that . . . wasting his strength in meaningless struggles, with nothing to show except mounds of scribbled paper. This schismatic narrowness doomed him to sterility in Europe, left him no future except in Russia—but also made him indispensable for any activity there. Indispensable now!

And that is the point. Once out of Europe and back in Petrograd, Lenin becomes the most focused man in Russia, indeed perhaps the only focused man in Russia, a man whose narrow mind—grinding like the gears of a clock—concentrates on one issue. While everyone else is debating politics, Lenin meticulously plans how to actually seize power, which, as Solzhenitsyn's vast canvas makes clear, is, as they say, lying in the streets waiting to be picked up. Lenin was a nightmarish machine of domination. This is human agency at its heights, though not the kind that intellectual idealists contemplate.

"There is just one buttress: the spell of the Tsar's name!" someone remarks in *March 1917, Node III, Book 1*. "The people are generally indifferent to the various parties and programs but not to the fact that they have

a Tsar.” Of all the violence depicted in these books, perhaps the most terrifying is the sight of the Tsar’s full-length portrait hanging in the Duma, shredded by bayonets. Despite all of its monumental faults, the monarchy was the only graspable fact of stability in Russia. However backward, reactionary, and ineffectual it was, longevity had provided Nicholas II’s royal line with legitimacy, allowing him to rule without the sharpened steel of extremism that the twentieth century was to manifest with all its frightening *isms*. This is why, as explained by Mahoney, Solzhenitsyn came to see the February Revolution that brought the democrat Alexander Kerensky to power as “the true revolution and the enduring disaster,” since it toppled the monarchical order and led Russia into complete anarchy, from which a Bolshevik coup, the October Revolution, was only subsequent. Indeed, the murder of Nicholas II’s family, including all his children, in July 1918, probably ordered by Lenin, was the seminal crime of the twentieth century: if you could deliberately kill children with guns and bayonets, *well then*, you could kill millions.

Indeed, while democracy is a relatively new and fragile phenomenon across the span of history, monarchy is perhaps the oldest governing system and incubator of stabilizing tradition known to man. The twentieth century came to be marked by other seminal crimes and tragedies, quite a few involving the end of monarchies. In July 1958, forty years to the month after the Romanovs were butchered, army officers in Iraq murdered the family of the Hashemite King Faisal II, bringing a string of military rulers to power in Baghdad, culminating in the chilling brutality of Sad-

dam Hussein, whose Baathist ideology was devoid of any sense of tradition and political compromise. As for the Shah of Iran, had he not been forced to abdicate in 1979, Iran today—like Iraq today had the Hashemites remained in power, and like Russia today had the Romanovs remained—would have evolved gradually over the decades into a highly imperfect constitutional monarchy with the royal family as stabilizing figureheads. Had the Hohenzollerns been restored to the throne in Germany after World War I, even stripped of any real political power, there might well have been no Hitler. This, then, is the twentieth century: the axe-like ending of the Old World with all of its stabilizing traditions, allowing for the rise of abstract and utopian movements, each in its own machinal way constituting a dictatorship of virtue.

In his first book, published in 1957, titled *A World Restored*, the young Henry Kissinger wrote that “the most fundamental problem of politics . . . is not the control of wickedness but the limitation of righteousness.” It is self-righteousness that lies at the heart of most tyrannies: the belief that only you and your side are moral and on the right side of history, making your opponents immoral, and therefore not only wrong but illegitimate. This was what the vast anarchy across the whole of Russia, every detail captured in quasi-fictionalized manner by Solzhenitsyn, finally wrought. Solzhenitsyn was a conservative because he believed in tradition. And because he believed in tradition he also believed in moderation, all of which made him a great humanist. His *Red Wheel* warns still of the future, with all its terrifying technological and ideological innovations.

New poems

by *Anton Yakovlev, Rachel Hadas & Jessica Hornik*

So much to say

On the evening they try to kill you
you won't think of me. I will remain standing
by the side of the road. I won't come through for you.

In small ways, perhaps. Avoid eye contact
with the landscape at low tide. Let's find
the only restaurant open after the hurricane,

just as it starts raining again. Let's hide in the tunnel
under the parkway we drove when we were made up
of a completely different set of molecules.

—*Anton Yakovlev*

Ghost guest

I sometimes think I recognize the face
of my own death. Knowing it is nearer
makes me feel it ought to be familiar,
a neutral guest I've seen somewhere before.
Even if it's not a face I know,
can it be ignored,
that shadow presence quiet in a corner?
And therefore as a stranger give it welcome.
Which is the lesser of two evils here,
which the least boorish way to be a host?
Who is hosting whom? If I'm a host,
I'm also just as much a guest, a ghost.
What heart heard of, ghost guessed. So,

death, I'll acknowledge you, I'll be polite,
hand you a drink and let you circulate
and talk with others. You will cycle back.
Precisely: *at my back I always hear*
and do not hear and see and do not see,
know and do not know you'll catch up with me.
Since I think I know you from somewhere,
why should I be so sure
that you do not know me at least as well,
my length of days and my Achilles heel,
which in each person's in a different place?
Sometimes I think I recognize your face.

—*Rachel Hadas*

Coltsfoot

The coltsfoot is in bloom—
are words no one
has ever been moved to say.
Poking up its fringed face

along the wasted roadside,
through dead leaves
grayed with winter,
coltsfoot doesn't ask

to be looked at.
Yet here you are,
waylaid by what seems
a stunted, oddly early

dandelion. Its dullness
is a kind of dogma.
You can rely on it.
It won't tear you up on the inside

with some unnameable beauty—
like a nothing-special
sunset, when the light
just goes.

—*Jessica Hornik*

Reflections

Stepping stones

by James Zug

When I was younger and wiser, I loved the conversational tangent. It burst out in those irrepressibly flowing, intense, interrupting dialogues. We were at a café or pub, lingering in the half-light, a second cup, or a third round, moving from the gossip and quiddities of our days to larger, more abstract issues. We discussed memory, the meaning of life, where we might be going, and why.

The tangent was not a dining-out tale, something humorous and easily retrievable from my past with which to regale an audience who was giving me a meal. Instead it was a method to unknot something: we were putting our world to rights and figuring out how to live.

It didn't always go well. I remember one evening in Ketcham, Idaho. We were twenty-two, full of life, two-thirds of a summer's drive across the country. We spent a long dinner discussing the future. Evidently we were callow, obnoxiously opinionated, assuredly solipsistic, or possibly just loud. A guy came up to us on his way out, white beard, old (probably in his fifties). He stopped and said, in a fly-fisherman voice, "You guys are completely full of s—. Just stupid. You don't know what the f— you are talking about." He was probably right.

When we got into one of these tangents, a go-to was my Graham Greene tale. I never read much Greene when I was young. His paperbacks were in the corner, with their white covers and garish illustrations. Then I met Paddy. He was the husband of our landlord.

They lived in a cottage high on the windswept hills behind our house. Every afternoon he toddled down to the stone-walled pool for what he called his daily constitutional. After his swim he toweled off, sat in a chair, and read. I'd come down and we'd talk. He told me stories of a life spent across all the continents. Some days he handed me a roughed-up *Sunday Times*. He had it posted from London each week. For many weeks—this was 1994—the *Times* excerpted a major biography of Graham Greene (the second volume by Norman Sherry). Paddy loved Greene, had read every one of his novels, had mourned his death. "But his nonfiction is extraordinary," he told me, more than once.

A few years later, I stumbled upon that nonfiction. I twice read Greene's *Journey Without Maps* (1936), about his month walking around Liberia. I also stumbled, when a library was deaccessioning, upon a copy of Greene's memoir, *A Sort of Life* (1971). As a schoolboy, Greene wrote, he was bullied by a classmate named Watson. Greene had a memorable phrase for how he was haunted by his memories of Watson: revenge was alive for him like a creature under a stone. Three or four decades later Greene was in a store in Kuala Lumpur buying whiskey. He was going to Malacca for the Christmas holidays.

A man approached him. It was Watson. For years, Greene had pondered humiliating Watson. Now, he had the chance.

Watson, it turned out, remembered being good chums with Greene at school, swotting

up their Latin together. Greene was astounded. In the liquor store, with the clink of dusty warm bottles, they made half-hearted plans to get together in the New Year. It was the usual thing. Greene went on to Malacca, forgot all about Watson, and never looked him up.

That was it. That was Greene's ultimate revenge. No creature lived anymore under that stone.

I was recently reminded of my old Greene story. While on a trip to London, I had a free afternoon. It was a surprise. Usually when traveling for work, I found myself overscheduled with a full calendar of meetings, busy rushing around; all the while, like water slowly seeping through your house's foundation into your basement while you were sleeping, emails leaked into my inbox, drop after drop after drop.

Years ago, it was different. When I traveled alone in the pre-digital age, I could disappear for an afternoon when it transpired that I was free. No one who knew me knew where I was. In various cities on various continents, I wandered in cities and towns, drifting through neighborhoods. I circled back. I got lost. I had no map, no guidebook, no expectations or obligations.

The first time it happened, I was in Cape Town. It was my twentieth birthday. I took the train out to Simon's Town, along the northeastern edge of the Cape peninsula. The train stopped in Kalk Bay, blue-green waves crashing nearly onto the railroad tracks. After a hesitation, the train lurched and reversed, going backwards up the track. Through the scratchy PA system the conductor said in a heavy Afrikaans accent that the train was returning to Cape Town.

The next stop the other way was Muizenburg. I disembarked. I saw a sign for the cottage of Cecil Rhodes. I knew little about Rhodes. He was just a statue back at Oriel or here in Rondebosch, some sort of mythical beast who painted the continent British pink. I walked into the tin-roofed seaside cottage. It turned out that it was there that Rhodes, one of the wealthiest people in the world, had died at the age of forty-nine. I then walked

into the village. I found an antique shop. I bought a slim Penguin orange-spined paperback copy of D. H. Lawrence's *The Virgin and the Gypsy*. I sat in a teashop around the corner and started to read. I had never heard of this novella (it was found, apparently, in Lawrence's papers when he died in France in 1930). As I read, I felt that peculiar emotion of being at once alone and adrift and yet tethered, through words, to the vast literary world. The book started with a delicious sentence: "When the vicar's wife went off with a young and penniless man the scandal knew no bounds."

Since then, I had occasionally lucked into these kinds of moments: finding a shop in New York's Soho that sold only kaleidoscopes, a blisteringly tough museum about slavery in Doha, a church of John Coltrane in San Francisco. It was about being open to the new.

Decades later, here I was—in London with nothing to do. The plan was to meet my wife's cousin for dinner and the theater, but until then a few hours stretched out, luxuriously, before me. I headed along Oxford Street, poking into stores. It started to spit and then, ever so slowly, the gray skies sent rain down in blinding sheets. I turned into Regent Street, stunned by hundreds of wet Union Jacks in the air (another royal wedding). I ducked through some side alleys and came into the Charing Cross Road, just above Trafalgar Square. Thirty years earlier, while up at Oxford, I had haunted Charing Cross secondhand bookstores. I'd buy up a half dozen books and the seller would sometimes tie them with brown twine like they were a miniature bale of hay.

This time there seemed to be far fewer bookstores. I plunged into the first one. Out of the rain, curling up my battered umbrella, I realized that my entire lower legs, feet, and socks were soaking wet. I clomped downstairs, leaving gray wet footprints on the floor. I scanned the shelves. I saw a blue spine: Graham Greene, *Ways of Escape*. I hadn't heard of this book. A novel? No, his memoir. Another?

Ways of Escape came out in 1980, a sequel of sorts to *A Sort of Life*. It originated in in-

roductions Greene had written for a collected edition of his novels. Deep into *Ways of Escape*, Greene discussed his Catholic faith, which led him to thinking about his relationship with another famous English Catholic writer, Evelyn Waugh. This led to reprinting some correspondence between him and Waugh and a short exegesis on Waugh's *The Ordeal of Gilbert Pinfold* (1957). I had never read this novel. When I got home, I ordered a copy. I read it. I didn't like it. I adored Waugh and found the novel trapped, thwarted. It was even boring, something I thought Waugh could never be.

This kind of literary stepping stone—*Sunday Times* with Paddy to Greene to Waugh—was commonplace. When I moved to Greenwich Village in the mid-1990s, my college roommate gave me a housewarming present, a copy of Anatole Broyard's 1993 memoir, *Kafka Was the Rage*.

Broyard had a short aperçu about Caitlin Thomas. They met in the early Fifties at a party on Morton Street. "I saw only the bottom half of her, her legs, thighs and cotton underpants," Broyard wrote, "because she was holding her dress up over her head." Caitlin got a bit wild at this party. She punched one man in the face and chucked ceramic Haitian figurines off a mantelpiece. Her husband, Dylan Thomas, tossed her onto a bed and sat on her until she calmed down. On Dylan's instructions, Broyard took Caitlin back to the Chelsea Hotel. She invited him into her room. He declined. She threw a punch. He

ducked and closed the door and ran down the stairs.

A few days after I finished Broyard's memoir, I was in a used bookstore on Fourth Avenue. In those days, before the internet, I spent hours in used bookstores, never imagining a day when books would be too easy to find. (Once I was passing through Portland, Oregon. Some friends gave me the grand tour of Powell's bookstore. At the front door, they said, "meet back here in three hours," whereupon we all emerged with towering stacks of books in our arms and glittering looks in our eyes.) Here on Fourth Avenue, I bumped into a copy of *Dylan Thomas' New York* and bought it for three dollars. It was an oddly fascinating book: full of photographs from the 1970s; musings by an American, Tryntje Van Ness Seymour; and excerpts from *Under Milk Wood*.

The book led me to Paul Ferris's 1977 biography of Thomas which led me, inevitably, to his poems. I rummaged out my *Collected Poems*, the 1953 New Directions edition, which lived, like many of the books in my tiny walk-up apartment, under my bed. It had a bookplate in the front. I had forgotten, but it was originally from the library of a prominent New England boarding school. One summer during college, through a friend of a friend, I had taken a room in a rambling house in north Berkeley. It wasn't really a room, but more of a hallway leading out onto the backyard. One of my housemates had kept the *Collected Poems* when he exited the school a few years earlier in a rather unceremonious way. When I left the house, I filched it from him.

Meeting Mrs. Mandelstam

by *Edward Greenwood*

I met Nadezhda Mandelstam at her Moscow apartment in August 1975. I had struggled with her husband's difficult poetry in Russian with the aid of various translations and such articles as I could find for a number of years. The most rewarding aids to understanding it were, in fact, her own magnificent autobiographical studies *Hope Against Hope* (*Memuary* in Russian) and *Hope Abandoned*. Her husband's character and destiny as man and poet are, as she herself emphasized when I met her, the thematic center of each work. But there was still more to her own works than that. I felt that they continued into an unpropitious and iron age that gift for the re-creation of the physiognomy of both life's external forms and its inner spirit which the great Russian memoir writers of the nineteenth century—Aksakov, Herzen, and Kropotkin—had achieved. But while her husband's poetry (apart from the perspicuous, and, in retrospect, prophetic ode of May 1918, "Let us glorify, brothers, the twilight of freedom") partook of that obliquity characteristic of modernism, it also always conveyed a sense of deep humanity.

I traveled to the Soviet Union as a co-driver on a school trip with Nicholas Leader, the Russian teacher at the Simon Langton Grammar School in Canterbury, England. We had ten pupils with us. We discovered when we reached the border that we had to have a guide throughout our travels in the country.

My own principal object for the trip was to visit Tolstoy's house at Yasnaya Polyana, in the Tula province about eighty or so miles

south of Moscow. I was just about to bring out a book, *Tolstoy: The Comprehensive Vision*. At the time, the Brezhnev years, Intourist visitors were supervised. Anti-Western suspicion was rife. All baggage was searched to see if visitors were bringing in Bibles, Solzhenitsyn, or the banned work of Mandelstam herself. I would have to obtain special permission to visit the Tolstoy estate. This raised bureaucratic difficulties typical of the regime. I had to pay for a private car—bus or train would expose the public to ideological contamination. When I arrived I had to be accompanied everywhere by a guide.

All this meant that I had a day alone in Moscow when the others went on to what was then, of course, still Leningrad. I was determined to use the time to see Mrs. Mandelstam. When I went to the office of the Union of Soviet Writers, they affected not to have heard of her. With some difficulties I managed to find directory inquiries by calling from an information booth. Though I mispronounced the Mandelstam name, stressing the first syllable rather than the last as I should have done, the lady at directory inquiries gave me her telephone number, much to my amazement. Mrs. Mandelstam answered and gave me her address, and I set off by taxi.

When I entered her ground-floor apartment, I couldn't easily see what it was like and how many rooms it had. She ushered me into a small, poorly lit room to the right. There was a window at the far end. This seemed to be kitchen and sitting room combined. The

lavatory and washing facilities were probably communal. We sat at a little table. I remember thinking that she was so old and frail that it seemed a kindness on someone's part to let her have a ground-floor apartment. As she was kept under surveillance by the KGB it wasn't surprising that she was initially suspicious. She had been a teacher of English and thought my English sounded foreign at first. I recall her testing me with a quotation from Shakespeare's *King John*—a play I didn't know particularly well.

I told her about the nature of my trip to the Soviet Union and about our guide. "Don't trust these pleasant girls," she said, "for all their charm, they are all members of the KGB." She was amused rather than disquieted by my account of my visit to the Union of Soviet Writers. "Oh no one would know me there," she said derisively, as though she took a quiet pride in the fact. I stumblyingly expressed my admiration for her memoirs. To my utter amazement she said she would like to have a copy of her own book. After all it was not allowed into the country. I soon realized that what she meant was a copy of the English translation.

We talked a little more about the two volumes of her memoirs, and it was then that she told me that her husband was the real center of both works. I respectfully questioned this, saying that, though Osip Mandelstam was certainly at their center, they nevertheless dealt with many other persons, in particular with the poet Anna Akhmatova and with formalist critics such as Victor Shklovsky. She said that when Shklovsky divorced and married a much younger woman, she (Mandelstam) had to choose between his previous wife Vasilissa and the new one. Apparently she chose Vasilissa.

Mrs. Mandelstam told me that Akhmatova had been very afraid, almost paralyzed with fear. Did she like Akhmatova's early love poetry? Not really—there was too much of the refined "elegant" lady, about her ego and its sufferings, a kind of enjoyment of the role of heroine, a constant note of self-regard. Even her poem about the purges, *Requiem*, didn't merit much praise. Akhmatova was too fearful to circulate her best poems, those political works about the suffering under the Terror. Her son with

the poet Lev Gumilev (who had been shot by the Bolsheviks) had been sent to the Gulag. Mrs. Mandelstam quoted four lines of what she thought was Akhmatova's best work. But my Russian wasn't good enough to grasp the sense of an oral rendering, and I foolishly didn't ask her to repeat them so I could write them down. I showed her the Soviet edition of her husband's poems. "That is a horrible book, I don't wish to know about it. The editor is a scoundrel. He printed inferior texts deliberately."

Mrs. Mandelstam then asked me to do one or two things for her in the West. This necessitated writing down addresses. When she saw me writing on the fly leaf of the Soviet edition of her husband's poems, she said the authorities would be sure to look at the book as I left and, noting an address on it, would confiscate it. There was a nervousness akin to paranoia in her. "No, they won't," I said, "for I'll tear it out and hide it in my wallet." She was for the most part unwilling to name the people in the West with whom she had contact, except, of course, those she had to mention as part of her request. She spoke of an Oxford professor, whom she would not name (Isaiah Berlin?), who had invited her abroad for a visit. She wouldn't leave, she said, because she was sure that once they let her out of the country she would not be allowed back in. "I hate this country, but whether it is the language, my husband's poetry in that language, whatever it is, I just could not bear not to be allowed back here; here is the place I wish to die." I keenly felt her fear of what Shakespeare called "the bitter bread of banishment."

I asked her if she was still harassed by the authorities. Surely they didn't persecute her now she was old? She said that she was still worried. It seemed that while she was at the dacha of some friends, her flat had been broken into and the KGB had used this affair as an occasion to suggest that she was somehow implicated in the theft of things to be smuggled to the West. She feared the Lubyanka prison and still considered interrogation to be a real possibility. She said that she hadn't traveled abroad for fifteen years. She spoke scathingly of Soviet writers and of the state of the country

under the regime, saying that it was full of drunkenness and inefficiency. I gently ventured to hint, on my knowledge of Tolstoy's "The Devil Was the First Distiller" and of the works of Dostoevsky, that drunkenness had not been unknown in Russia under the old regime, but she obviously thought that things had gotten much worse. I mentioned that I was going to visit Leningrad. "It is a dead city, a dead city," she said. I thought of her husband's response to seeing the city when it was the city of Peter: "We shall die in transparent Petropolis." Alas, he didn't know he would die miserably on the way to the Gulag.

When I said that I was going to Yasnaya Polyana to visit Tolstoy's home, a twinkle appeared in her eyes and she said: "Look at all the peasants in the village. They all look like Leo Tolstoy." It occurred to me that this was probably a joke she had heard as a girl when it was doing the rounds in pre-revolutionary St. Petersburg.

We talked of Tolstoy and it emerged that, just as everyone is either a Platonist or Aristotelian, so everyone is either a Tolstoyan or Dostoyevskian. I spoke of my great admiration for *Anna Karenina*. She came out with an objection to the truth of the work which struck me as totally idiosyncratic. It seemed that Mrs. Mandelstam had never been able to read the novel without feeling a note of falsity and strain. I have always felt just the opposite, the marvelous ease of the narrative. It strikes me how much of the novel—such as the excellence of the portrayal of Levin's perplexities about his relations with his brother Nicholas, his half-brother Koznyshev, his wife, and the peasants—would remain unaffected by her remarks, even if she was right. It seemed that Tolstoy was not so central to Mrs. Mandelstam's moral and literary experience as I had hoped. After all, she had a great poet, her husband, one who suffered horrors even Tolstoy couldn't have imagined, to reside in the foreground of her life and imagination.

Mrs. Mandelstam was proud of her English and had taught it to students who would then go out to teach the language themselves in schools. She didn't learn things by rote,

deliberate memorization. She simply found that when she familiarized herself with a text she loved she could quote it from memory. I recalled to myself how she preserved much of her husband's poetry during the gloomy years when it was not allowed to be published.

It emerged that the Russian Orthodox faith had become very important to her. I told her how we had greatly enjoyed the singing in Smolensk cathedral and how we had been impressed by the youthfulness of the bishop. She replied that many of the higher clergy were young because their predecessors had been shot. She told me that a young priest she knew had almost been killed in a car crash. She was convinced that the whole thing had been rigged so that the "accident" was nothing less than attempted murder. She herself tried to get to a service each Sunday, but the nearest working church was too far to walk, necessitating a taxi. I asked her what she thought of Orthodox thinkers like Shestov and Berdyaev. She conveyed the impression that she had no need of their help in matters of religion. Her own meditations were rich enough. Indeed, she told me that she was writing a third book, not memoirs this time, but a book on Orthodox Christianity. I must not mention this to anyone.

We discussed Solzhenitsyn. I think she saw him as a courageous man, but as somewhat "Soviet" in his style of writing. She much admired Proust. The contemporary literary scene was awful for the most part. As to politicians, Kosygin was the first whose hands weren't stained with blood. She saw the whole country as run down, industry and agriculture in a terrible state, shortages and drabness everywhere. She wanted to know if I thought the English had any literary figure of significance to succeed T. S. Eliot.

She gave me to understand that no mail was allowed to reach her either from abroad or from inside Russia. We had been talking for two and a half hours, and she seemed tired. I felt I ought to leave. I rose to go, and we shook hands. She accompanied me to the door. She went to her post box and opened it: "See, there is nothing inside. There never is and there never will be." The door closed and I made my way to the tram stop.

Reconsiderations

Isabel Colegate endures

by David Platzner

Isabel Colegate, born in 1931, may well be the greatest living English novelist, and yet many readers have never heard of her. Nevertheless, she has always attracted discriminating admirers. Her best-known book is *The Shooting Party* (1980), set in an Oxfordshire country house in 1913 and adapted into a 1985 film starring James Mason, John Gielgud, Dorothy Tutin, and Gordon Jackson, who played *Upstairs Downstairs*'s Hudson. A little before, in 1984, Penguin published two paperback collections, one her first three novels (*The Blackmailer*, *The Man of Power*, and *The Great Occasion*), the second the *Orlando Trilogy*, originally published separately as *Orlando King* (1968), *Orlando at the Brazen Threshold* (1972), and *Agatha* (1973). New, elegantly written, trim books by Colegate regularly appeared throughout the 1980s and '90s. Her most recent book, published in 2002, is her one full-length venture into nonfiction, *A Pelican in the Wilderness: Hermits, Solitaries and Recluses*. For several years, most of her books other than *The Shooting Party* have been out of print. Now, Bloomsbury has produced a new edition of the *Orlando Trilogy*, the third paperback version (the second was published in 1996 by Virago), this time under the name of the first novel in the series, *Orlando King*.¹

The trilogy is based on Sophocles' *Oedipus Rex* trilogy, the names anglicized and the settings adapted to Brittany, England, and Tus-

cany in the first half of the twentieth century and into the 1950s—the time of the revelations of the Cambridge Traitors and the Suez crisis, both central to *Agatha*, the last novel in the trilogy. Colegate, the daughter of a Tory politician, Sir Arthur Colegate, has often written in the way of Trollope about people who seek and wield power, sometimes placing her tales in the recent past as Thackeray did. The trilogy takes place mainly in the years of her childhood and her youth, but there is nothing evidently autobiographical about it. She tells us that “We know the story of course. . . . We are here profoundly to contemplate eternal truth.” If this seem a little ponderous, be reassured: amid much that is tragic, hints of comedy are always present and never more so than in the darkest moments near the trilogy's end.

The story tells of a boy born in 1909 to two unmarried Cambridge undergraduates, Leonard Gardner and “a girl called Pauline.” A kindly lecturer named King adopts the child and raises him with the help of a gruff Australian named Sid on a tiny island in Brittany's Gulf of Morbihan. The boy, handsome and strong except for his hammertoes, goes to school with the children of fishermen. King works on building a tower. When Orlando turns twenty-one, King sends him to London to spend six months. In hand are six letters of introduction, one of them to Leonard Gardner, who never knew Pauline was pregnant and whom King imagines to be a civil servant.

The Gardner Orlando encounters is instead a rich businessman, married to Judith, the

¹ *Orlando King*, by Isabel Colegate; Bloomsbury, 608 pages, \$19.99.

sister of Lord Field (Conrad to his friends), a great landowner in Somerset and prominent in politics. Gardner initially tells Orlando he can't help him, much as he would like to. Judith walks into the room, takes an immediate interest in Orlando, and reminds her husband of a vacancy in a furniture business, Timberwork, that he directs with his brother-in-law Conrad. Orlando is staying with another of King's contacts, Guy Waring, who takes him to his tailor and barber. Waring's wife takes him to her bed. The boy is immensely attractive to women, his bad foot discouraging them no more than Byron's did. Orlando's plan to return to the island is scotched by King's sudden death, and he remains in London, finding success in business, with women, and soon in politics, causing one character to compare him to Trollope's Phineas Finn.

Gardner explodes into a fury when he arrives at his office at Timberwork one afternoon to find Orlando at his seat, feet up on his desk. Gardner storms out, jumps into his car, and runs it into a viaduct. Orlando's initial feelings of remorse make him want to go back to the island. Conrad counsels him instead to remain in England and take up the safe seat in the House of Commons intended for Gardner: now it is Orlando's if he wants it. Conrad strongly warns Orlando against getting involved with Judith, who is much older than Orlando and the wrong wife for him. But Conrad's advice comes too late: Judith has already welcomed Orlando into her arms, and, despite Conrad's warning, Orlando soon marries her.

The brittle Judith, a *femme* a little too *fatale* for her own good, is likened to the women in Aldous Huxley's early novels, but she shows a worldlier aspect than that possessed by such Huxleyian vamps as Myra Visheash or Lucy Tantamount, or Anthony Powell's Pamela Flitton, creatures more of high bohemia than politics and business. Judith and Conrad each have a tragic aspect: Conrad, a religious, high-minded man who believes in empire, belongs to virtues the twentieth century is discarding; Judith, self-destructive and prone to such fads as psychotherapy, is prey to contemporary foibles. Herself fond of lovers on the side, Judith is wildly jealous of what she learns or

imagines of Orlando's occasional affairs. For all her beauty and hardness, she is insecure and acutely aware of how much older she is than her young, attractive husband.

The first part of *Orlando King* reaches an intensity worthy of nineteenth-century opera as the 1930s approach their end. Orlando's friend Graham, a talented designer employed at Timberwork with a chip on his shoulder about his grammar school education, is driven by his communism to perish, pointlessly, in the Spanish Civil War. The Waring's, Orlando's first mentors in England, become disciples of Sir Oswald Mosley and will be interned in 1940. Orlando becomes a junior minister in the Cabinet, and a wholehearted supporter of appeasement to Hitler. Conrad strongly disagrees, and their differences are illustrated in several pages of dialogue. Sid, King's Australian companion, fleeing a collapsing France, arrives in England and reveals Orlando as Gardner's son. By the end of this part of the trilogy, Orlando's quick ascent is in ashes, and he retreats into obscurity, as much Icarus as Oedipus. Forsaking politics and business, he becomes a fire warden, is injured and half-blinded. His abnegation shows that Orlando lacks the cold-blooded search for power of Anthony Powell's Widmerpool. Lying in his hospital bed, Orlando resolves to return to the island, complete King's tower, and remake his life and those of Judith—last heard of in an asylum—and her sons by Gardner: Paul and Stephen.

At the opening of *Orlando at the Brazen Threshold*, the war has ended. In addition to his damaged sight, Orlando's heart is weakened in more ways than one. He resists Conrad's entreaties to return to politics, his participation in which he regards as a mistake, as highlighted by his former support of appeasement. Judith has died in her asylum, and King's diaries, recently discovered, reveal King to have been unhappy and lonely in ways Orlando hadn't imagined, an expatriate among people whose language he can understand only on a functional level. Returning to Brittany, Orlando finds King's house and unfinished tower in ruins and post-war

France short of food. On the suggestion of Miss Bates, an Englishwoman resident in Tuscany, he buys property in Chianti and begins building his own tower there. Agatha—Orlando’s daughter by Judith, now seventeen and hoping to become a doctor (perhaps a wish inherited from the genes of her unknown paternal grandmother, Pauline, whose father was a doctor)—joins him just as Antigone did her father Oedipus. Close to her half-brother Paul, who is now married to the daughter of a brash businessman named Daintry, Agatha tries to persuade her father to return to business as Paul wants, in large part to spite his brother Stephen, who is directing the family firm that Orlando once brilliantly conducted. Orlando refuses. Once a man of action, he now seems something of a sage. His Chianti is populated by the figures one would expect among the British settlers in Tuscany: Miss Bates, impeccably competent and always there when needed; William Holmes, the art expert who lives in an impressive villa and has his pale brown hair curled like an 1830s dandy; and the ubiquitous Warings, who turn up throughout the trilogy.

James Lees-Milne, fond of Colegate, wrote in his diary of his admiration for *The Shooting Party*, “firm, well-balanced, well-written. Yet it makes me hate Edwardians.” *The Orlando Trilogy* can make a reader feel something similar about the generations of the Thirties and the Fifties, though there are exceptions, including Orlando. The shadows surround Orlando, with his weak heart and his blindness. When he escapes away to an idyll in Florence with a young woman of his daughter’s circle, there is already a sense of an Indian summer about the affair, though Orlando is only in his mid-forties.

Orlando in his expatriate exile seems to have reached a truce with life. There is to be no such ease for others in the final book of the trilogy, taut and as suspenseful as a well-made thriller, which takes place in the mid-1950s. Stephen has committed suicide, and his tormented brother Paul, always a problem, has been caught and imprisoned for his spying for Soviet Russia, his treason inspired more by perversity than ideology. In her portrayal of Paul, Colegate may well have diagnosed the disease that afflicted the real-life Cambridge Traitors, and by extension, such spiritual descendants as today’s Black Lives Matter/Antifa “protestors.” Conrad reappears, caught up at the same time in the Suez crisis and the escape of his nephew Paul from prison. He also suspects that his daughter-in-law, Agatha, married to her first cousin, Conrad’s estranged son Henry, is involved. Conrad tells the police of his suspicion. Agatha, the mother of two young children rather than the doctor she once hoped to be, works in a bookshop in Chelsea, her employers two eccentric and left-wing elderly ladies. The scene when the two ladies are captured in an anti-Suez demonstration, Henry with them, shows a horrified Conrad seeing his son in the mob. It is one of the funniest moments of the trilogy, closer to the Marx Brothers than John le Carré.

The books, together a brilliant and compelling portrait of manners, leave a reader with more questions than answers, a latter-day *The Way We Live Now*. Colegate’s writing, seemingly effortless, is as intricate as a Renaissance painting, revealing new facets the more it is examined. With any justice, this reissue should confirm the trilogy as a classic and send readers to Colegate’s other books, all of which deserve to be in print.

Guys & dolls

by Kyle Smith

Summing up the state of the New York legitimate theater on the last page of his gossip book *Singular Sensation: The Triumph of Broadway*, Michael Riedel runs through a list of some long-running hits and ends the book with this line: “Broadway is in the midst of its new Golden Age.”¹ That sentence was true as recently as March, when Riedel thought his book was finished. He added a foreword in May acknowledging that the title he had chosen had taken an ironic turn. Today Broadway is in the midst of not a golden age but a coma. Notwithstanding the preternatural pep of the theater community, it may never recover. A full reopening remains many months away, with the most optimistic observers speculating that a partial reopening may be feasible by late summer. What then? Theatergoers are famously more high-strung than, say, NASCAR enthusiasts, and no one knows whether the audience will ever fully regain its pre-COVID enthusiasm for an experience that involves sitting in a tightly packed space for three hours with 1,800 cheering, coughing, and sneezing strangers. Even should the current virus be vanquished—a process that would require Bill de Blasio and Andrew Cuomo suddenly to acquire a level of competence neither has ever approached—future potential ticket buyers will be calculating the possibility that another lethal and highly contagious virus could waft

1 *Singular Sensation: The Triumph of Broadway*, by Michael Riedel; Avid Reader Press/Simon & Schuster, 352 pages, \$28.

in to take its place. After 9/11, when Broadway was described as facing its biggest crisis in thirty years, it reopened within two days. So far, then, the COVID crisis is roughly 160 times as bad as 9/11.

As Riedel was writing this book, Broadway was coming off a near-record year: in 2019 grosses were just shy of 2018’s dizzying all-time-best sales of \$1.8 billion. Thanks to *Hamilton*, Broadway had reclaimed an important perch in the nation’s cultural order, and celebration was appropriate. Riedel, however, appeared an odd figure to wave the pompoms. His reputation is for being to Broadway shows what icebergs are to passing luxury liners. For many years he has been New York City’s best-informed and (consequently) most widely read theater reporter, first at the New York *Daily News* and then at the *New York Post*, where I used to shape barbs for my film reviews at a desk not far from where he sat firing bullets over Broadway. Reporters tend to be an anxious lot who spend much of their energy worrying and fuming, but Riedel, who never had any serious competition in his domain from *The New York Times* or any other quarter, is a merry assassin. He’d come into the office in mid-afternoon and lean back in his swivel chair, swapping wisecracks on the phone with his show-folk friends, never more delighted than when learning every gruesome detail of a disaster in the making so he could share the fun with his readers. I’ve popped a few productions’ balloons myself over the years but never have enjoyed the honor of making a joke

so biting that it got me punched out in a bar. This did happen to Riedel, who was struck by the director of a revival of *Fiddler on the Roof*. The director, David Leveaux, objected to the columnist's jokes about the way Leveaux had toned down the Jewish aspects of the material, or, as Riedel put it, staged an "all-Presbyterian production of *Fiddler on the Roof*."

Riedel confesses in his new book that after *Razzle Dazzle: The Battle for Broadway* (2015), an essential document about the history of the theater in New York, he was at a loss for an idea to follow it and pitched many half-hearted suggestions that were swatted down by his editor before the two of them latched onto the idea of a sequel. Like most sequels, the new book falls short of the standard set by the original, though it's mostly a bouncy read, especially in its early chapters. Like a good newspaperman, Riedel leads with his best stuff. His best chapters—most of which focus on a single production—are the early ones, and they teem with entertaining details about a real-life cast of rogues, crooks, and divas to rival the dramatis personae of *Guys and Dolls* (the beloved 1992 revival of which gets its own chapter). The heel of the book is Garth Drabinsky, the polio-lamed Canadian impresario who founded the now-disbanded company Livent and produced the 1989 Toronto production of *Phantom of the Opera* and the 1996 Broadway show *Ragtime*. Drabinsky's bookkeeping shenanigans raised eyebrows for years before he was finally convicted of fraud and forgery in Canada in 2009, earning himself a prison stay.

In an introduction that strikes an uncharacteristic (for a reporter) stance of humility, Riedel acknowledges that although he reported on many of the productions he discusses in the book when they were going up, he didn't at the time understand the full story behind many of them. This volume promises a more complete picture. Those who cherish Riedel mainly for the way he danced on the graves of so many failed shows will be taken aback by how mysteriously, alarmingly, discombobulatingly *nice* he sounds. The wolf has lain down with the lamb. Even his portrayal of Drabinsky isn't particularly unkind.

Riedel's previous book began in the vaudeville era, before the invention of what we today think of as the Broadway musical, and told an engrossing story of how the Shubert brothers, of Syracuse, gobbled up Broadway then spent decades undergoing one existential threat after another. The company barely weathered the Great Depression, a struggle for control of the company that saw an alcoholic heir ousted in favor of two sober lawyers, a fight with the government that led to a consent decree meant to dilute the outfit's near-monopoly power over its medium, and the catastrophic collapse of Times Square in the late Sixties. New Yorkers and especially tourists were terrified to walk the neighborhood after dark, and one survey found there were nine men for every woman on the sidewalks at night. *Razzle Dazzle* has a plot, and it's a classic: the gifted but besieged hero (the Shubert Organization) undergoes one nerve-shredding trial after another on the way to a huge reward, which was the late-Seventies resurgence launched by *A Chorus Line* and continuing through *Evita* and *Cats* and *Phantom of the Opera*.

There is no such narrative drive to *Singular Sensation*, however, which is essentially an anthology in which each chapter is more or less a standalone report on the progress of one show or another. There is no lurking threat of doom. In 1991, the Tony nominees for best musical were a lackluster quartet that included *Miss Saigon* and *The Will Rogers Follies* (which won), but the Theater District was no longer seen as unacceptably unsafe. *Miss Saigon*, *Phantom of the Opera*, *Cats*, and *Les Misérables* kept the theater as a whole flush, and the presence of these successes attracted patrons to the Theater District and to other shows. The big four were all British imports, however, and this proudly American art form was thirsting for a made-in-USA response. It came, with fireworks: *Rent* and *Chicago* were all-American blockbusters, and their minimalist aesthetics proved to be a clever and profitable rebuttal to the British style, which was heavy on spectacle. *The Lion King*, which under Julie Taymor's direction was no mere adaptation but more of a reimagination of the Disney animated feature, was an even larger success.

Meanwhile, the British mega-musical made one last elephantine effort: Andrew Lloyd Webber's *Sunset Boulevard*, which sought to dazzle the audience with a colossal levitating mansion but, despite logging the largest advance sale in Broadway history, ultimately closed at a loss. It cost a then-unthinkable \$500,000 a week or so in running costs, on top of \$13 million for development. All of that money could not buy the thing a soul. "The thing about this show—it's a fantastic score—but there's not one character in this show that I actually like," noted the producer Cameron Mackintosh. Thanks to the delicious backstage sniping among the many divas involved (Patti LuPone, Glenn Close, Faye Dunaway, Lloyd Webber himself), the making of *Sunset Boulevard*, notoriously described by Frank Rich of the *Times* as "the ultimate 'hit' flop" because it sold scads of tickets and yet lost oceans of money, provides Riedel with a particularly tasty chapter. LuPone said that when the show was in rehearsals, the cast found to their chagrin that the radio frequencies used to raise the mansion scenery were the same ones being used by taxi dispatchers outside on the street. The scenery would sometimes lurch upwards unbidden by anyone in the theater, occasionally with terrified cast members still on it. "Anyone passing by the Adelphi," LuPone said, "could give me a thrill ride just by picking up the phone."

Close reports that she plastered the face of her unhinged character Norma Desmond with white makeup because she had seen the effect when Walter Matthau's wife did it, observing that the elderly Mrs. Matthau must have thought it made her skin look like porcelain. A clever publicist got Lana Turner, who had rarely been seen in public for decades, to attend the Los Angeles premiere in order to generate publicity that obligingly compared Turner to the story's batty silent-film queen Desmond, and another publicist arranged for Ronald and Nancy Reagan to attend. (The former president pronounced it the "best show I've ever seen," though an onlooker was startled to notice that Reagan, who had not yet made public his battle with Alzheimer's, was unaware that there existed a film version of the musical.)

Dunaway was so awful in rehearsals for the Los Angeles production that one wag compared her to Florence Foster Jenkins, the notoriously untalented but deep-pocketed soprano who rented out Carnegie Hall in 1944 for a concert so bad it became a legend (and the climax of a 2016 film that starred Meryl Streep). Lloyd Webber closed the show in Los Angeles at a huge loss rather than allow Dunaway to go on.

Another stellar chapter is the one told from the point of view of Fran and Barry Weissler, a pair of small-time theater producers derided by their richer competitors as "the Weisslers, of New Jersey." A successful four-night concert staging of a 1970s show at City Center in 1996 struck them as Broadway material, but when they timidly inquired whether they could have a small piece of the producing pie when the production transferred, they were told they could take all of the rights. No one else wanted to produce the revived musical on Broadway. Wary of spending too much, the Weisslers decided to keep the show just as it was—a glorified concert—and hoped to keep it going long enough to pay off its modest budget, which they sought to raise from others. At the last minute, the bulk of their financing fell apart. The Weisslers, of New Jersey, couldn't find anyone to pony up a measly two million for *Chicago* on Broadway, so they took a deep breath and violated the cardinal rule of Broadway producing: never put your own money in the show. The Weisslers barely had the \$2 million. They were betting their futures on one single show.

Twenty-four years later, *Chicago*, now the longest-running American musical in the history of Broadway, was still on the boards as of last March, and the Weisslers, Riedel notes with satisfaction, today live regally on their nearly twenty-acre estate, which is not in New Jersey but in Westchester County, New York. Being famously cheap to produce because of its spare staging, *Chicago* has been able to stay viable through a quarter-century of economic reversals and crashes, though the success of the Oscar-winning movie adaptation in 2002 surely served as invaluable publicity.

Chicago's story parallels that of *Rent*, another underdog show with a stripped-down

look that positioned it as an antidote to Lloyd Webber's wedding-cake overkill. By the time it hit Broadway the same year as *Chicago*, in 1996, the death of its composer-lyricist Jonathan Larson at age thirty-five was already the stuff of theater lore. Larson collapsed with an undiagnosed tear in his aorta just hours before the musical's first public performance at an experimental downtown theater. Riedel retells this oft-told story of the plucky determination of an array of irrepressible theater kids with due sensitivity and respect. Among young people, *Rent* was the *Hamilton* of its time. An obsessively enthusiastic cohort of students and fledgling creative types flocked to its grungy, multiculti reworking of *La Bohème*. The production worked marvelously for the kinds of people who thought *Friends* was a great television show. *Rent*'s showtune-rock songs, however, are unbearable, and by the time it closed in 2008 it was a period piece. It seems unlikely to cast a spell over future generations, and *La Bohème* has already been re-reworked for Broadway, this time under the title *Moulin Rouge*, which after *Hamilton* was Broadway's second-highest grossing show as of last March.

Late in the book, Riedel's material runs a bit thin. He baffled me in spending an entire chapter on *Titanic* the musical, a not bad but largely forgotten 1997 effort that was neither a famous hit nor a notorious flop. I'd forgotten it swept the Tonys that year, but then again everyone else forgot that also, because the entire Broadway musical season was written on

water. The other Tony nominees—*Steel Pier*, *The Life*, and *Juan Darien*—were flat-out flops. A chapter on the Mel Brooks smash *The Producers* (2001) begins and ends dramatically enough: the show's planned director, Mike Ockrent, died of leukemia during development in 1999, leaving the reins to his widow, Susan Stroman, who had planned merely to choreograph the show but wound up directing it, to universal acclaim. After the 9/11 attacks early in its run, the show and its star Nathan Lane became Broadway's most visible champions, and the theater quickly rebuilt its audience. The creation of the show doesn't make for especially compelling reading, though: "[theater executive] Rocco Landesman was not happy about having to cut short his weekend in the country on a cold Sunday afternoon in April to attend a reading of *The Producers*," runs a typical passage. Later we learn that Stroman threatened to walk off the show if not granted her choice of costumer and set designer. This is thin gruel.

Despite some attempts at online performances that rarely make an impact comparable to that of in-person productions, Broadway sits in suspended animation. *Singular Sensation* has a different feel than was intended while it was being written, shrouded as it is by a sense of loss, but it's also a cheerful reminder of better days that once were, and which perhaps will return. There's little doubt, closing either of Riedel's books, that Broadway people adore their art and pour everything they have into it. May we all be fortunate enough to be able to savor their creations again soon.

Art

“The Fall Reveal” at MOMA

by *Karen Wilkin*

It feels like much longer ago, but the most recent addition to the Museum of Modern Art, designed by Diller Scofidio + Renfro, turns out to have opened in October 2019. As was much discussed at the time, the more than forty thousand square feet of well lighted, handsomely proportioned permanent collection galleries, west of Yoshio Taniguchi’s 2001–04 addition, were conceived to eliminate a preferred path through the works of art on display: all had multiple doorways, none on axis. The initial installation, spurred by MOMA’s new mantra “there is no single or complete history of modern or contemporary art,” was intended to expand our (inadequate) linear conception of that history, and disturb our (even more inadequate) parochial notions of the relative achievements of various artists. Works by previously ignored or “marginalized” practitioners from all over the world, many recently acquired, were put on display.

Ideas about chronology, influence, and that much maligned concept “quality” were deemed restrictive and largely ignored. The only concessions to more or less traditional hierarchies were the broad, somewhat unbalanced, sometimes broken, top-to-bottom divisions of the collection: 1880s–1940s on the fifth floor; 1940s–70s on the fourth; 1970–present on Floor 2. While many of us wondered about the wisdom of MOMA’s downplaying its magnificent, celebrated collection of “historical” modernism in order to become yet another museum of trendy global art, we had to admire the effort to echo

the often messy, contradictory, and illogical development of art from the late nineteenth century to the present with this open-minded, wide-ranging approach. But if we hoped that the museum would help us to make sense of this baggy monster, we were notably disappointed. Visitors were obliged to find their own way, clutching small maps or their cell phones. (Now it’s just cell phones.) Even my graduate students, who were enthusiastic about seeing “so many different things,” confessed to being confused and sometimes disoriented by the new installation.

Whatever our reactions, we were urged to be patient. The opening installation, we were told, was a beginning, a work in progress. It would be altered and reconfigured at regular intervals. (No one, as far as I know, mentioned how visitors who came specifically to see MOMA’s legendary collection might react if the Mona Lisas of modernism were not on view in a coherent relationship.) The shutdown that began in March 2020 played havoc with all museum and gallery scheduling, but in mid-November we were finally rewarded for withholding judgment. “The Fall Reveal” gave us twenty “transformed” galleries throughout MOMA’s three collection floors, characterized on the website as “new art from wall to wall.” Those listed as responsible include a remarkable number of staff members, although things being how they are, the itemized names may acknowledge the admittedly invaluable contributions of preparators and security personnel, as well as curators. We are told that

because the museum recognizes that—wait for it—“there is no single or complete history of modern or contemporary art,” the Fall Reveal was designed to “offer a deeper experience of art through all mediums and by artists from more diverse geographies and backgrounds than ever before.” There’s no doubt about the variety of mediums and the diversity of geographies and backgrounds. A deeper experience? I’m not sure.

Some things have not changed. The galleries devoted to the 1880s–1940s on the fifth floor still begin, as they did in October 2019, with classic, well-known works by Vincent van Gogh, Henri Rousseau, Paul Cézanne, and their peers, along with a glorious Medardo Rosso sculpture. It’s an impressive selection guaranteed to satisfy all visitors. In the gallery otherwise devoted to MOMA’s exemplary collection of Pablo Picasso’s work, that enormous 1967 Faith Ringgold provoked by a street riot still takes up a lot of real estate. (The point has been made. Is it heresy to suggest that the story might now be enhanced by more of Georges Braque’s paintings and collages, made when the two pioneers of Cubism were “roped together like mountain climbers,” as they described it, rather than by an unrelated canvas chosen to address issues of diversity?)

In the dazzling Henri Matisse gallery, a reasonably strong painting by Alma Thomas is still cruelly placed beside the unassailable *Red Studio*. Thomas is a fine painter, but even her loyal fans—I am one—have to admit that she would be better served by integrating her work with that of her Washington School colleagues, inventive painters who, like her, used radiant color as the main carrier of emotion and meaning. Yet those artists, while represented in the collection, are conspicuously absent from the current installation. On the plus side, the delightful tribute to the poet and former MOMA curator Frank O’Hara, on the fourth floor (1940s–70s) is still intact.

What’s new? Occasional signs indicating routes to exits and to the collection. Selections from the generous Patricia Phelps Cisneros gift of Latin American geometric abstraction, initially isolated in a special exhibition,

have been integrated with contemporaneous works, most conspicuously in a fifth-floor gallery titled “Circle and Square: Joaquín Torres-García and Piet Mondrian,” subtitled “abstraction above and below the Equator.” The installation commemorates the two men’s meeting in Paris, in 1929, and their founding of Circle et Carré—circle and square—an organization and publication that attracted an international group of artists committed to geometry, order, and rationalism, in opposition to Surrealism’s courting of the illogical. Torres-García kept the principles of Circle et Carré alive and created a Spanish-language version of the magazine after he returned to his native Uruguay in 1934 and created his Bauhaus-type school and workshop, the influential Taller Torres-García. Four important paintings by Mondrian, including *Broadway Boogie Woogie* (1942–43), are shown with significant examples by Torres-García that range from a canvas of stacked glyphs, to a bare-bones, fictive grid, to a generously scaled, rough-hewn construction in wood. Also included is a miscellany of South American works and constructions by a British artist and a Belgian founder of De Stijl. Whether they were associated with either the French or Uruguayan iterations of the group is not stated.

Nearby, “New York City, 1920s” offers a satisfying assembly of works by Stuart Davis, Arthur Dove, Edward Hopper, John Marin, Georgia O’Keeffe, Ben Shahn, and Florine Stettheimer; photographs by Walker Evans and James Van Der Zee; and sculpture by Elie Nadelman and John Storrs, plus an atypical but strong José Clemente Orozco painting of the New York subway. Cumulatively, the selections summarize many dominant concerns of the decade. There’s also a tantalizing film clip by Oscar Michaux, an excerpt from *Ten Minutes to Live*, a thriller apparently about a lovely young black woman being stalked by a handsome bad guy. The film is dated 1932, but the views of a now-vanished New York make up for the discrepancy between the date and the gallery theme.

Focused as these individual installations are, we still, as before, experience staccato rhythms and chronological disruptions as we move

from gallery to gallery, overwhelming any hints of continuity. “Circle and Square” and “New York City, 1920s” are interleaved with “According to the Laws of Chance,” mainly about Marcel Duchamp, and “Ornament and Abstraction,” a terrific overview of architectural decoration and textiles. The former, subtitled “What happens when artists give up control?” is one of the few galleries that suggests the depth of MOMA’s collections. Elsewhere, apart from the very welcome, unchanged concentrations on Matisse and Picasso, and a fourth-floor gallery given largely to Nam-June Paik—not that I’m equating the three artists—works are treated as isolated examples, the way provincial institutions display their often limited holdings. “According to the Laws of Chance” confirms how broadly Duchamp is represented at the museum: an early Cubist canvas; a painting based on “standard stop-pages” (the results of dropping meter-long lengths of string); a smallish work on glass, now shattered, with a machine-like image; a bicycle wheel ready-made; and much more, including an extraordinarily annoying sound piece. Works by Max Ernst, Man Ray, and Jean Arp contextualize the Duchamps, along with a witty Francis Picabia and a surprisingly accomplished Cubist-inflected painting by Katherine S. Dreier, Duchamp’s friend, patron, and, with him and Man Ray, a founder of MOMA’s ancestor, the Société Anonyme.

“Ornament and Abstraction” is a feast of architectural fragments from the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, when progressive architects and designers rejected academic classicism in favor of geometry and motifs from nature, and modernism had not yet rejected ornament. There’s an undulating wrought-iron window grille by Antoni Gaudí, from the Casa Milá, Barcelona; a gorgeous spandrel—all swirling tendrils and burgeoning leaves—and a dizzyingly elaborate stenciled frieze panel from Louis Sullivan’s Gage Building and his Chicago Stock Exchange, respectively; geometric stained glass windows and bits of the extravagant geometric ornament of some of Frank Lloyd Wright’s early houses; and a length of railing by Otto Wagner. Drawings, textile designs, and textiles by contemporaries enrich

the installation. The whole is a fine portrait of an era, but since chronology is out of favor, there’s also a prototype for a façade panel with stylized foliage from a project by Herzog & de Meuron, from the 1990s.

Apropos this disregard for chronology, “new art from wall to wall” on the fifth floor (1880s–1940s) includes Gerhard Richter’s suite of fifteen paintings, *October 18, 1977*, a meditation on the unsatisfactorily explained deaths, on that date, in a Berlin prison, of members of the violent, radical left-wing organization often called the Baader–Meinhof gang. The blurred images translate photos of the youthful gang members, dead and alive, and related settings, into subtly modulated, mysterious expanses of grays. Painted in the late 1980s, the series was a kind of personal exorcism for the artist, who described himself as haunted by the gang’s actions, their trial, and its aftermath. The less explicit, more ambiguous paintings of half-glimpsed horizontal figures and vague interiors seem more potent than the somewhat sentimental transcriptions of headshots, especially when the images are repeated, at different scales, on multiple canvases, further abstracting them, but the series as a whole is unquestionably among Richter’s strongest efforts. Couldn’t MOMA have found a more informative context for it? One of the new installations on Floor 4 (1940s–70s), “Gordon Parks and ‘The Atmosphere of Crime,’” includes, in addition to selections from Parks’s searing 1957 photo essay on crime, justice, and incarceration in America, vintage mug shots, newspaper photos of crime scenes, an image of the bullet-riddled car in which Bonnie Parker and Clyde Barrow died, and a graphic shot by Weegee, made in 1942, of elegantly dressed men in a police van, hiding their faces with their top hats. Surely that gallery would have made a provocative segue, to or from Richter’s series.

Yet that kind of relationship among adjacent or even proximate galleries was evidently never desired at MOMA, neither in 2019 nor in the Fall Reveal. Nor, despite the stated intention of providing “a deeper experience,” is there any indication that visitors should be encour-

aged to spend extended time with the works on view. The effort to present “works in all mediums” means many galleries include film clips, videos, and other sound-producing art forms—see Marcel Duchamp on Floor 5. The films and videos are usually relevant and enrich the installation as a whole (apart from a puerile anti-American effort by the Canadian Joyce Wieland on the fourth floor), but there’s no sound isolation; the result is an inescapable cacophony. It’s a toss-up as to whether the insistent Duchamp piece, with its random, piercing notes, is the most intrusive or whether that title goes to Shuzo Azuchi Gulliver’s *Cinematic Illumination*, on Floor 4, a room-filling, animated construction that all-too-vididly evokes what we are told was “an immersive moving image event . . . in the Tokyo discotheque Killer Joe’s, as part of the Fluxus-associated Intermedia Arts Festival” in 1969. The enormous ring of constantly changing, dizzying projected images and the sound level are effectively and distressingly reminiscent of the disco experience. I guess you had to have been there. On reflection, the Duchamp sound piece wins “most irritating.” We have a choice about entering (and leaving) the space where Shuzo Azuchi Gulliver’s contraption is installed. We can’t avoid Duchamp.

The most memorable addition to the second floor (1970–present) is Carrie Mae Weems’s *From Here I Saw What Happened and I Cried*, made in 1995–96, a moving disquisition on the way black people in this country have been perceived by white Americans. Weems’s appropriated images, from the past to the near-present, include the horrifying portraits of African Americans, treated not as people but as ethnographic specimens, made for the Harvard biologist Louis Agassiz, and the sympathetic portraits of black soldiers in Augustus Saint-Gaudens’s memorial to the heroic Shaw Regiment. Each image has been tightly cropped by a circular mat and tinted red; Weems’s comments, sometimes laconic, sometimes accusatory, always thought-provoking, are superimposed. Black-and-white portraits of what we learn is a royal

Mangbetu woman, with an elegant neck, a magnificent headdress, and the elongated skull once characteristic of the people, bracket the red images, serving as witnesses. It’s powerful and disturbing work and needs to be taken in slowly, without distractions. The sound from a nearby video by the Chinese artist and acute social critic, Cao Fei, no matter how worthy, is not an enhancement.

Is the Fall Reveal an improvement over the reconfigured MOMA’s initial installation? It may be even more wide ranging. Works such as a seldom-exhibited canvas by the influential Indian abstract painter Vasudeo Gaitonde are now on view. But works by other significant artists are not. We look in vain for Marsden Hartley and Bay Area figuration, for example; Martin Puryear is represented only by the cover of an illustrated book. As in the opening installations, some artists seem to have been systematically written out of the canon, as if politics rather than aesthetics had driven the choices. Many of the notably absent, then and now, are those whose work was acquired and exhibited by William Rubin, MOMA’s distinguished curator and director of the department of painting and sculpture in the 1970s and 1980s. Rubin’s legacy is being erased. We would never know, in the “new” MOMA, that the collection includes major works by Milton Avery, Anthony Caro, Gene Davis, Sam Gilliam, Hans Hofmann, Morris Louis, Kenneth Noland, Jules Olitski, Larry Poons, or Frank Stella, or that MOMA staged illuminating exhibitions of their work. Like most institutions, these days, MOMA is attempting to redress their neglect of women and artists of color, and to reduce their emphasis on white males, such as those on the list of ignored artists. I applaud the much-needed effort to broaden our vision, but why does that require eliminating important contributors to the culture? How can an exclusionary, Maoist revision of recent art history coexist with MOMA’s often repeated assertion that “there is no single or complete history of modern or contemporary art”?

Next stop

by James Panero

The demolition of McKim, Mead & White’s Pennsylvania Station proved to be the great architectural trauma of New York. It was arguably the worst destruction the city endured in the past hundred years before the attacks of 9/11; its effects altered the urban fabric just as much. At Penn, the promise of “progress” was, in fact, the terror that leveled that civic temple of 1910 and replaced its soaring classicism with the soul-crushing modernism of today’s station. In 1965, a sign on Seventh Avenue announced the “redeveloped” station with the cheery slogan, “on the way to you.” Just behind it, as commuters continued to board their trains, the station’s exterior colonnade and vaulted interior were bashed to bits and carted off as landfill to the New Jersey Meadowlands.

The tragedy signaled an ignominious end to New York’s classical era. The indignities it introduced have become a daily reminder of what was lost. That’s because, for the sake of expediency while developers disfigured what had to remain an active transportation center, the old station was leveled rather than excavated. To keep the trains running, on through if not on time, the tracks, the east–west submarine tunnels, and the platforms were all kept, even as they were covered over with an oppressively low new ceiling. Like a blister in the sun, the awful new Madison Square Garden rose above these ruins. (To add insult to injury, the sports complex was named after the original palace where Harry K. Thaw had murdered Stanford White.) Commuter and intercity rail passengers—up

to 600,000 a day spread across Amtrak, New Jersey Transit, and the Long Island Rail Road—were crushed down into what remained of the increasingly urine-soaked passages beneath. The ingenious double-decker platforms of old Penn, originally created to distinguish the path of arriving and departing passengers, now just added to the underground mayhem.

From the Baths of Diocletian, one of the classical models for the original station, to a modern-day sewer, old Penn has haunted the city’s conscience just as its replacement has remained a blight on the urban landscape. “One entered the city like a god,” the architectural historian Vincent Scully famously observed. “One scuttles in now like a rat.” Over the years, even as much else in the city has improved, new Penn’s warren of dingy tunnels and onrushing crowds has remained astonishingly grim.

In my own underground transfers, I too have learned the many twists and turns it takes to walk from the Seventh Avenue subway to an Amtrak train. I pass through one sickly tile corridor after another, beneath the stained ceilings perfumed with stale pretzels, on up to Penn’s departure concourse, only to wait among a scrum of passengers jostling one another over the announcement of their departure track. The one solace of this subterranean passage is the glimpse of old Penn that occasionally flashes in the light like an artifact kicked up in the rubble. A old handrail here and a staircase there—a few remnants of the original station remarkably remain intact amid the latter-day squalor.

Some three decades ago, looking up from the back of Penn Station on Eighth Avenue, Daniel Patrick Moynihan, the iconoclastic senator from New York who died in 2003, made a similar discovery on a much larger scale. What he saw was not exactly old Penn, where as a boy he had once shined shoes, but there to the west was a building with striking similarities to the original station. And indeed, occupying an equivalent two-block space, the General Post Office Building, now known as the James A. Farley Building, still rises as a shadow of old Penn. In fact, McKim, Mead & White designed the facility, which opened in 1914 and was expanded to its current size in 1935, to complement the station. The Olympian building ringed with Corinthian columns and pilasters at one time served the same central role for mail as Penn did for passengers. At the time that Moynihan gave it another look, changes in postal distribution were upending the rail-based facility, just as the car and airplane had done to old Penn.

Moynihan had a vision to reuse the old postal building as a new passenger station. Starting in the early 1990s, he began negotiating with a tangle of federal agencies to secure the permissions and funding to get the idea on track. Like much else at Penn, the arrival of this initiative, what is now called the Daniel Patrick Moynihan Train Hall, has been delayed. With New York still in partial lockdown, the hall's January 1, 2021, opening came and went with little fanfare, even as the completion of the 255,000-square-foot transit hub has cost \$1.6 billion and taken a generation to reveal.

That the Moynihan Train Hall offers improvements over Penn's existing facilities is a low bar to clear. At its best, the new train hall indeed finds ways to echo the grandeur of the original station, just as the late senator had envisioned. As adapted by Skidmore, Owings & Merrill, the train hall hints at what was lost next door. In the original Penn, the station's classical Seventh Avenue head house opened to the west onto a glass-enclosed train shed. Just as that station's façade and waiting room took inspiration from the past, its crystal concourse looked ahead, revealing the splendor of the machine age. Exposed cross-braced steel piers kept

massing to a minimum while terraces of glass maximized the light within. Around the open stairways, natural illumination filtered all the way down through the levels, even reaching the trains passing beneath.

In the reuse of its original structural steel, now selectively left exposed, the new train hall reveals the DNA it shared with the departed station while recalling some of the forms of that crystal-palace shed. The train hall's new main concourse has been carved out of the post office's former central work room. As originally designed by McKim, Mead & White, this large central sorting area, just behind the post office's retail windows, was glazed with its own sunken skylight that spanned the entire space. Blacked out during World War II, this back-of-the-house open acre was modified and divided more than once, yet the roof retained its steel superstructure.

In the thirty years it took to develop the new train hall, many proposals were put forward for reglazing this space. Some called for new skylights at the building's upper roofline. The final decision to keep the original trusses while cutting down the concourse to street grade has created a lofty new space that still reaches back to an important past. The core of the train hall makes the most of its original structural elements, opening up its massive trusses and cross-braced columns and walls that, in the original post office design, were left unseen. At its center, a new four-sided pendant clock, designed by Peter Pennoyer Architects in 20th-Century-Limited moderne, ties the space together with a nod to the analog Benrus clocks suspended inside the original station.

New skylights now fill in among the old trusses in barrel-vaulted form with some extra fizz. These custom-engineered glass baubles are the station's nod to the future, but one wonders if simply restoring the original glazing would have had a similar illuminating effect while freeing up resources for other improvements. For while the train hall's central concourse looks sharp in battleship gray, with nicely illuminated rivets, its integration with the trains running beneath—the whole purpose for its creation—seems to have been an afterthought.

Beyond its uplifting forms, it is still an astonishing fact that the function of a century-old train station should be better than anything created today. At the original Penn, glass tile brought illumination to all levels. Step on one of Moynihan's slick new escalators down to the platform and you descend from light to near-total darkness. Here, the light is only skin deep. An earlier proposal calling for glass flooring, both inside and out, went nowhere. Now beyond signaling their newness, those fancy new skylights are all form and no function.

That's not all the signaling here. Move beyond the historical features of the main concourse and this train hall most resembles a high-end mall. In attempting to create a new retail and commercial hub, the surfaces mistakenly look west, to the flailing emporium at Hudson Yards, rather than east, to the spirit of old Penn. A colleague of mine calls this slick consumer finish the "international duty-free style." With a smart but tiny waiting area designed by the Rockwell Group tucked under a side of the concourse, one wonders where trains even ranked in the level of importance for this train hall. The answer may be near the bottom, just a half step above its original use as a post office, which continues but with little integration now with the rest of the complex. The recent leasing of much of the building to Facebook, with new retail and restaurants planned just beneath them, speaks more to the design's underlying interests.

Unfortunately, as a hall for trains, the new Moynihan Train Hall more than once goes off track. The hall's street-level avenue entrances, to the north and south of the grand post office stairwell, are the opposite of inviting. Positioned at the far western end of platforming trains, the new concourse also presents an added inconvenience for the majority of passengers coming to the station from the east. As I noticed the day I visited, the new concourse was deserted compared to those oppressive waiting areas across the street at Penn, which are still better positioned over the center of the trains. When I asked a Moynihan ticket-taker about this, he wondered why anyone would walk an extra

block west just to have to walk back the other way on the platform. He also suggested that Amtrak was making a tally of those still boarding from Penn and those from Moynihan, and would eventually stop listing the trains in the old location, forcing passengers to use the new hall.

For the rail commuter, the addition of Moynihan merely adds an extra length of turns to get from the subway to the Amtrak train. A pleasant concourse at the extreme end of a rat maze merely compounds an unsavory overall experience. The poor integration of typography, wayfinding, and pathways with the rest of Penn Station remains a joke, now made cruel with this reminder of what there once was. It is all the more remarkable that SOM's own new underground waiting area, the West End Concourse, with overworked signage by Pentagram, which opened in June 2017, shares no stylistic similarity with the austere Moynihan concourse directly above.

Beyond the trains, the last missing piece of the Moynihan Train Hall is Daniel Patrick Moynihan. Until recently, the new rail center was supposed to be known as Moynihan Station. Then in 2017, the first signs went up calling it Penn Station West. It could be that cancel culture finally caught up with the trailblazing studies of this senator who wrote "The Moynihan Report," the 1965 paper concerning the high out-of-wedlock birthrate of black Americans and its negative economic consequences. A simpler answer is that the New York governor only ever wants to credit a civic project to a Cuomo. Andrew Cuomo now plans to build a new station, in a new style, over the entire Penn complex, and he would prefer to retain the naming rights.

As the National Civic Art Society and others have argued, the real solution for Penn Station is Pennsylvania Station: the demolition of Madison Square Garden and the rebuilding of McKim, Mead & White's lost masterpiece over the extant tracks. Daniel Patrick Moynihan felt that loss deeply and dedicated his final years to finding it. By looking to the past, his new train hall should now inspire others not to make the same mistakes of fifty years ago all over again.

Music

Livestream chronicle

by Jay Nordlinger

A week before Christmas, the Oxford Philharmonic Orchestra staged a concert—not a Christmas concert, but a festive concert nonetheless. It paid tribute to the Oxford scientists who had worked unceasingly to come up with their vaccine against COVID-19. There was no audience for this concert, except online, around the world. The players and singers were socially distanced.

Singers? Yes, the choir of Merton College, Oxford; Bryn Terfel, the great bass-baritone from Wales; and others.

The program consisted of “feel-good music,” which I would defend in three ways, at least: (1) What’s wrong with feeling good? (2) There is a lot of excellent music that feels good. (3) Feel-good music is called for when you’re hailing a new vaccine, and thanking the men and women who worked to produce it.

Oxford’s program featured one new work, by John Rutter, the renowned Englishman who today is seventy-five. There was a second Rutter piece, too, and it began the concert. This was “Look to the Day,” a choral piece written in 2008. The composer’s website describes it as “a tuneful and uplifting anthem with warm harmonies.” And its level of difficulty? “Very Easy.”

Rutter wrote the words, as well as the music. “Look to the day when the world seems new again.” “Look to the day when the earth is green again.” “Look to the light that will drive out darkness.”

Next on Oxford’s program was a little piece by Elgar, *Chanson de matin*. The composer

wrote it for violin and piano, and later orchestrated it. This Englishman liked to give pieces French titles. The companion to this piece is *Chanson de nuit*. Elgar also wrote the famous, beloved *Salut d’amour*. His publisher described it as a “morceau mignon,” which is perfect. All of these pieces are dear. Is that a put-down? It sounds like one, but I don’t mean it that way. Dearness can be desirable.

After the morning song, Bryn Terfel and the Merton choir sang “Abide with Me,” the great hymn whose words are by Henry Francis Lyte and whose music is by William Henry Monk. As the hymn progressed, another solo voice took over for Terfel’s: that of a boy, Alexander Olleson. The BBC named him its Young Chorister of the Year for 2020. The contrast between Terfel’s voice—so big, rich, and renowned—and this treble voice was very sweet.

Plus, Master Olleson will have quite a story to tell, decades from now: how he stood on a stage with the great Bryn Terfel, before a worldwide audience, to sing in tribute to a team of scientists who had labored to produce a COVID-19 vaccine.

With a soprano—a full-grown one—Terfel sang some Rodgers and Hammerstein: “You’ll Never Walk Alone,” from *Carousel*. (Senator Bob Dole’s favorite song, by the way.) The soprano was Alexandra Lowe. Terfel likes R&H, and I imagine Ms. Lowe does, too. Who doesn’t? Twenty-five years ago, Terfel made a whole album of R&H: *Something Wonderful* (whose title song, as you recall, comes from *The King and I*).

John Rutter's new work is *Joseph's Carol*, Christmassy indeed—but the composer linked it to the vaccine team. “I feel a strong sense of connection with the team,” he said in a videotaped interview. “I know exactly what it feels like to be working in the back room, which can be a lonely place. You don't get any public appreciation for your efforts until your work's all over.” Plus, “there's a constant deadline pressure.”

In any event, said Rutter, “my thoughts were very much with the team when I wrote *Joseph's Carol*, which is my musical thank-you to them.”

Rutter went on to explain that he regards Joseph as “the character in the Christmas story who most often gets overlooked.” Joseph “must have felt that he was treading a very long, dark road, without knowing what was at the end of it.” But “at the end of that long, difficult journey, a miracle took place, and that's what my carol's all about: a miracle, which will never be forgotten.”

Joseph's Carol was sung by Terfel and the choir, accompanied by the orchestra. It is an example of relaxed, beautiful storytelling. The music has a mixture of gravity and hope. It has a lovely lightness of texture. The carol is well made, meaning that everything—notes, words—is in its right place.

The concert ended with the Hallelujah Chorus. It was a little tame, for my taste—without the verve that really makes you say, and feel, “Hallelujah!” But to end with this masterwork—masterwork within a masterwork—was a very good idea, as was this entire concert.

Traditionally, the Metropolitan Opera has a New Year's Eve gala—and the show went on, though on the Internet, only, and from Augsburg, Germany. Four singers gathered there: two sopranos and two tenors. The first names of the sopranos are “Pretty” and “Angel.” We are speaking, of course, of Pretty Yende, from South Africa, and Angel Blue, from Los Angeles. The tenors were Javier Camarena, the Mexican, and Matthew Polenzani, the American. In this concert, Yende and Camarena were paired, as *bel canto* singers, chiefly, and Blue and Polenzani were paired, as “lyric” singers,

chiefly. Of course, there is ample crossover in these vocal categories.

The men were in smart red bowties. The women looked beautiful. Ms. Blue, incidentally, is a former beauty queen, as well as an opera star. She has a killer smile. Pretty Yende is pretty killer herself. I will give you one biographical fact about her: she got interested in opera when she heard the Flower Duet from *Lakmé* (Delibes) in a British Airways commercial. You never know how a career will start.

Our four singers were sometimes accompanied by a pianist—Cécile Restier, from France—and sometimes by a string quintet, plucked from the Morphing Chamber Orchestra, of Vienna. Hold that thought, because some people back home in New York weren't very happy about the presence of the Morphing Quintet, or of Ms. Restier, presumably.

The music on this program was gala music. Also feel-good music? Yes, in the operatic category, you could say. The concert began with excerpts from *The Daughter of the Regiment* (Donizetti). Javier Camarena sang the “high-Cs aria,” “Ah! mes amis.” He was a little tight on some of those Cs—there are nine of them, by the way—but basically fine. The final high Cs were his freest and best.

It is very strange not to hear applause at the end of this aria, and others like it. Camarena snapped off a nice salute—in character—and smiled hugely. Let me add that piano accompaniments often sound absurd in these *bel canto* arias. This is no fault of Cécile Restier's, needless to say.

Pretty Yende sang another aria from the opera, “Chacun le sait.” She was not at her most accurate, but she was more than adequate. At the end, she giggled charmingly (and in character).

How much acting should singers do in galas such as this? If they do too much, they can look foolish. At the same time, you are not presenting an oratorio. Our four singers struck an intelligent balance, neither overacting nor underacting.

When it was their turn to take the stage, Angel Blue and Matthew Polenzani sang excerpts from *La bohème* (Puccini)—that fabulous 1-2-3 at the end of Act I: the tenor aria “Che gelida manina”; the soprano aria “Sì, mi chiamano

Mimi”); and the duet “O soave fanciulla.” How many composers have ever written so successful a stretch? Anyone tempted to sneer at Puccini should think again, or listen again.

Polenzani was “hooked up,” in fine voice. He was at his best, I think, in soft, subtle passages. Angel Blue has a beautiful voice. Was she Italianate in this music? Passably so, I think. Did the two singers pull off the high Cs at the end of the duet? They can do better, but yes, they did.

Later in the program, there was more Puccini, involving all four singers. This was “Bevo al tuo fresco sorriso,” from *La rondine*. I would describe it as half toast, half hymn. It is noble, stirring, and absolutely beautiful. Our four singers made some nice sounds, of course, but the piece did not have its impact—its thrill. The singers could have used a proper orchestra (no offense to the quintet). Possibly, they could have benefited from a conductor, too.

“Ah! mes amis” is a signature aria for Camarena. So is “Sì, ritrovarla io giuro,” from *La cenerentola* (Rossini). He duly sang this aria on New Year’s Eve. I often regret that we don’t apply the word “virtuosic” or “virtuoso” to singers—because it would suit Camarena. I have a joke—or an observation, really—to make about Rossini’s aria. The first two notes are on “Sì” and the first syllable of “ritrovarla.” These days, I swear you’d think the tenor were asking Siri for help.

Pretty Yende sang some more Rossini—“Una voce poco fa,” from *The Barber of Seville*. She sang it winningly, with agility and style. But I often want to caution singers about one thing: don’t so load your arias with ornaments and interpolations that you, or the audience, lose sight of the song. A stellar aria such as “Una voce poco fa” is more than a vehicle for technical display.

Angel Blue did her best singing of the night in a very difficult aria: “D’amor sull’ali rosee” from *Il trovatore* (Verdi). She was disciplined and focused. She had both vocal focus and mental focus. She succumbed to a little flattery at the end, but this was of no great import. After the aria, she spoke to the audience—the camera—saying that her father had died on New Year’s Eve fourteen years before. He was a great lover of opera, she said, and taught her how to sing. She concluded with, “Thank you, Dad.”

The final, most gala-like portion of this gala started with “Lippen schweigen,” the duet from *The Merry Widow* (Lehár). As a rule, singers not only sing the duet, they also waltz to it. Blue and Polenzani did not disappoint. Then there were three hits from Naples: “Mattinata,” “Torna a Surriento,” and “O sole mio.” All four singers did commendable things in these songs, but Polenzani stood out, exhibiting the style. The way he toyed with “O sole mio” was especially pleasing.

They said goodbye with “Auld Lang Syne,” which I hope made Guy Lombardo smile, somewhere.

Earlier, I mentioned some upset back home, in New York. The Metropolitan Opera Orchestra issued a blistering statement, saying that its members had been callously treated during the pandemic. “There is no reason why these gala events need to take place in Europe. There are star singers on American soil too.” What’s more, the pandemic “does not need to be so financially devastating to the orchestra, nor so contentious and heartless—that is the choice of Met management.”

In this miserable period, there are a million stories.

The Vienna Philharmonic Orchestra has been playing a New Year’s concert since 1939 (not a proud year, to be sure). It starts at 11:15 on New Year’s morning, in the Goldener Saal of the Musikverein. The program is Viennese: waltzes, galops, polkas, and the like, especially composed by members of the Strauss family. These days, tickets can run as high as 1,200 euros. Families pass down their seats from generation to generation. I’m reminded of the Masters golf tournament in Augusta, Georgia: the waiting list for tickets closed in 1978.

This year, there was no audience in the Musikverein, but the show went on—and it was watched by some fifty million people around the globe. The Vienna Philharmonic underwent a program of rigorous COVID testing. Therefore, they were able to play onstage together.

“Without a concert on January 1,” said Riccardo Muti in a press conference beforehand, “the Musikverein would be like a grave. That would be a negative sign to the world.” Muti

was conducting the New Year's concert, for the sixth time. No guest except Lorin Maazel has conducted it more. The VPO is self-run, meaning that the players decide on conductors and programming.

Muti has been conducting the orchestra for fifty years. He first conducted the New Year's concert in 1993. "I couldn't sleep for nights," he said. "I was terrified." The VPO players are "unique" in this repertoire, he said. "I felt that, with my inexperience, I could only do damage." Italians have Verdi within them, he said—not Lehár, the Strausses, and the rest. Yet he came through fine.

The Viennese music is much more difficult to conduct than people imagine, he said. "The boat needs a good pilot, an expert pilot." It does not go, or even float, by itself. When you conduct a New Year's concert, said Muti, "you can't relax until the *Radetzky March*." This piece, by iron tradition, is the final encore. The audience claps along. Although this year, there would be no clapping, "so we will finally hear the march as it's written," smiled Muti.

He was staying in the Imperial Hotel—and was virtually the only one in it. There was almost no one on the streets. "I have the sense of being in a horror movie," said Muti, smiling again.

When he took the stage on New Year's morning, the players clapped vigorously for him. I think they were trying to make up, in part, for the lack of an audience in the hall. They opened with the *Fatinitza March*, i.e., the march from the operetta *Fatinitza*, by Franz von Suppé. The players had the lilt, the step, the bounce—everything that makes this sort of music special. As I frequently say, when writing of them, they were good as a unit and good in their solos. They showed technical exactitude. And their patented sound came through, even on your laptop at home.

Muti? He was in good form throughout the concert. He was charismatic and disciplined. He let his hair down—and that hair is famous—while maintaining order. He knew how much conducting to do, by which I mean, he knew when to intervene: when to impose himself, or guide, and when to stand back,

letting the players do their familiar thing, and enjoying it. I have never seen Muti do so much dancing on a podium.

I don't know about you, but, for me, a little of this music goes a long way. Still, it goes down easy. One of the pieces on this morning was *Ohne Sorgen! (Without a Care!)*, a polka by Josef Strauss. That was the mood of the concert at large.

The highlight of the concert, I believe, was more Suppé: the famous *Poet and Peasant Overture*. The VPO and Muti betrayed no hint of slumming in this piece. They approached it as they would a Schubert symphony. It was precise, beautiful, stirring, and satisfying. There is an extensive cello solo, handled by Tamás Varga (Budapest-born) with elegance.

Let me give you an aside. Out of habit, Muti went to shake the hand of Rainer Honeck, the concertmaster (and brother of the conductor Manfred Honeck). Honeck demurred, and Muti suddenly remembered we're not shaking hands at the moment. The two nodded at each other with big smiles.

One of the last items of the day was the *Emperor Waltz*, by Johann Strauss the Younger. It was irresistible in its nobility and pomp, and blessedly unrushed.

Taking a microphone, Muti made a statement to the audience—the audience beyond the hall. The past year was an "annus horribilis," he said. Yet music has a message to deliver. "Music is more than entertainment," he said. "It is not only a profession, it is a mission. This is why we do this work: to make society better." That is a platitude, maybe, and we can argue about it, but such words have particular weight in a time of worldwide distress.

Before the *Radetzky March*—which is by Johann Strauss the Elder—comes *On the Beautiful Blue Danube* (the Younger). Tradition so dictates. In the *Danube* waltz, the horns were incredibly fluid. Don't they know that horns are supposed to cough, shout, and flub? As for the Neapolitan on the podium, he was unquestionably idiomatic in his conducting.

I must say, I enjoyed the *Radetzky March* without the clapping. But may the clapping return next year, and the year after that, and on and on.

The media

Democracy dies in the media

by James Bowman

The top headline of *The Washington Post's* "Today's Headlines" newsletter on the Sunday after the Epiphany riot in the Capitol read as follows: "Republicans largely silent about consequences of deadly attack and Trump's role in inciting it." The big news in the D.C. swamp that day, it seems, was that there were unaccountably still people thereabout who could be suspected of not agreeing with *The Washington Post* about these things—both the prospective "consequences" and "Trump's role in inciting" the riot, which were treated equally as simple matters of fact. Emboldened by its own firm possession of these unquestioned truths, the *Post* was hinting that, if indeed there were such people, they had better get their minds right PDQ, or they might face a few consequences of their own.

Of course, one is used to such subtly intimidating language from the media nowadays, but I can well imagine its chilling effect on any remaining "moderate" Republicans who hadn't, at that point, spoken up with the sort of ritual denunciation of the President being demanded of them in the media. They might well wonder, however, whence came the media's authority, either for its truth claims or for making such threats against those unwilling to believe them. This was ostensibly a news story, and therefore, presumably, partook of that tentativeness once implied when the reporters of the news were said to be writing "the first draft of history." Now they are asking us to accept without question that it is also the final draft.

History is in the pockets of the *Post* and of its brethren in the media, both old and new, these days because they have succeeded in branding themselves as exclusive purveyors of "Truth" and enlightenment. "Democracy," remember, "dies in darkness." But when the truth of your reporting is proclaimed in advance of the news you report, the reporting tends to be more or less limited to confirmation of what you have claimed already to know. The shock headline in the next day's *Post* was: "For anti-Trump Americans, calamity spurs a muted sense of vindication." It can't have been difficult to find a few anti-Trump Americans who, like the writers and editors of the *Post*, can now claim to have known of Mr. Trump's perfidy all along. They could therefore all afford to be modestly "muted" in their I-told-you-so. Not that they really were.

Meanwhile, just outside this elite circle of precognition, there was some real muting going on, as the Twitter and Facebook accounts of President Trump were shut down and the aspiring Twitter rival Parler, whose brand is "no censorship," was itself censored by Amazon, Google, and Apple. No doubt the fortune-tellers at the *Post* saw all this coming as well, if not the riotous pretext by which it would ultimately be accomplished. It doesn't take psychic powers to predict that the "consequences" mentioned in Sunday's article will be continuing for some time to come, and that they will affect many more people than Mr. Trump. Within days, Senator Josh Hawley's forthcoming book—ironically on *The Tyranny*

of *Big Tech*—was canceled by Simon & Schuster on account of his persistence in backing efforts to delay certification of the election pending an investigation into allegations of voter fraud.

The *Post's* denial of such allegations out of hand, from the very moment they were first made, was thus of a piece with its more general self-certainty, which, in turn, is the twin of its invincible self-righteousness. We now take it for granted that both qualities are shared with the rest of the progressive American media that, on account of them and on present showing, will soon be all the media there are. Such absolute faith in their own rightness of opinion, which is what it means to report opinion as fact as often as they do, is characteristic of totalitarianism, as is the need to make any waverers, like those temporarily silent Republicans, profess their assent to media-determined party lines.

Accordingly, it should not surprise us if our public life seems to have made yet another quantum leap in the direction of totalitarianism in the first days of the new year. It would have taken no special foresight to observe from the beginning that this was always the direction in which we were being taken by the cancel culture—which has, as I write, now come for an elected President of the United States. His 75 million voters must now include a fair few who are wondering how much longer it can be before it comes for them. As an unusually perspicacious celebrity named Emily Ratajkowski pointed out, “If [Mark Zuckerberg] can shut the president up/off, he can shut any of us up/off.” The more dissenters from the media consensus are shed by their on- and offline thought police, the more power the media have to shed them—or to intimidate any remaining independent thinkers into falling into line.

Before the riot, I had begun to write this column as an attempt to show how such leaders of that consensus as *The Washington Post* and *The New York Times* go about the manufacture of truth and what they have lately been pleased to call “reality.” They make this to their own specifications by what I called the “suppressed conditional”—as when Tom Nichols of *The Atlantic* wrote of Republican attempts

to investigate electoral fraud before certifying the election of Joe Biden: “Worse Than Treason: No amount of rationalizing can change the fact that the majority of the Republican Party is advocating for the overthrow of an American election.”

In fact, it would have taken very little rationalizing indeed, assuming he were capable of it, for Mr. Nichols to recognize that this putative advocacy of “the overthrow of an American election,” not to mention the unnamed crime said to be “worse than treason,” depended absolutely on an *if* clause that he, for obvious reasons, chose to leave out and that might have read something like this: “if (and only if) those Republicans knew there to be no electoral fraud and were claiming that it existed anyway.” Like so many others in the hypercritical media, Tom Nichols could stake such extravagant claims of criminality on the assumption that his readers, all partisans like himself, would be willing to take for granted as true what was, in fact, in dispute.

That of course is why there was never any mention of the presidential and other Republican claims of fraud anywhere in the prestige media without the qualifiers “baseless” or “unfounded” being attached to them. No one must be allowed to suspect that fraud was even possible, lest the storm of abuse being heaped upon the heads of the President and his supporters should come to seem a trifle overdone. And this, remember, was before the renewed opportunity for such abuse afforded by the riot, which was said by one and all with equally positive certainty to have been incited by Mr. Trump.

A rational person might have been less impressed by the riot itself than by the riot of self-righteousness and claptrap about democracy from people who have spent the last four years trying to thwart the democratic choice of 2016 and condoning the actions of those who seek to impose their will on the country by extra-democratic and intimidatory methods. Talk about incitement! It’s hard for me to see how Mr. Trump’s appeal to his followers before some of them rioted was anywhere close to being as provocative as Nancy Pelosi and her fellow House Democrats who kneeled to

the rioters in Washington D.C. last summer, draped in kente cloth to show their support. Now, of course, the rioters were coming after *them*, which must have made a difference in their attitude. But back then—remember?—rioting was just fine and dismissed as “mostly peaceful protest” when it was Black Lives Matter and Antifa who were claiming to have a grievance and who thought that the people in power weren’t listening to them.

It will be observed, perhaps, that the public discourse (if you can call it that), as managed by the media, now depends on a kind of induced amnesia, for which the media must owe a lot to the educational establishment’s help in producing a new generation of readers and watchers who know almost nothing about the past—or nothing but the media version of it as found, for example, in *The New York Times’s* 1619 Project. The media’s own self-induced amnesia goes even further and requires that yesterday’s misreporting, as of the “Russian collusion” hoax, be utterly forgotten in order to clear the way for today’s. Who now remembers the wild goose chase of the Mueller report, which for months was top-of-the-headlines news every day in the prestige media? The President’s “collusion” with Russia—no one was ever quite sure what criminal act, exactly, they were supposed to have colluded in—proved to be a truth that wasn’t true, but that didn’t mean that it was an error, let alone a falsehood. It was simply forgotten, dropped down Winston Smith’s memory hole.

And then there was the impeachment of last year, which you might have supposed would be somewhat fresher in the media’s memory. Yet the “consequences” referred to in *The Washington Post* headline first mentioned above included yet another effort by Nancy Pelosi and her fellow Democrats in Congress to impeach the President only days before the end of his term. To anyone whose memory stretches back even as far as one year, the message they were sending by such a pointless act could only have been: “Now we’ve finally found something we can *really* impeach him for.” It ought to be a pretty obvious point to be raised by the fair-minded that not only the

previous attempt but the new one as well could hardly count for impeachment as envisaged by the Founding Fathers, for “high crimes and misdemeanors.” It was clearly nothing but political vendetta.

But either there are too few fair-minded people or too many amnesiacs these days, the latter having fallen along with the media into the mere habit of outrage, like children throwing a temper tantrum every time they don’t get their own way—each outburst in utter forgetfulness of the one before, so as to be full of fresh indignation. Impeachment should thus appear to those who have not lost their memories, or their minds, like the prosecution of General Flynn, or the attempt by prosecutors in the southern district of New York to get hold of Mr. Trump’s tax records, not to mention the two-year Mueller investigation. In other words, it was and always has been a (hopeful) conviction in search of a crime. Is that how American justice was supposed by the molders and shapers of our legal system to work?

Who can remember that far back? Or perhaps the better question is who wants to remember that far back when the media have the power to threaten “consequences” for anybody who does? No doubt that is the reason why there are so few voices being raised in protest against the reduction of democratic politics to raw power struggle—or few voices outside of the right-wing media ghetto, now more ghettoized than ever on the same pretext that is being used to check off everything else on the political wish list of the Democrats and the media. Do ordinary, more or less apolitical Americans then approve of the way the law and the deep state have been used to hound the President since even before he took office? The election results would seem to suggest that they do, but then some people continue to doubt the results, in spite of all the media’s urgings.

I think we have to confess that if ordinary voters seem confused, it is at least partly the fault of both parties. I always thought that the Republican impeachment of President Clinton in 1998 was a mistake. I understood that it was meant as payback for the attempted “high

tech lynching” of Clarence Thomas seven years earlier (presided over by one Joseph R. Biden), but the Republicans were politically interested parties who could not honorably or impartially sit in judgement of the President. They should have left his punishment for the Monica affair, if any, to the Democrats and thus, ultimately, to the voters. But when I suggested this to one or two prominent Republicans at the time, I was slapped down as naive. This was, like it or not, what hardball politics now looked like in America.

Well, we sowed the wind, along with Mr. Biden, and we (if not he) have now reaped the whirlwind. Neither Republicans nor Democrats should be too surprised if all the pious cant about the holy shrine of democracy’s defilement by Trump supporters on January 6 falls on deaf ears among the public at large. The naked and unseemly power struggle that has gone on in that building for the last thirty years (at least) cannot have looked to many of those outside it like the sacred rites of democratic self-government. Few politicians today appear even to know what the word “democracy” means, since so many of the ironically named Democrats have spent four years trying to nullify an election in its name—and now seek to prevent Mr. Trump from seeking office again on the paradoxical grounds that any future election he won would be as much of a “threat to democracy” as the last one.

But even that is a mere trifle compared to the political degrading of the very idea of truth. Now, with every “false or misleading statement” of President Trump catalogued by *The Washington Post*’s indefatigable “fact checkers,” and

every repetition of the a priori claim that his allegations of election fraud were “unfounded” or “baseless,” we are reminded that truth and falsehood have become entirely a matter of which side of the political divide they are coming from. One side’s truth is the other’s falsehood, and vice versa. Who doesn’t know that now, whatever the media say? And what are ordinary people supposed to make of it, apart from concluding both that they’re lying and that truth—*true* truth—is now inaccessible to anyone not himself engaged as a partisan?

There used to be an unwritten rule in the advertising business about “no knocking copy.” If Coke started claiming that Pepsi would make you sick, Pepsi would naturally retaliate by claiming that Coke would kill you, and ordinary everyday people would begin to think it safer to leave both of them alone and drink Dr. Pepper. Something like that seems to have happened in our political life, largely because of the media’s post-Watergate faith in the power of scandal and threats of scandal to manipulate politicians into advancing their own agenda. The Democrats have been happy to take advantage of this because the media’s agenda is so largely their own, but if they had any aspiration beyond the sheer exercise of power they might now be thinking twice about this devil’s bargain, now that they’re being asked both to condone riotous assemblies and to impeach a president for (allegedly) doing the same. That kind of thing, too, was not anyone’s idea of democracy up until the day before yesterday. Now it appears we’ll have to get used to it. What was it again that democracy was said to die in?

Books

Vicious Highsmith

by Brooke Allen

It's a well-known principle that if you admire certain writers' work, maybe you'd be better off not meeting them in the flesh. Good writers are often surprisingly unpleasant people—no one can quite figure out why, but it's true. And never has there been a writer I'm so glad not to have known (though I very much enjoy her fiction) as Patricia Highsmith (1921–95). To use a non-PC term—I think I can get away with it in these pages—she was a predatory lesbian, in addition to being a professional homebreaker; a nasty drunk; an emotional sadist; and an equal-opportunity bigot who seems to have detested every group except the American and European *gratin*. Arabs, Jews, the French, Catholics, evangelicals, Latinos, blacks, Koreans, Indians both dot and feather . . . the list goes on and on.

Richard Bradford, Highsmith's most recent biographer, observes, in his book *Devils, Lusts and Strange Desires*, her carryings-on with a sort of horrified fascination.¹ “Compared to Highsmith, the likes of Casanova, Errol Flynn and Lord Byron might be considered lethargic—even demure. She seemed to enjoy affairs with married women in particular, but breaking up lesbian couples was a close second.” “An insatiable appetite for things, and people, stolen from or denied to others, seemed to have become her *modus operandi*.” She had an urgent and insatiable need for high drama end-

ing in ruined lives, and if a relationship did not provide her with such fodder she soon moved on.

The question of mental illness of course arises, though Highsmith was never diagnosed. Bradford cites a psychiatrist, unacquainted with the writer, who passed her in a hotel corridor and noted that her facial expression was one he had never witnessed outside of an insane asylum. She herself speculated that she might have been bipolar, but to me (amateur psychologist that I am) her behavior seems more in keeping with borderline personality disorder. But we will never know.

What makes all this interesting, aside from the reader's prurience and the perverse fascination involved in watching a train wreck in progress? It is, Bradford demonstrates, that Highsmith's personality is so closely interwoven with those of her characters, her pathologies so allied with theirs, that a knowledge of her life truly expands the imaginative exercise of reading the fiction—which is not always the case with biographies. But how much do we actually know, and how much of what she tells us can be trusted? From adolescence on she recorded her life, thoughts, and fantasies in a series of “*cahiers*,” now assembled in the Swiss Literary Archives at Bern. Bradford has clearly spent a long and frustrating time in those archives, trying to differentiate truth and fantasy, fact and fiction. He admits that the attempt was often vain—but that fact in itself tells us much about Highsmith's odd psyche. “As well as writing books featuring invented

¹ *Devils, Lusts and Strange Desires: The Life of Patricia Highsmith*, by Richard Bradford; Bloomsbury Caravel, 272 pages, \$30.

characters,” he tells us, “she decided that her own life should become the equivalent of a novel, a legacy of lies, fantasies and authorial inventions.” She apparently did this for several reasons: to create a life she desired rather than the one she lived, shaping her own life as fiction; to transpose her own experiences imaginatively into those of her characters; and, mischievously, to confuse scholars and biographers, poor saps like Bradford who, she knew, would scrutinize her papers after her death.

Much of her childhood and early life can be ascertained, however. Was there anything there to have caused the extreme behaviors of later years? Probably so, as it turns out. She was born in 1921 in Fort Worth, to Jay Bernard Plangman and Mary Coates Plangman. When Mary got pregnant, the Plangmans, who were looking forward to a new life in New York, attempted an abortion (with turpentine!) but botched it; Jay inexplicably revealed this incident to Patricia in later years. The birth of the child (whom neither parent wanted) hastened the collapse of the marriage, and the Plangmans split up six months later. Mary got remarried two years later, to Stanley Highsmith, an illustrator and photographer, who adopted the child.

Patricia claimed to have childhood amnesia, a state that is usually connected with childhood trauma, and in fact she suspected that she had been sexually abused at her grandmother’s house. Bradford suggests, however, that the amnesia might possibly have been invented as a method for Highsmith to place her life within her own artistic control: “one has to wonder,” he writes with justifiable frustration, “if Highsmith intuited [invented?] childhood amnesia as a means of rewriting her past.” Certain salient facts, however, still stood out to her. “My [sexual] character was essentially made before I was six,” she recalled, as well as that from the age of eight or so she had entertained “evil thoughts of murder of my stepfather”: “I learned to live with a grievous and murderous hatred very early on.”

Patricia spent much of her childhood shuttling back and forth between Texas and New York City; at one point the Highsmiths tem-

porarily split up and Patricia was left with her grandparents in Fort Worth for a year while her parents worked things out. Then it was back to New York, and the Julia Richman High School, where one of her major crushes was one Judy Tuvim (later to achieve fame as Judy Holliday). In 1938 she enrolled at Barnard College, where she cut quite a swath “dressed as a character in a noir movie”; “My vision of her,” remembers one contemporary, “is with a cigarette hanging out of the corner of her mouth. And the camel hair coat, the high white collar and I think she wore an ascot. I mean she was stylish.” A year into college she joined the Young Communist League. Not that she was ever very political; Bradford’s assumption is that she posed as a communist for attention, as it was not a persona adopted by many of the nice Barnard girls. “Quite soon, though, she grew tired of this new performance.”

It was at this time that she commenced her lifelong career of social climbing, befriending luminaries like Janet Flanner, Ludwig and Madeleine Bemelmans, and Berenice Abbott. Most of all she lusted after the rich, the glamorous, the WASP. Like her most famous character, Tom Ripley, fixating on the glittering, golden Dickie Greenleaf, Highsmith was always fascinated by such creatures of fantasy: “she only truly desired women who came from the kind of social, cultural and intellectual ranking to which she aspired.” She even stalked them. When she was working as a temporary saleswoman at Bloomingdale’s one Christmas season, for example, she was deeply struck by a mink-clad blonde and tracked her down to her home. Unlike the situation in her 1952 novel, *The Price of Salt*, which was inspired by this incident, she and the strange woman would never actually meet, let alone have a romance. (Times being what they were, Highsmith had to publish *The Price of Salt* under a pseudonym; much later, after its true authorship had been finally revealed, it was adapted as the 2015 movie *Carol*.)

As Bradford points out, “there are eerie resemblances between the real-life stalker, Highsmith, and her horrid creation, Bruno” (the psychopath in *Strangers on a Train*). Highsmith, he continues, “spent much of her life as

a writer siphoning the emotional catastrophes she prompted, encountered, and experienced,” using alcohol as a way of heightening her already provocative behavior. The two most memorable characters in her fiction, Tom Ripley and Charles Anthony Bruno (whose name was changed to Bruno Anthony in the Hitchcock film), are almost certainly memorable because of the author’s personal identification with their obsessions: like Bruno, who wishes profoundly for his father’s death, Highsmith fantasized for years about murdering her stepfather, and, like both Bruno and Tom, she equated murder with love. “Murder,” she wrote, “is a kind of making love, a kind of possessing.”

Devils, Lusts and Strange Desires is not a critical biography, but the connections between Highsmith’s life and works are made clear. In the years after college Highsmith began writing, supporting herself primarily by penning scripts for the Sangor-Pines Comic Shop. (Bradford suggests that the spare comic-book style might have had some influence on her prose.) She drew well, and even considered becoming an artist rather than a writer. In 1944 she moved to a pleasant villa in Taxco, Mexico (Bradford rightly wonders where she got the funds to pay for it), and wrote a novel, *The Click of the Shutting*, which was “irredeemably bad” but whose plot foreshadowed the central relationships in *Strangers on a Train* and *The Talented Mr. Ripley*. The first of her twenty-two published novels, *Strangers on a Train*, appeared in 1952.

From this point on, with an assured income, Highsmith spent much of her time abroad: in Positano (which she wonderfully recreated as Mongibello in *The Talented Mr. Ripley*); in France, although she hated the French; in Switzerland, where she died of lung cancer and aplastic anemia in 1995, mourned by few. She had always been dreadful: once she had looked on as a distraught lover washed down an overdose of Veronal with several large martinis, then left her there on the bed and went out to dinner with friends, returning at 2:00 a.m., finally deigning to call an ambulance when she failed to wake the hapless Ellen from her

coma. But as Highsmith aged, her vision grew even darker, perhaps because, as she remarked in a *cabier*, she regarded the vast majority of humans as “morons.” One of her lovers mused: “If she hadn’t had her work, she would have been sent to an insane asylum or an alcoholics’ home. . . . It took a while for me to figure this out, but all those strange characters haunting other people, and thinking and writing about them—they were her. She *was* her writing.”

Devils, Lusts and Strange Desires is certainly an engrossing book, though it leaves a rancid taste in the reader’s mouth. But why was it written? There are already two Highsmith biographies out there: Andrew Wilson’s *Beautiful Shadow: A Life of Patricia Highsmith* (2003) and Joan Schenkar’s *The Talented Miss Highsmith: The Secret Life and Serious Art of Patricia Highsmith* (2009)—and this for a writer who has been dead only twenty-five years. Bradford’s introduction doesn’t provide a justification, and one suspects that, 2021 marking Highsmith’s centenary, he approached, or was approached by, Bloomsbury to produce a volume in honor of the occasion. Bradford, a British academic, is a prolific writer who specializes in literary biography, having authored lives of John Milton, Philip Larkin, Alan Sillitoe, both Kingsley and Martin Amis, Ernest Hemingway, and George Orwell. Trying to separate fact from fiction in the Swiss archives might have made Highsmith the most difficult subject he’s taken on. His most serious handicap in the attempt is his obvious unfamiliarity with the American scene: he compares the lifestyle in *The Philadelphia Story* with “those of the degenerate Regency Aristocracy,” calls Manhattan’s 103rd Street “midtown,” says that Astoria “is a suburb of New York” and that Barnard College is “in Central New York, adjacent to Broadway.” Simply asking an American reader to have a look at the book prior to publication would have cleaned up this sort of thing.

But, at his best, Bradford can demonstrate real psychological savvy. Speaking of Highsmith’s avowed anti-Semitism, for instance:

I suspect . . . that Highsmith as the foul anti-Semite was in part an invention. Like Ripley she reflected horrible elements of her creation

honestly enough but she deliberately exaggerated them as an excuse in provocation and self-loathing. Highsmith knew that those closest to her were appalled by her views and her expressions of them, which is why she continued them. She was genuinely anti-Semitic, but in the same sense that Ripley was a genuine, real murderer.

The key word here, I think, is “self-loathing.” Was she born this way, or had the conditions of her early life created the pathology? For all of his assiduous archival detective work, Bradford has not succeeded in finding the answer.

The air up there

Alexander Rose

*Empires of the Sky:
Zeppelins, Airplanes, and Two Men’s
Epic Duel to Rule the World.*
Random House, 624 pages, \$32

reviewed by John Steele Gordon

Flying has been a dream of humankind since time immemorial. As E. Y. Harburg wrote, “Somewhere over the rainbow, / Blue birds fly / Birds fly over the rainbow / Why then, oh why, can’t I?” Only at the dawn of the twentieth century was the dream of flying finally realized. And, as hardly anyone now remembers, it was realized twice.

For a third of a century, the two means of flying—heavier-than-air (airplanes) and lighter-than-air (airships)—vied to become the dominant form of air transportation. This now forgotten contest has been brought back to vivid life in *Empires of the Sky* by Alexander Rose, the author of several well-regarded works of history, including *Washington’s Spies: The Story of America’s First Spy Ring* (2006). Despite a ridiculously over-the-top subtitle, this new work is well worth the reader’s time.

The dirigible, also called a zeppelin after its inventor, Ferdinand Graf von Zeppelin, a German aristocrat, had many advantages over the airplane in the early days of flying. For one thing, it evolved from a proof-of-concept to a mature technology much faster. By 1910,

zeppelins were capable of handling substantial numbers of passengers. Only in the mid-1930s could airplanes do the same.

And while zeppelins were slower than airplanes, they had a much greater range because they didn’t need to expend energy just to stay aloft. Large ones could easily cross the Atlantic Ocean, for instance. And they were much faster than the other means of transatlantic passenger service, ocean liners. A zeppelin could cross the Atlantic in only two and a half days, twice as fast as RMS *Queen Mary*, the fastest ship of her day.

The dirigible had other undeniable advantages over the airplane as well. Unlike the cramped, uncomfortable space in early airplanes, airships were more like ocean liners. They had cabins, commodious lounges, a well-stocked dining room and bar, sometimes even a grand piano (made of aluminum to save weight). They even had smoking rooms, pressurized to ensure safety, where the steward would light people’s cigars and cigarettes with a device like an old-fashioned automobile cigarette lighter to avoid a flame.

Because we now live so deep in the age of the airplane, all that most of us know about airships is the spectacular end of the largest and grandest of them, the *Hindenburg*, on May 6, 1937. Transatlantic zeppelin landings had become routine by then and therefore no longer newsworthy. But, fortuitously, a cameraman was there to capture riveting footage of its landing at Lakehurst, New Jersey.

Bad weather had made the ship seriously late, and the weather was still threatening thunderstorms as the *Hindenburg* maneuvered towards its mooring mast. Suddenly the great airship burst into flames—probably due to a gas leak and a build up of static electricity because of the weather—and crashed to the earth, killing a third of its passengers and crew. The footage was shown around the world in newsreels and can be seen online in dozens of documentaries and docudramas, as well as in the raw footage itself.

The United States at the time had a monopoly on non-flammable helium, thanks to natural gas wells in Oklahoma that were particularly rich in the first of the noble gases. Had the United States been willing to sell helium

to Nazi Germany, the disaster wouldn't have happened. But America wouldn't, afraid it might have military applications. And so the Germans had to use hydrogen.

Hydrogen has the advantages of being both cheaper and able to lift 18 percent more weight than the same volume of helium. But it has the fatal disadvantage of being highly flammable, and the end of the *Hindenburg* spelled the end of the airship as a serious rival to the by then rapidly developing airplane.

Indeed, no more dirigibles, with their metal framework and vast sacks of gas, were ever completed. Today what you see hovering over major sporting events are blimps, essentially large, helium-filled, powered balloons. Today's Good-year blimps are 192 feet long, dwarfed by the *Hindenburg*, which was more than four times that length. The *Hindenburg* remains to this day the largest flying object ever constructed.

Rose tells this tale through the eyes of three main characters, Graf von Zeppelin, Hugo Eckener—who ran the Zeppelin company for much of its existence—and the American Juan Trippe, who built Pan American World Airways into a major airline. It was the last two who would battle for dominance in air travel in the 1920s and '30s.

Graf von Zeppelin was born in 1838 in the Grand Duchy of Baden in what is now the southwest of Germany. Educated by private tutors and at the University of Stuttgart, where he studied engineering, he joined the army of Württemberg, one of the many still-sovereign states that would form modern Germany in 1871.

In 1863 he took leave in order to be a military observer in the American Civil War. Unimpressed with the Union Army, Zeppelin toured the upper Midwest, thereby missing the battle of Gettysburg. It was in St. Paul, Minnesota, that he encountered a balloonist and fellow German, John Steiner, who offered rides to people for a fee. Zeppelin took his first balloon flight with Steiner, in a tethered balloon that gained its buoyancy from coal gas.

Steiner was grounded by winds on the day he met Zeppelin, and so he had plenty of time to talk to him about ballooning. Balloons at that time were what we would to-

day call light bulb-shaped and could not be steered. Untethered, they were at the will of the wind and thus had no practical use other than entertaining people brave enough to take a ride. (Steiner had been in the Union Army balloon corps, intended for observing enemy movements, but it had been disbanded when it yielded little actionable intelligence.)

But Steiner told Zeppelin about how he intended to revolutionize ballooning by changing the shape of balloons to one more like a cigar, with a large rudder at the back end to help steer it. Zeppelin flew with Steiner the next day and would not fly again for more than forty years, but the idea of a practical, freight- and passenger-carrying airship did not leave him.

As early as 1874 he had produced the essential design of a dirigible, with a rigid metal frame and huge gas bags inside an outer skin. But he had to wait until nearly the end of the nineteenth century for two new technologies to emerge that made the dirigible possible: cheap aluminum, which weighs less than half what steel weighs, and the internal combustion engine, which had a much higher power-to-weight ratio than the steam engine.

Zeppelin's first dirigible, the LZ-1, flew in 1900, three years before the Wright Brothers successfully flew an airplane. Zeppelin, a military man with the rank of four-star general, foresaw military use for them, but the German army was not very interested at the time. The military did, however, commandeer zeppelins at the outbreak of World War I and ordered many more from Zeppelin's company for bombing campaigns against England and France. But while they created considerable panic at first (they were dubbed "baby-killers"), they were very inaccurate and once defenses were developed, such as search lights, they proved too vulnerable to attack to be useful as bombers.

Zeppelin, an aristocrat to his fingertips, thought using zeppelins for passenger travel a vulgar tradesman's undertaking and had little interest in the founding of the world's first airline, the Deutsche Luftschiffahrts-Aktiengesellschaft (German for "German Airship Travel Corporation"), known by its acro-

nym, DELAG. But by the outbreak of World War I, the company had transported 34,028 paying passengers on 1,588 flights around Germany.

Graf von Zeppelin died in 1917, and by that time Hugo Eckener was head of the company. Born in northern Germany, he earned a doctorate at the University of Leipzig in psychology, which he would later put to very good use marshaling public interest and support for airships. But he became a journalist. Assigned to cover the first zeppelin flights, he criticized the engineering, and Graf von Zeppelin sought him out for advice and asked him to become a part-time publicist for the company. He soon became deeply fascinated by airships and went to work for the company full time. He earned his airship pilot's license in 1911.

The Treaty of Versailles that ended World War I forbade Germany from building any large airships, and the two that the company owned were given to France and Italy as reparations. After much skillful lobbying by Eckener, the company was allowed to build a new zeppelin for the U.S. Navy in 1923, named the *Los Angeles*. In 1924, Eckener piloted it across the Atlantic to the naval air station at Lakehurst, New Jersey, the first non-stop transatlantic flight.

The strictures of the Versailles Treaty were loosened in 1927, and the company was able to build the *Graf Zeppelin*, modeled on the *Los Angeles*. It entered passenger service in 1928 (it was christened on what would have been Zeppelin's ninetieth birthday), operating mostly between Germany and Brazil, which had a large German population. In 1929, at the behest of William Randolph Hearst, it went around the world, making the first non-stop crossing of the Pacific by air. It also went to the Arctic on a scientific expedition, both times piloted by Eckener.

These flights made Eckener a national hero in Germany, and he was considering running for president of the country until Paul von Hindenburg decided to seek another term. As Eckener was adamantly anti-Nazi, when Hitler took power he was soon sidelined. But Eckener in the previous sixteen years had succeeded in establishing that lighter-than-air passenger service was a viable commercial enterprise with

an apparently limitless future. Then, of course, came the *Hindenburg* disaster.

Juan Trippe was, on his father's side, what his generation would have called "well born." His mother's side was considerably more raffish, with a colorful line of crooks and gold diggers that Trippe was always at pains to conceal. His maternal grandmother, Irish born, had married Juan Pedro Terry as her second husband, a Venezuelan of Irish ancestry, whose father owned the biggest sugar plantation in Cuba. It was after his step-grandfather that Juan Terry Trippe was named, a name he hated.

Trippe was always closed-mouthed about his background and business dealings (he kept a roll-top desk in his office which was always locked unless he was alone). And he cultivated what Rose calls a "silky sneakiness." Franklin Roosevelt—a Harvard man, of course, and a shrewd judge of character—called him "the most fascinating Yale gangster I ever met" and "a man of all-yielding suavity who can be depended on to pursue his own ruthless way."

Trippe had a conventional WASP upbringing at the Hill School and Yale (St. Anthony's Hall, Skull & Bones) and went to work on Wall Street. But he was soon bored and he was already fascinated by airplanes. He had dropped out of Yale when the United States entered World War I to take flight training from the Navy and was commissioned an ensign in the Naval Reserve. The war ended before he saw combat, and he returned to Yale, graduating in 1921.

In 1923 he raised money from his Yale friends and founded Long Island Airways, using nine surplus Navy biplanes based on Coney Island to take passengers for rides along the beach. But there was only room for one passenger and giving joyrides was no way to make a profit, especially as during the barnstorming era there was lots of competition. He put in larger engines and moved the fuel tanks to the wings to make room for a second passenger seat, but the airline shut down after only a few months.

Trippe studied the history of railroads and shipping lines and came to three conclusions. First he realized that an airline needed substantial capital to invest in the latest aircraft.

Second, an airline had to be able to charge enough to make a profit, and that could only be done if it had exclusive rights to a particular route. And third, the public had to be convinced that airplanes were now a legitimate form of transportation, not just something to take a joyride in.

With his Yale friends, who numbered Vanderbilts and Whitneys among them, capital was not a major problem. And a change in how airmail was carried solved the second problem. The Post Office had been running its own airmail service, and the railroads were complaining about competing with the government. So the Kelly Act of 1925 provided for four-year exclusive contracts with airlines to carry airmail on various routes. And new government regulation of flying and airplanes quickly made flying much safer, greatly reducing insurance rates (and ending the brief era of the barnstormers).

Rose goes into entertaining detail about the wily and often devious Trippe and his corporate machinations as he maneuvered his way into becoming president of Pan American Airways. He had an agreement with the president of Cuba giving him exclusive landing rights, and he used that to force a merger of his Colonial Air Transport with Pan American, which had the Key West–Havana mail contract but no landing rights in Cuba.

The Post Office had specified that the route had to become operational no later than October 19, 1927, or the contract would be canceled that very afternoon. Heavy rains had made the runway at Key West unusable, and his first plane had not been delivered. But Trippe saw in the contract that it didn't specify that the plane had to take off from a runway. He managed to find a seaplane and, in the nick of time, fulfill the contract's requirements. Pan Am was in business.

Over the next decade, Pan Am expanded through the Caribbean and South America (Trippe wisely took along the already legendary Charles Lindbergh when he personally negotiated rights with various South American countries). He also began trans-Pacific operations in the late Thirties.

These new routes were made possible by the rapid increase in airplane capacity and range in these years, pushed relentlessly by Trippe, especially for seaplanes that didn't need runways to take off and land, producing the famed Pan Am clippers. By 1940, air travel by airplane was routine and growing quickly, the long battle with the airship already forgotten.

Whatever his personality defects, Juan Trippe was, undoubtedly, the most important single individual in the history of passenger air travel.

Alexander Rose handles this complex story with authority and very considerable skill, making *Empires of the Sky* not only an enjoyable read but a deeply satisfying one as well.

Sceptered & sovereign

Robert Tombs

This Sovereign Isle:
Britain In and Out of Europe.
Allen Lane, 224 pages, £16.99

reviewed by Simon Heffer

At 11:00 p.m. on December 31, 2020, the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland finally left the European Union, forty-eight years after it had joined its predecessor organization, the European Economic Community. The United Kingdom left four and a half years after the binary referendum of June 23, 2016, when it had voted by 51.9 percent to 48.1 to do so, and eleven months after embarking on a “transition” while the United Kingdom and the European Union sought a post-departure “deal”—a term covering not only tariff-free trade, but also cooperation on matters such as security and crime and regulation. The European Union, which is already economically moribund, was worried that without continuing to impose a level of unnecessary regulation on the United Kingdom, the departing country would obtain a competitive advantage over the bloc. When a deal was finally concluded on Christmas Eve, both sides, inevitably, claimed it as a triumph. The document enumerating the “deal” runs to

1,266 pages: it will be some time before it is absolutely clear what price has been paid for Britons' ability to drink champagne, claret, and chianti tariff-free for the indefinite future. One of the first details to rise from the verbiage was that the United Kingdom's ability to have complete control of its own waters for fishery purposes—one of the most outrageous surrenders of sovereignty made upon joining the bloc—had been postponed until the summer of 2026. Given the typically inflated rhetoric of Boris Johnson, the British prime minister, about how there would be no surrender of the fisheries, it appears that at least one defeat, albeit temporary, has been sustained.

Robert Tombs is one of Britain's most eminent historians, though one who has spent his distinguished career at Cambridge University studying the history of France. Married to a Frenchwoman and, as he says in this book, a citizen of the Republic by marriage, he can hardly be accused of the ignorance or the xenophobia with which most advocates of Britain's leaving the European Union find their reputations tarred. Tombs himself admits that he came close to voting "Remain" in 2016; ultimately he was swayed by a belief that the European Union was a fundamentally anti-democratic institution (which it is), but also by the admission of one of his fellow Cambridge dons that the economic damage to the country would be negligible, requiring only a "readjustment." His new book draws, to begin with, on his superlative single-volume version of the Island Story, *The English and Their History*, published in 2014, as he outlines the relationship between Britain and Europe in the couple of millennia since the Romans arrived. He describes *This Sovereign Isle: Britain In and Out of Europe* as a sort of appendix to that magnum opus, which indeed it is.

Having detailed the essential apartness of Britain from Europe throughout history, and notably its reluctance to become embroiled in European affairs, he then examines what, after the Second World War, drew the country into what was essentially a Franco-German plan to create an economic entity in Europe that widened and deepened until it became,

in the view of the European Union's British opponents especially, a European superstate or federation. Many of Tombs's arguments have been well rehearsed, but are no less valid for that: Britain had lost its empire but hadn't found a role; the British, who had spent what money they had after the Second World War on new housing and consumer goods first and on investment last, found themselves lagging behind both the quality and productivity of European enterprises, notably those run by the recently defeated Germans. When Britain first tried to join what was then called the Common Market, in 1962–63—with the attempt famously, or notoriously, vetoed by General de Gaulle—senior ministers knew very well that the organization was more than the simple trading bloc that Harold Macmillan and others had presented it to the public as being. The Treaty of Rome was clear about the goal of ever-closer union; it was clear, too, to those not befuddled by idealism, that the surrenders of sovereignty—and therefore of democratic power—demanded would not be acceptable to the British public if they were widely known.

Ironically, they did not become widely known until after Britain had joined, and indeed until well after the first referendum on continued membership was held in 1975, when the vote was two-to-one to stay in. There was a passionate anti-Common Market movement, whose earliest and most articulate visionary was Enoch Powell, who curiously barely rates a mention in Tombs's otherwise comprehensive survey. The arguments that were advanced in the 2016 "Leave" campaign were essentially the same arguments Powell was putting forward as early as 1969, and they were especially powerful in the alternative anti-EU campaign of 2016, called "Leave.EU," fronted by Nigel Farage. Tombs's unwise disregard of Leave.EU is the only serious flaw or omission in his book. Farage brought with him into the tent a vast number of working-class voters, many of whom owed an allegiance to the Labour Party, and who would have been less easily persuaded by Boris Johnson or Michael Gove, the two cabinet-level Conservative politicians who led the "official" Leave campaign. Tombs advances a number of reasons why Leave nar-

rowly won, and all are valid. But none is so valid as the one he never advances, which is that Farage, through his direct line to those who felt left behind by Europe, was in the end primarily responsible for the Leave victory.

Tombs devotes much of the last part of his book to discussing the appalling, and deeply anti-democratic and unconstitutional, activities of much of the political class (led by the then Speaker of the House of Commons) to reverse or obstruct the democratic decision of 2016. The author has been trapped inside the Remainder-dominated enclave of Cambridge, one of only a handful of dons with the courage and principles to argue for Britain's leaving the sinking ship of the European Union and reasserting its right to trade with the rest of the world as just one expression of its own sovereignty. He tells of a typical Cambridge *doyenne* whom he met at a party, and who told him she only understood what Leavers were on about when she deigned to discuss the matter with her gardener and cleaning lady. I too witnessed the start of this at Cambridge, dining on High Table in my own college the Friday before the referendum, and again a fortnight later. In the first instance my dining companions burst out laughing when I said I thought Leave would win the following Thursday—an assertion I made having spent weeks traveling with Farage's campaign, and having witnessed the mobilization of the working class and vast swaths of the Conservative grass roots. On my return there was no laughter—most dons were in deep shock—but one had the decency to ask me why I had thought the outcome would be as it was. I asked when he had last had a conversation about politics with his bedder—the woman who cleaned his rooms in the college—and he took my point with grace.

Many others did not. A very senior former civil servant told my college's High Table that autumn, when dining as a guest, that the civil service would stop "it." Certainly some made a heroic attempt to do just that, which was not least why Theresa May's premiership was such a disaster for her and for the country. The disdain and contempt with which the British elite chose to treat the 17.4 million who voted

Leave had to be witnessed to be believed. They had insulted the voters' intelligence before the vote—claiming as part of what became known as "Project Fear" that there would be an economic collapse after a Leave vote. This was orchestrated by George Osborne, then the Chancellor of the Exchequer (now, happily, no longer in parliament), and, as Tombs points out, most of the Treasury's prognostications were wildly exaggerated. Some Remainders simply went off the deep end: a Conservative MP, Heidi Allen, already renowned for not being the brightest light on the seafront, said to a public meeting that eight million people would lose their jobs if Britain left—a quarter of all those employed. Nobody took her seriously, and happily she, too, no longer sits in the House of Commons.

Tombs is unequivocal about the effect this contempt for the public had in shaping the outcome first of the referendum, and then of the 2019 general election, when an electorate sick of having their democratic wishes blatantly disregarded fought back and elected an overwhelmingly pro-Leave parliament. But he may not, perhaps, go far enough in condemning these vindictive Remainders. Having lost in 2016, many were incapable of asking why; yet their utter disregard for the wishes of the people was a principal cause. Perhaps even worse, they were so used to getting their own way as an elite that they could hardly articulate their outrage when the masses thought differently: it was as if they were asking how *dare* these people not do as they were told? Tombs could enlighten them about 1789, and perhaps he should.

He ends by looking at how pitiful the European Union's reaction to the COVID-19 pandemic was and draws the right conclusions about what this says about the organization post-Brexit. Many of its constituent economies are basket cases, and even those that profit from the European Union because of an artificially low exchange rate—Germany, notably—cannot afford to rescue some that are in trouble. Italy is the foremost example, and what no one yet has the guts to admit is that nothing will be put right there, or in several other similarly afflicted countries, without

those economies leaving the Eurozone and being allowed a devalued currency. This crisis cannot be kicked like the proverbial can down the road forever. Tombs also reflects on the Chinese steamroller, the real challenge of the decades to come.

Some years ago one of Britain's leading historians of the seventeenth century, Blair Worden, wrote a superb book, *Roundhead Reputations*, in which he traced political and class divisions still apparent in twentieth-century England back to the civil wars of 1640s. One question all Britons must ponder is for how many generations the query will be raised of whether a person's forebears were Leavers or Remainers. The divide is that fundamental, and its legacy will be around for a lifetime or two yet. Tombs's is a first, and rather good, draft of this part of British history; others in the years ahead will make increasingly interesting reading, especially if—as Tombs and many of us expect will be the case—the future is far brighter than the elites, choking on their sour grapes, will ever be prepared to admit.

Appreciating idiosyncrasies

Iris Jamahl Dunkle

Charmian Kittredge London:
Trailblazer, Author, Adventurer.
University of Oklahoma Press,
312 pages, \$26.95

reviewed by Carl Rollyson

Not often does a biography begin with a villain—a biographer no less. In a rousing opening, Iris Jamahl Dunkle has Irving Stone explode on the scene, romancing Jack London's widow, Charmian Kittredge London, and dancing her into cooperating with his desire to write a biography, *Sailor on Horseback* (1938), which casts the woman as the *femme fatale* that, in effect, drives her husband Jack to suicide. Dunkle's book might well be titled "Justice to Charmian." Stone's life of London is really a biographical novel. He went in search of an archive in the London home that served his sensationalistic purposes, even

though the facts—such as London's death by kidney failure—were amply established.

So well does Dunkle present her case for a revised biography of Charmian that she perhaps overlooks what Stone or any biographer had to contend with. Like other widows who behave as keepers of the flame, Charmian had a vision of her husband she wanted to preserve for posterity. As Dunkle points out, in Charmian's own biography of her husband, *The Book of Jack London* (1921), she rearranged certain events and took liberties that no biographer adhering to the facts could condone. Stone, for all his faults, would have had a hard time with Charmian even if he had chosen not to be so high-handed and intent on forcing the evidence to fit the story he wanted to tell.

But Stone is a good foil for an honest and scrupulous biographer like Dunkle, who gets on with her story in a lively fashion, feeding our appetite for the fascinating account that supplants Stone's melodrama. Although Jack London, the writer as adventurer, might overwhelm anyone else's own story, Dunkle manages to depict her subject in the round, as Charmian saw herself and as others responded to her. Here is a typical passage: "Charmian was well aware that her behavior—wearing pants, riding astride, and traveling around the world in a small yacht—must seem mad to most people, and this gave her the ability to appreciate the idiosyncrasies of others."

Charmian called her husband her "mate," and that typified the marriage, which thrived on a reciprocal relationship of writers sharing their work often aboard ships sailing around the world. Charmian typed up London's stories and articles, edited them, and sometimes added passages at his request. He did the same for her, acknowledging her talent and encouraging her all along the way. She forgave him his numerous infidelities but also stood up for herself, never allowing his work to overwhelm hers, except on occasions when, desperately ill and despondent, he needed her full attention. Even so, on trips to New York, for example, she refused to accompany him because she had her own writing to do at home. He objected, tried to wear her down, but she would not relent, remaining loyal to her own ambition.

Dunkle carefully develops Charmian's back story, how she grew up with a mother who was also a writer, and with a controlling Aunt Netta who took over after Charmian's mother died and her father proved incapable of providing a stable home. Netta had an open marriage that seems to have provided an example for the unconventional Charmian, who had affairs with married men—most notably Harry Houdini—without any qualms.

Charmian enthusiastically joined Jack London in a quest to sail the world, cut short by his own ill health and his self-treatment with a mercury-based medicine that most likely led to the kidney failure that killed him. She reveled in their singularity and fame and in the opportunities to visit remote islands that had seen few Western women. Charmian took these exotic locales in stride, and she later wrote about them in her best-selling *The Log of the Snark*, named after the sailboat they built for the journey.

Dunkle's biography is as much a cultural study as it is the story of a singular woman ahead of her times. Stone could make her out to be an opportunist because of her aggressive lifestyle and manner that fit none of the narratives of her time. Here is another fine paragraph that reports on rather than editorializes on how Charmian got slotted out of the picture during a visit to the Solomon Islands:

An iconic photo of Charmian was taken on August 16, 1908, when she visited a women's market that was being held on the beach. With a revolver strapped to her hip, she stands smiling at the camera among a group of naked native women. Later, when Jack tried to include this photograph in his book *The Cruise of the Snark*, the editors at Macmillan refused to publish the photograph because they found it obscene—not because the natives are naked but because Charmian, a white woman, wasn't disgusted by their nakedness.

Dunkle's biography is a rediscovery of a history that the standards of her subject's time could not permit to be seen.

The bravura beginning of this biography is matched by the harrowing details of Jack Lon-

don's death, which came after several warnings to stop drinking, change his diet, and reduce his hectic schedule. He became increasingly irritable and sometimes irrational. Charmian, in Dunkle's unsparing account, never nagged her husband but mostly left him to his own devices, loving him all the same and rationalizing, perhaps, that some kind of intervention on her part would have made no difference in her husband's pell-mell careening into disaster.

Sometimes Dunkle wants to believe she knows more than a biographer has a right to claim, resorting to what Charmian "must have felt" and what "must have been." But these are minor lapses in a well-told narrative and meticulously researched study.

Miraculous Mozart

Jan Swafford

Mozart: The Reign of Love.
Harper, 832 pages, \$45

reviewed by John Check

The story of Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart begins with the "miracle of January 24, 1761." This is Jan Swafford's apt phrase, found in his new biography, *Mozart: The Reign of Love*, for what happened one night in Salzburg when a four-year-old boy sat down at the harpsichord in his parents' house and began to play. His sister Nannerl, age nine, had been practicing a scherzo, and he was taken with its lively rhythms. When she finished, he wanted to give it a try. Their father, Leopold, a composer, violinist, and music pedagogue, was astounded by what happened next: the boy immediately caught the gist of the piece. Within half an hour, despite being unable to read music and having had no previous harpsichord instruction, he had learned it by heart.

Swafford, a composer and veteran biographer, capably guides classical music enthusiasts through Mozart's life from its miraculous first act to its denouement. Mozart was born in Salzburg in 1756. The achievements of his early years defy comprehension. At five he composed his first piece, a minuet, and more

quickly followed. These earliest works were transcribed into notation (and lightly edited) by Leopold, but, Swafford emphasizes, the elder Mozart did little more than tidy up loose ends, ensuring that what was characteristic in his son's art was preserved intact. Leopold led Wolfgang through a series of composition exercises, after which the boy's "wild imagination" took over, filling in gaps and making the most unusual of connections.

In 1762, Leopold took Wolfgang and Nannerl to Vienna. So polished was her playing, so impressive were his pieces and improvisations, that they caused a sensation. A lucrative sensation: the money Leopold received during this relatively short visit exceeded his yearly salary as a musician in the court orchestra of the archbishop of Salzburg, the openhanded Sigismund von Schrattenbach. This doesn't begin to take into account the gifts showered on the children. The next ten years were dominated by tours, the longest of which, lasting some three and a half years and including visits to the music capitals of Europe—Paris, London, Amsterdam, and others—came to be known as the "grand tour." The engineer of these vast productions was Leopold. As he wrote of a later tour of Italy, he planned for it as a general plan for a military campaign, going so far as to refer to his son as "my little soldier."

Whether at home in Salzburg or, more often than not, on the road, Mozart composed at a furious rate. Before the age of ten, he wrote his earliest symphonies, most of them tidy three-movement affairs, and orchestral serenades. His first Mass dates from his teens. More ambitiously, he began to compose operas, the genre for which he would in time set the bar. As commissions began to come his way, he worked to refine his craft. "At sixteen," according to Swafford, "Mozart was already one of the finest of melodists, but more important, he was already creating art capable of making life sweeter, more poignant, more intense." Within a year, Mozart wrote what Swafford considers his first "unforgettable" symphony, Symphony No. 25 in G minor. He was now a mature composer.

From 1773 to 1781, Mozart was centered mainly in Salzburg. A prodigy no longer, he turned to the writing of concertos, often placing himself in the starring role. He taught, tailoring his instruction to the strengths of his pupils. He fell in love with the beautiful soprano Aloisia Weber, only later to marry her sister Constanze. All the same, he chafed at the relative confines of Salzburg. No irritant was greater than his employer, the new archbishop, Hieronymus Colloredo. Colloredo was a proud progressive who treated those beneath him with contempt. Bristling at being considered a servant, Mozart sought to extricate himself from the archbishop's grasp, searching in vain for employment elsewhere. Now that the course of his career was no longer being dictated by his father, Mozart, writes Swafford, "proceeded to bungle nearly every opportunity that presented itself." He showed up established composers, complained when asked to perform on inadequate instruments, and couldn't quite conceal his disgust at the poor taste of potential patrons. Things came to a head in 1781. Colloredo was so sick of Mozart's scheming and insolence that he had him booted out the door. Out the door, Swafford adds, and "into his glory."

Mozart's glory came during the ten years of 1781–91, when he called Vienna home. Among its fruits are his last half-dozen symphonies. The final three of these, his very best, were composed in about six weeks. Paying homage to Haydn, the father of the string quartet, Mozart published the six "Haydn" quartets in 1785. Swafford quotes the dedication, in which Mozart warmly reveals how much the elder composer's "approbation" meant to him. The seventeen piano concertos of the Vienna period, Swafford writes, were "more substantial, bigger in sound . . . more nearly symphonic than any before." Two of these, the K. 449 and the K. 453, are dedicated to his piano student, the virtuosa Barbara Ployer.

And then there are the operas, especially the three with librettos by Lorenzo Da Ponte, *The Marriage of Figaro*, *Così fan tutte*, and *Don Giovanni*. The treatment of these works is a highlight of the book. Take *Figaro*. Swafford traces its development from the 1778 play by

Beaumarchais that mocked the excesses and abuses of the aristocracy. Mozart assigned Da Ponte the task of fashioning a libretto from the play. Da Ponte, it becomes clear, was rather an operatic figure himself. Jewish by birth, a convert to Catholicism, an ardent student of languages, a onetime priest who gave in—completely in—to the pleasures of the flesh, Da Ponte reduced the number of characters and simplified the plot, endowing the story with a briskness and naturalness that suited Mozart's purpose to a T. Swafford notes the contributions of the soprano Nancy Storace, whom he calls “the soul of the first production,” and the tenor Michael Kelly, who talked the composer into accepting his stuttering delivery in the sextet from the third act. This opera gave Mozart enormous satisfaction. Not long after the 1786 premiere in Vienna, he wrote a friend about the production in Prague. “[H]ere they talk about nothing but *Figaro*. Nothing is played, sung or whistled but *Figaro*. Nothing is drawing like *Figaro*. Nothing, nothing but *Figaro*.” “*Figaro*,” adds Swafford, “is as close to perfect as Mozart ever came, which is to say as close as opera ever came.”

The author of biographies of Beethoven, Brahms, and Charles Ives, Swafford is a fluent writer with a sharp eye for detail. As he states in the introduction to the present book, “I am primarily a composer, and I write biographies of composers from that point of view.” The amount of musical analysis the book contains is substantial—for non-specialists, perhaps too substantial. While examples set out in notation are absent, the more readers know about the technical side of music, the better.

Mozart's life came to an end with a miraculous last act. *The Magic Flute*, the clarinet concerto, “Ave Verum Corpus,” the beginnings of the *Requiem*—these were among the immortal works of 1791. Mozart died early that December. He was thirty-five years old. “The gods, nature, whatever it was that made Mozart,” writes Swafford, “had indifferently created a miracle, and indifferently let it be erased long before its time”; “[T]he gods do not care.” He is wrong. The gods do care: who else could have given us the music of Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart?

And everything in its place

Judith Flanders

A Place for Everything: The Curious History of Alphabetical Order.
Basic Books, 352 pages, \$30

reviewed by Anthony Daniels

So accustomed are we to alphabetical order, and so much do we take it for granted, that we assume it is an entirely natural way of ordering things rather than a means of classification that had to be invented. A moment's reflection, though, ought to be sufficient to persuade us that alphabetical order is not a synthetic a priori judgment, *à la* Kant. In addition to the fact that people whose system of writing is not alphabetic have nevertheless managed to order things successfully, to judge by their level of civilization, it is obvious that alphabetical order is something that we have to learn to employ rather than know by instinct, though I admit to having no recollection whatever of how or when I learned to employ it.

Such order has since become second nature to me, as it is to everyone else of my acquaintance, which is why, before reading this book, I had never considered its history. Whatever has not always existed has an origin story, however, and it was a clever idea of the social historian Judith Flanders to write that story, in a book entitled *A Place for Everything*. Without in the least meaning to, she makes us—or me—feel slightly foolish for never having thought about it before.

For anyone who has long taken alphabetical order for granted, it will surely come as a surprise that the history of its development was so tortuous and took so long. One cannot point to an Archimedes of alphabetical order who had a sudden flash of inspiration in the bath, or library; there was no bibliographical Kekulé who dreamed of alphabetical order as the organic chemist is said to have dreamed of the benzene ring.

Alphabetical order developed incrementally. The author tells us that the scrolls in the Alexandrian library were divided first by subject but were then stored according to the first

letter—though whether this was of the title, the author, or a further subdivision of the subject we do not know. Furthermore, alphabetical order was by first letter only, all As, Bs, etc. being lumped together with no further alphabetical ordering. We would suppose that once the first step to alphabetical ordering was taken, it would be obvious that universal alphabetical ordering would follow as the night the day: Austen before Austin, for example. But this was not the case. It took hundreds of years for the final step to be taken.

Like so much else—at least as I was taught history—the notion of alphabetical order, such as it had previously existed, was lost in the Dark Ages, and revived only slowly. Both books and written documents were uncommon, particularly back when individuals, not teams of scribes, copied books. Parchment was not a medium suitable for dashing off quick notes. A collection of two hundred fifty books counted as very large, but it was well within the capacity of any custodian of them to put his hand on any of them, so convenience of access was not a problem.

Nevertheless, they were put in order, though a hierarchical one. First came the Gospels, then the Acts of the Apostles, then the Church fathers, commentaries on the Gospels, etc., and then profane literature if any.

As books became more numerous and bureaucracy grew in size, a better—which is to say more convenient—means of classification was necessary. Documents that were stored in date order were not easy to refer to if there were many of them and dates were uncertain. Once the number of books surpassed the ability of any one person to locate them in a collection, some other means had to be found. Moreover, when books were few, scholars—who were also few—were expected to be able to find their place in any book they wanted to refer to, much as advocates in court are now expected to have mastered the papers in a case (and which they often do to a quite admirable extent), or a Koranic scholar knows the whole of the Koran by heart. But this was no longer possible when books became numerous, subject matter more diverse, and cross-referencing more difficult and sophisticated. The idea of

indexing took hold, but initially only with first-letter alphabetical order.

There was ideological resistance to alphabetical order, one of the last objectors being Coleridge. The hierarchical way of arranging books pointed to a stable worldview; the method symbolized the great chain of being which gave order and meaning to the universe. Alphabetical order, by contrast, was arbitrary, symbolizing the one-damned-thing-after-another view of life. In English, ants come before bees, but in French, ants come after bees; which, then, was higher or lower in the great chain of being?

Alphabetical order reduced the sense of hierarchy, even though there is a natural human tendency for people to think that what comes first, starting with the letter A, is more important and better than what starts with the letter B and so forth. (Nowhere is a C mark in an examination higher than a B.) Buyers of secondhand books will have noticed a tendency for hand-written annotations to become more infrequent and die out altogether the further on in the book they go.

Of course, there are ways of indicating importance in a classification other than where a thing classified comes in the order. Length or elaboration of entry in an encyclopedia is a telling clue to the importance of a subject (though we should remember that importance is not a natural quality, and requires a human mind to ascribe it). Thus “armadillo” is not more important than “Aaron,” the brother of Moses, just because it is found earlier in the encyclopedia.

As the author points out, the salience of alphabetical listing has declined with digitalization. To look up something on Wikipedia, I don’t have to know where it is stored relative to anything else: I just type in the name of the object of my inquiry and up comes the answer. Try as I might not to allow Wikipedia to make judgments for me, the length of the entry affects my estimation of the importance of the subject that I have looked up.

I am not qualified to say whether the author’s account of the development of alphabetical order is accurate or her interpretations of the evidence, much of which is very arcane, at least

to 99.99 percent of a general readership, are reasonable. I wish that she had not used the odious, weaselly, and absurd—but now very widespread—“B.C.E.” for “B.C.” and “C.E.” for “A.D.,” surely a manifestation of modern ideological mania. I should be interested to know whether the author chose to do so herself, or whether it was imposed upon her by sub-editors with the mentality of Soviet apparatchiks.

The way in which we classify the things, people, and events in the world is very important, but there is no way that is correct for all purposes. One of my projects in retirement is to classify and catalogue my books, some thirty thousand of them, in time for my relict to sell them to a bookseller at a knock-down price merely to disembarass herself and the house of them. How do I classify them? Alphabetical order plays a part, but only a part. Nobody else looking at the books would understand the way they are arranged. My classification, an autobiography of sorts, is unique and dies with me.

Same old story

Paul Betts

*Ruin and Renewal:
Civilizing Europe after World War II.*
Basic Books, 544 pages, \$35

reviewed by Daniel Johnson

The decline of civilization is as old as civilization itself. From Cassandra of Troy to Marx and Nietzsche, from Augustine of Hippo to Rousseau and Gibbon, the lamentations of latter-day Jeremiahs echo down the centuries. Never does the chorus of doom swell more volubly than in the aftermath of conflict. The Great War enabled Oswald Spengler’s *Decline of the West* to reinvent the genre of cultural pessimism. The Second World War turned the discourse of decline into a cascade of catastrophe.

No sooner had civilization seemingly survived destruction on an apocalyptic scale than the rival intelligentsias of East and West vied with one another to dramatize its predicament. The guns fell silent on the battlefields

of Europe, but the battle for the soul of civilization raged on: in classrooms and lecture halls, on the airwaves and the conference circuits, in press and parliament, throughout the Cold War and beyond. Having plumbed the depths of barbarism, Europe saw itself in a new light—or twilight, rather. For the West, it was the dawn of a new, democratic age of prosperity, led by the nations of the free world; for the Communist East, it was the dusk of “late capitalism,” of a dying imperial order that would soon be swept into oblivion.

Paul Betts has made it his mission to investigate this post-war era, a lost world yet still living in memory. His *Ruin and Renewal: Civilizing Europe after World War II* uses the mutating notion of civilization as a framework to examine Europe in the period during which it finally and irrevocably conceded global hegemony. His labors have divined new sources to irrigate the scorched earth of the Cold War landscape, from etiquette books that taught West Germans how not to behave like Nazis to the literature produced by Marxist-Leninist anthropologists who envisaged Africa as a laboratory for socialist experimentation. An expert on Communist East Germany, Betts bends over backwards to be fair to the Soviets and their allies. The vivid vocabulary of the West—“the free world,” say, “totalitarian” or “evil empire”—is excluded. So are the crimes that gave rise to international communism.

The climax of the book is a chapter devoted to “World Civilization,” which is an illuminating—if occasionally rose-tinted—account of the early years of UNESCO: the United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization. Fueled by the hopes of the “greatest generation,” a utopian cosmopolitanism was very much part of the zeitgeist and, until many of the new global institutions were hijacked by anti-Western forces, not the most ignoble of legacies. Alas, UNESCO, like other similar organizations, has been taken over by the very people it should shun. The United States, its most generous donor, has twice left UNESCO because of its outrageous bias against Israel—most recently in 2017 after the body designated Hebron’s Old City and Tomb of the Patriarchs, the second holiest site in Judaism, as a

“Palestinian” World Heritage site thanks to its “Islamic” history. As I write, it has just elected to its Intergovernmental Committee for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Heritage none other than the Syria Trust for Development, a front organization of Bashar al-Assad, run by his wife Asma. The Assad regime is responsible for the destruction of most of Syria’s world heritage sites—which UNESCO is meant to protect. Yet Betts writes blithely that UNESCO still carries on its work of preservation “under the banner of world civilization.” No: under the banner of a genocidal dictator.

Much of the book is an admirable effort of empirical research, rediscovering largely forgotten episodes such as the trial and incarceration in 1949 of Cardinal Mindszenty, the Prince Primate of Hungary, by the newly established Communist regime of Mátyás Rákosi. The key terms in the conceptual armory of liberalism, such as human rights and international law, acquired their modern meanings during the epoch of decolonization. Betts surveys the furious controversies in which they emerged, citing not only the leaders of movements against colonialism, but defenders of empire, too. The latter included passionate advocates of the European idea: the Belgian Foreign Minister Paul-Henri Spaak, who ensured that colonies such as the Congo were included as “associate members” of the European Economic Community, as part of a revamped *mission civilisatrice* known as “Eurafrica.” Then there was Carl Schmitt, the former “crown jurist” of the Third Reich, who deplored the abandonment of the *Ius Publicum Europaeum*, the Eurocentric view of law and civilization rooted in medieval Christendom. What would later become the European Union—which is indeed a kind of secularized Holy Roman Empire—has had some strange bedfellows.

Yet the animating idea behind this baggy monster of a book is rather more polemical than simply a post-war panorama of a divided Europe redefining its own civilization and acknowledging others. Educated at Haverford College and the University of Chicago, Betts is now Professor of European History at St Antony’s College, Oxford—a graduate

foundation with a focus on international relations and global development, with strong institutional connections to the European Union. However academically prestigious, the dons of St Antony’s are anything but neutral on certain contentious issues such as migration, Brexit, or Trump. The college has this in common with the rest of Oxford and indeed almost all universities in the United Kingdom, United States, and European Union, but opinion there is probably even more unanimous than elsewhere. Hence one might expect Professor Betts to frame his view of the recent past through the prism of our present discontents. He does not disappoint.

In fact, the Bettsian view of the world in 2021 is at least as apocalyptic as any of the thinkers he invokes from the late 1940s. In a final chapter, ominously titled “New Iron Curtains,” he paints an alarming picture of a European continent in the grip of “right-wing nationalism, tribal populism and anti-Muslim xenophobia.” Half of all border walls built since 1945 have been erected after the 9/11 attacks of 2001, he tells us, as “demands to protect civilization under threat have accompanied the fortification of new Iron Curtains So there is a new specter haunting Europe, and it goes by the old name of civilization.”

Betts sets out his case with a familiar litany of villains: “strong-arm leaders across the world—from Hungary to Turkey, Russia to Egypt, China to the United States—have deployed [civilization] to bolster their conservative political outlook.” His, too, is a vision of decline, from the universalist conception of civilization in the post-war era—associated with “science, comfort, rights, and protecting civilians in war zones”—to one of “sharp boundaries,” “religious fundamentalism,” and “ethnic homogeneity.”

Betts concedes that “the ongoing recasting of civilization is not simply a story of doom and gloom.” But where does he look for solace? Not to the West, but to “Chinese sociologists” who are said to be “rethinking the history of ‘communist civilization.’” Others, “especially in China,” talk of “ecological civilization.” Betts argues that the COVID pandemic has “brought with it a renewed one-world planetary con-

sciousness about the mortality of humanity and civilization itself?” He hopes for “concerted action based on more universal values to preserve the future of our species.”

Historians are not obliged to be politically impartial, but it is an absurd anachronism to describe as “new Iron Curtains” the attempts by European and American countries to protect themselves against illegal mass migration. “Iron Curtain” was of course coined by Winston Churchill at Westminster College in Fulton, Missouri, in 1946: it had everything to do with the emerging Cold War and nothing to do with migration. The post-war era was one of huge population movements in Europe, notably the expulsion of up to fourteen million ethnic Germans, mainly from Poland and Czechoslovakia, to the western zones of Germany. Such east–west migrations continued until the erection of the Berlin Wall in 1961. Large numbers of “guest workers” also arrived by invitation to provide cheap labor, but they had limited civil and political rights. The collective social security of the welfare state requires a society with shared values. Where those values are absent—as in more recent migrations from Africa, Asia, and the Middle East—the impact on host populations is bound to be different from that of earlier upheavals within Europe. Despite the difficulties of integrating some, mainly Muslim, migrants, attempts by European nation-states to reassert sovereignty over their borders have not been accompanied by serious ethnic or religious conflicts. But jihadist terrorism and political Islam have undoubtedly made it harder to integrate some Muslim asylum seekers, particularly if they arrive undocumented and in large numbers. Yet the tensions that have inevitably arisen serve only to demonstrate the robustness of civil liberties, democracy, and the rule of law in Europe. The present debate in France, in which President Macron is reasserting Republican secularism (“*laïcité*”) against Islamist “separatism” is, thus far, quite civilized. As for the notion that Brexit has unleashed a wave of racism and xenophobia in the United Kingdom: this canard has been refuted many times. In reality, the British emerge from polling data as more tolerant than their

Continental neighbors; this is one reason for the absence from the Westminster Parliament of extreme right-wing parties.

Nor is it the case that the West has erased the developing world from either its consciousness or its conscience. The levels of international aid now flowing south, whether from governments or NGOs, dwarf anything seen in the post-war era. More significantly, the rising nations of Africa, Asia, and Latin America have—with a few notorious exceptions—abandoned the socialist models foisted on them by Soviet-led initiatives from the 1950s to the 1970s. As a result, poverty has fallen dramatically. The danger now is the neo-colonial influence of China, which has just extinguished the independence of Hong Kong, one of the first great post-war Asian success stories. If there is a threat to law, liberty, and democracy in the world, it comes not from the West, but—as in the Cold War—from Beijing and Moscow.

Betts concludes his threnody to a lost era of progressive politics by calling as an improbable witness the novelist V. S. Naipaul—who, though Betts does not say so, was just as proud of his adoptive British citizenship as of his native Trinidad or his Indian ancestry. In a 1990 lecture in New York on “Our Universal Civilization,” the writer paid tribute to “the extraordinary attempt of this civilization to accommodate the rest of the world, and all the currents of that world’s thought.” Betts leaves open the question of whether Naipaul was speaking of the past or the future. But the authority of a Nobel laureate is clearly being invoked to suggest that, in the thirty years since, the “universal civilization” of which he spoke has been occluded by “conservative” forces.

I must declare an interest: *Standpoint*, a monthly magazine that I founded and edited for eleven years, was dedicated to the defense of Western civilization. According to Professor Betts, this puts me in the reactionary camp. It doesn’t help that the values we spoke up for are also those of the Enlightenment: expecting others to respect our liberties is “Eurocentric.” Defining that civilization as Judeo-Christian only makes matters worse. The language of civilization renders its defenders suspect.

Yet a leading member of my editorial advisory board was Naipaul. He read every issue and often sent appreciative messages via his wife, Nadira. He and I agreed implicitly on what we meant by civilization. It was indeed, as he said in that 1990 speech, universal—in the sense that it was open to all. But it owed everything, nevertheless, to the Western civilization that gave birth to it. His view of what it was to be civilized, like the Manhattan Institute where he delivered it, was conservative: as in Matthew Arnold’s definition of culture, it was the best of what has been thought and said. As he said in that speech, his family had come from India: “We were a people of ritual and sacred texts.” Original literary composition had no place. Somehow, in Trinidad, “an idea of the high civilization connected with the [English] language came to my father.” His father passed on the idea of being a writer, and Vidya realized that his vocation required him to move to England. Naipaul was deeply versed in what Goethe called *Weltliteratur*, the great books of all languages, but he chose the Anglosphere as his audience and Anglo-American literature as his frame of reference. He was a global version of the English man of letters and identified fiercely with the civilization that had made it possible for him to be a writer.

In his Manhattan speech, he reflected on his travels in Muslim lands and on the confrontation between Islam and the “universal” civilization created by the West. And then he recalled his hosts. Without even naming the

United States, Naipaul paid tribute: “This idea of the pursuit of happiness is at the heart of the attractiveness of this civilization to so many outside it or on its periphery.” That pursuit is “an elastic idea; it fits all men. . . . It cannot be reduced to a fixed system. It cannot generate fanaticism. But it is known to exist; and because of that, other more rigid systems in the end blow away.”

That prescient speech, given immediately after the fall of the Berlin Wall and more than a decade before 9/11, explains rather well why those who lament the decline and fall of Western civilization are likely to be proved wrong. Naipaul would have rejected the nostalgia of liberals like Professor Betts for a lost golden age of the mid-twentieth century. By the time Naipaul died in 2018, he was reviled by the progressive intelligentsia. No longer content to be merely a pioneer of postcolonial literature, he had become a voice in the wilderness, or rather a defiant watchman standing guard over the civilization he loved. He loved it so much, indeed, that he could be caustic about his heritage, even though this infuriated liberals. Asked why he left Trinidad, he replied: “To join civilization.” But he always took seriously the threats from those who have always rejected our universal civilization: the Islamists and communists, the fanatics and totalitarians of all stripes. His most quoted line remains: “The world is what it is.” Only our civilization, embattled as it is, can redeem it.

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Mario Bois' Bureau de Musique

by Charles Cronin

Of the dozens of family-run music publishers that flourished in Paris in the early twentieth century, only a handful remain, including Editions Enoch et Cie and Editions Lemoine. Both of these houses, over one hundred and two hundred years old, respectively, have survived, in part, by specializing in the music of French composers, and by forging close personal relationships with living musicians whose works they publish. In addition to selling print copies of their editions, they rent instrumental parts of their published orchestral scores and charge fees when their editions are used for public performances. Given the drastic decline of Paris's once-vigorous print music publishing industry, musicians will be heartened to learn that a relatively recent addition to this dwindling cadre of publishers, the eponymous Bureau de Musique Mario Bois, is celebrating its fiftieth anniversary.

In 1979, Jacques Barzun wrote an introduction for the Da Capo Press reprint of Cecil Hopkinson's *Dictionary of Parisian Music Publishers*, self-published by the author in London in 1954. Even knowing Barzun's extraordinarily catholic interests, his panegyric on the deeply obscure Hopkinson and his *Dictionary* seems peculiar until one realizes how vital Hopkinson's earlier Berlioz *Bibliography* was to Barzun's magisterial two-volume treatment of the composer, published in 1950.

Barzun describes how Hopkinson, loath to apply his education in engineering to his family's construction business, established himself as the proprietor of First Editions Books in

London. Here he sold first editions of scores, and books about music, while working assiduously on catalogues and bibliographies of editions of works by Gluck, Puccini, and other musicians. Barzun described Hopkinson's lifework as "exemplifying the tradition of amateur scholarship—'amateur' meaning, of course, neither haphazard nor careless, but merely non-academic." Without the baggage of an academic training in music, "he retained intellectual independence and full freedom for his imagination."

Hopkinson documented 550 music publishers operating in Paris between 1700 and 1950. Unlike in Germany, where music publishers were distributed in cities throughout the country, in unitary-state France music publishers were concentrated in Paris. Until the professionalization of the industry in the early nineteenth century, French music publishing houses were uncommonly promiscuous, offering, in addition to printed music, instruments, pictures, stationery, and in one case lingerie.

Beginning in the early twentieth century, the juggernaut of the music sound-recording industry gradually decimated the ranks of printed music publishers worldwide. Several of the most prominent French music publishing houses, like Durand and Salabert, survived by consolidating. Even these houses ultimately persevered only through acquisition by the American conglomerate Universal Music, their commercial significance now sadly inconsequential compared to that of the dozens of record labels generating Universal's profits.

The ineluctable development of audio recording technology, particularly in the latter half of the twentieth century, engendered not only galloping musical illiteracy but also the nearly universal passive “consumption” of musical works from recorded performances. These developments devitalized hundreds of small music print publishers and sellers in European and American cities. At once-venerated shops like Patelson’s in New York and Byron Hoyt in San Francisco, educated (i.e., literate) musicians used to spend hours silently perusing unfamiliar scores, perhaps quietly humming a passage here and there—as Oliver Sacks reports his father did, between appointments with patients, conjuring performances by reading miniature scores of symphonic works. Even these institutions have folded; today musicians buy their scores online, in isolation. While the internet and digital technologies have made it easier to locate not only printed scores of esoteric works but also “virtual” scores that are marvelously manipulable, they too have contributed to the desuetude of these brick-and-mortar musical havens.

I met Mario Bois thirty years ago while I was a graduate student in musicology. I had transcribed what was identified as an unpublished autograph sketch of *Souvenir d’Aix*, a suite of waltzes by Jacques Offenbach, which I came across in Stanford’s underappreciated Memorial Library of Music. The late conductor and Offenbach promoter Antonio d’Almeida put me in touch with Bois, who published my transcription. Offenbach’s charming suite has now been heard—likely for the first time, as Offenbach never drafted a complete score from which the work could be performed—through performances and recordings made possible by Bois’ publication of my transcription.

Attempting to locate Mario Bois’ Bureau de Musique in Paris, I realized why there is no French phrase for “city block.” None of the taxi drivers who drove me to my handful of visits there was familiar with Rue de Rocroy, a crooked sliver of a street in a neighborhood west of the Gare du Nord. More than once I was horribly late, having located No. 19 only

after a good deal of re-consulting maps, and re-tracing steps. On one occasion Bois, invariably gracious but undoubtedly chagrined by my unpunctual arrival, gave me a copy of his most recent book, *Beethoven et l’hymne de l’Europe*, inscribing a dedication comprising a compliment followed by “et à la fois un homme insupportable.” Liliane Segura-Marie, Bois’ *soignée* aide-de-camp, always greeted me warmly, humoring my clumsy spoken French while leading me through a warren of bookshelves en route to his office, which was overflowing with books, scores, pictures, and cigarette smoke.

Bois has written over twenty books, about musicians, painters, and dancers—including Stravinsky and Nureyev, both of whom he knew well. Stravinsky, who had been an American citizen and Los Angeles resident since 1945, often visited Paris during the 1960s. The Paris branch of Stravinsky’s publisher, Boosey & Hawkes, assigned Bois, then a young employee of the firm, to join Stravinsky’s entourage during his sojourns in Paris. Through this assignment Bois became acquainted with not only Stravinsky and his second wife, Vera, but also his wide circle of friends and collaborators, including Picasso, Artur Rubenstein, and Jean Cocteau. Most significantly, he befriended Rudolf Nureyev, the dancer who remained in Paris after his dramatic defection from the Soviet Union, accomplished at Paris’s Le Bourget airport in 1961. Nureyev was close to Claire Motte, an *étoile* at the Ballet de l’Opéra national de Paris, and later, under Nureyev’s leadership, its ballet mistress. In 1964 she married Bois; they had two sons during their twenty-two years together until Motte’s untimely death from cancer in 1986.

In 1989, Nureyev broached with Bois plans for a new full production of *Bayadère*. Bois informed Nureyev that he would be unable to publish an edition of the music for Nureyev’s arrangement of the ballet because Ludwig Minkus’s complete score was available only at the Mariinsky and Bolshoi theaters. In 1987, however, with Mikhail Gorbachev’s permission, Nureyev had visited Moscow for the first time in twenty-five years. And although his visit to the Soviet Union was limited to forty-eight

hours, he managed to obtain a photocopy of the Bolshoi's complete score for *Bayadère*, which he presented to Bois after pitching his idea for a new production of the ballet. Nureyev, however, or whoever operated the photocopier at the Bolshoi, had made horizontal copies of vertically oriented pages, thereby lopping off significant portions of Minkus's score. Also, and in a classic Soviet moment, the toner of the photocopier was exhausted before Nureyev completed the job, so the music on the pages toward the end of the run was barely legible.

Upon confronting the chaotic sheaf Nureyev proffered, Bois summoned his friend John Lanchbery, who joined Nureyev and Bois, puzzling for innumerable hours through hundreds of sketchy pages to re-assemble Minkus's score. Lanchbery, a former music director of the American Ballet Theatre, had arranged and re-orchestrated the music for well-known ballets including *Giselle* and *Don Quixote*, as well as that of dozens of other works which he converted to ballets, including operas like Lehár's *Merry Widow*. He had also collaborated with Natalia Makarova, who, in 1980, directed at ABT the first complete *Bayadère* performed outside the Soviet Union. According to *The Washington Post*, when Makarova appealed to pre-Perestroika Soviets for a copy of Minkus's full score, she got nowhere. Fortunately for her, a decade earlier Harvard's Houghton Library had acquired the Sergejev Collection, an enormous trove of documents relating to Russian ballet of the late imperial period. It contains Sergejev's manuscript of the complete dance score, which documents Petipa's choreography for *Bayadère*, as well as a répétiteur's score in which Minkus's music is reduced to an arrangement for two violins. Makarova and Lanchbery used these sources, as well as Makarova's recollections from her performances years earlier of an abbreviated version of the ballet at the Kirov, to cobble together a score for her full-length production.

Lanchbery subsequently wrote an arrangement based upon the reconstituted Minkus score, which was used in Nureyev's acclaimed production of *Bayadère*, first performed in 1992 by the Opéra national de Paris. Bois published this, and many other Lanchbery scores, that are still widely used by ballet companies today.

(One often encounters the names Lanchbery and Bois in the programs for ABT performances.) Nureyev designated Bois executor of the rights to his choreographic works, and Bois' firm continues to manage the performance rights and associated royalties for Nureyev's revised choreographies for *Swan Lake*, *Sleeping Beauty*, and many other ballets.

The variety of musical works published and sold by Mario Bois' Bureau de Musique reflects the wide-ranging artistic curiosity of its founder, but particularly his dedication to ballet and works by relatively unknown French composers. In 2016, recognizing Bois' decades of entrepreneurship promoting the performing arts in France, the French Cultural Ministry designated him, among a distinguished cohort including Yo Yo Ma and Marion Cotillard, an Officer of the *Ordre des Arts et des Lettres*. Now on the brink of his ninetieth birthday, Bois is retired, having relocated from his home near the Palais Garnier to Bordeaux. Thierry Fouquet, a former director of the Opéra National de Bordeaux, now heads Bois' Bureau de Musique, which has also relocated, thirty miles south from its raffish neighborhood in Paris's Tenth Arrondissement, to Boissettes, a leafy suburb on the Seine.

Unlike the dozens of long-established music publishers and music shops in Paris that folded during the twentieth century, Bois' Bureau de Musique, founded in the 1970s, has survived because its mission is grounded by the concinities of the specialized interests of its founder in music, visual art, and dance. Bois once mentioned to me that his affection for Paris was based on its human scale (unlike New York, where I was living at the time) that allowed one to be aware of the city's modulating "poetic rhythm." The human scale of Bois' enterprise, delineated by the topics and related artifacts of his eclectic but focused curiosity, provides a similar foundation. It has always been more an *oeuvre de l'esprit* than a tangible creation and, as such, is contingent upon an ongoing appreciation of its founder's artistic sensibilities and curatorial finesse. As he, and his Bureau de Musique, turn ninety and fifty respectively, I wish them both *joyeux anniversaire et longévité*.

James T. Demetrion, 1930–2020

by *Eric Gibson*

Sometimes under-the-radar lives do more to illuminate a particular moment than the brightest blips on the scope. Such is the case with James T. Demetrion, the director of the Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden for sixteen years beginning in 1985, who died in Washington, D.C., a few days after Thanksgiving last year, at the age of ninety.

In his time, Demetrion was not an art world celebrity. This had nothing to do with his abilities and everything to do with his personality. Down-to-earth, self-deprecating, and partial to loud neckties, Demetrion was the antithesis of the suave, smooth-talking director out of central casting—a man more comfortable operating behind the scenes than working a room.

Yet reflecting on his career from the vantage point of today, it seems clear that he was, if not the last, then very nearly the last of a breed that emerged in this country between the two World Wars and that is exemplified by MOMA's founding director, Alfred H. Barr, Jr.: the scholar-connoisseur who had art in his bones, and for whom the shaping of an institution was a kind of creative act.

Demetrion was born in 1930 in Ohio, the son of Greek immigrants. He came to art relatively late, while stationed in Europe with the U.S. Army in the early 1950s after college. He returned to Europe a little later on a Fulbright scholarship for graduate study on the work of Egon Schiele. But he never completed any advanced degrees.

He came to the Hirshhorn after sixteen years running the Des Moines Art Center, succeeding Abram Lerner, the founding di-

rector and Joseph H. Hirshhorn's longtime curator. Though it had been open as a public museum of European and American modern art of the late nineteenth and twentieth centuries for just over a decade, the Hirshhorn still bore the stamp of a private collection, its holdings large, eclectic, and unbalanced. The museum, housed in Gordon Bunshaft's Brutalist donut, had opened in October 1974 with about six thousand objects. (A bequest after Hirshhorn's death in 1981 boosted that number to around twelve thousand.) The collection included pre-Columbian art, Persian miniatures, Benin bronzes, and Eskimo carvings. As well as acquiring across a broad front, Hirshhorn collected certain artists in depth, among them Henry Moore, David Smith, Elie Nadelman, and even Thomas Eakins.

The Hirshhorn was famous for its outstanding collection of modern sculpture, Rodin to around the mid-twentieth century. Outside of MOMA there was nothing like it—Raymond Nasher's collection wouldn't go public until 2003. Things were a little rougher around the edges with the paintings. Reviewing the inaugural installation for *The New York Times*, Hilton Kramer found that outside the Eakins holdings, the nineteenth-century American paintings “do not add up to a significant museum survey”; early American modernism “is one of the most viable sections”; but Abstract Expressionism was “unevenly represented,” with only a few Gorkys, de Koonings, and Stills. The 1960s, however—“op, pop, color-field painting, the realist revival, and much else”—were extremely

well accounted for, though “as we come closer and closer to the present day, the effort to include one of everything, whether good, bad, or indifferent, is unmistakable and dreary.”

The “present day”—the mid-1970s—was pretty much where the collection stopped. Demetrian was brought in to tidy things up—to give the collection more coherence and shape while hewing to Hirshhorn’s modernist vision—and to turn it into a living museum by collecting contemporary art. In this latter effort he was the beneficiary of one final Hirshhorn gift: the freedom to sell anything to acquire more art. So he went to work.

In the press release announcing Demetrian’s death, the current Hirshhorn director, Melissa Chiu, true to the zeitgeist, praised him for having “diversified” the collection. And it’s true that he acquired work by artists such as David Hammons, Glenn Ligon, Ana Mendieta, Nam June Paik, and Eva Hesse. But that blinkered view shortchanges Demetrian’s singular talent as an acquirer, which combined both breadth of vision and sharp focus. You get a more accurate picture of his accomplishments from a May 1986 *Washington Post* story. In just his first eighteen months as director, it said, Demetrian acquired a 1985 Frank Stella relief; a Robert Irwin disk; sculptures by Deborah Butterfield, Claes Oldenburg, Ed and Nancy Kienholz, Isamu Noguchi, Robert Arneson, Sol LeWitt, and H. C. Westermann; and paintings by Jean Dubuffet, Richard Diebenkorn, William T. Wiley, Leon Golub, and Anselm Kiefer. By the time he retired in 2001, Demetrian had sold or traded 2,901 objects and acquired more than three hundred works. (“We may be the only modern art museum in the world whose collection has decreased,” he had wryly observed to the *Post* two years earlier.) He was lucky in his timing—the market in the ’80s was red hot, so things sold well. For example, that same 1986 *Washington Post* story reported that Henry Moore’s *Seated Woman* (1956–57), the lesser of two bronze casts of the work the museum owned, had sold for \$990,000, “far above the estimated \$550 to \$750,000.” By the time he retired, Demetrian had parlayed an annual \$150,000 acquisitions budget into a \$30 million endowment fund for purchases.

It’s a measure of Demetrian’s sober temperament and discerning eye that, given the hype attending the emerging artists of the 1980s—Julian Schnabel, Cindy Sherman, Jeff Koons, *et al.*—he did not, as did so many of his colleagues, leap aboard the bandwagon. Those three didn’t enter the collection until well into the 1990s, while others, such as David Salle and Robert Longo, have never made the cut.

Something else that distinguished Demetrian’s tenure was that he organized exhibitions: monographic shows on Francis Bacon (1989), Jean Dubuffet (1993), Stanley Spencer (1997), and Clyfford Still (2001). These averaged out to one every four years, a remarkable feat given the demands of his “day job” as director. The Dubuffet show was a revelation to me—I have never forgotten the figure composed of a collage of butterfly wings—and a typical reflection of Demetrian’s independent mind. I had known this artist only from his anodyne late work, exemplified by his *Group of Four Trees* (1970–72) in New York’s Chase Manhattan Plaza. Demetrian’s show began just after World War II with the artist’s discovery of “art brut”—the work of children and the insane—through which he sought to arrive at a more authentic mode of expression, and stopped in the early 1960s, mercifully short of the late phase. Reviewing the show for the September 1993 issue of this magazine, I wrote,

Dubuffet differs from today’s “transgressive” artists in that his tactics weren’t undertaken solely for their own sake. What invariably surfaces in Dubuffet’s churning aesthetic is a deep humanity. The gnarled figure of a vintner in *The Soul of Morvan*—a sculpture made out of twisted grape vines and roots—is an expression of aesthetic opportunity, to be sure. It shows Dubuffet working at the extreme end of the found-object aesthetic, “seeing” in the random configuration of natural objects a human figure and doing little more in the way of artistic manipulation than simple assembly. Yet beyond the purely aesthetic aspect of this work one senses an identification of the artist with his subject, a Millet-like admiration for the dignity and difficulty of work on the land. This emotion is present in virtually all of Dubuffet’s work, even the most comic.

I got to know Demetrian in the early 1990s when I worked at *The Washington Times* and so discovered another of his singular characteristics. I was the art critic, but since we were a small staff and there were pages to fill, I doubled as the art feature writer. And so one day my editor assigned me a series of interviews with the city's art museum directors as they led me on tours of their collections. These yielded good conversations, even memorable ones. J. Carter Brown, at the National Gallery, stunned me by pointing out a painting, an Eakins, he said he had once disliked. I'd never heard a museum director make such an admission and made a point to include it in my story. But it's Demetrian's tour that has remained with me across the decades. For one thing, it was anything but the "Greatest Hits" I was expecting. It was personal, even idiosyncratic. Rodin (*The Burghers of Calais*) and Willem de Kooning (*Two Women in the Country*) were the only marquee names on the tour. For the rest we looked at works by Giorgio Morandi, Dubuffet, Thomas Hart Benton, and the now undeservedly forgotten Czech Cubist sculptor Otto Gutfreund. But what has really stuck in my mind is Demetrian's ability to talk about works of art spontaneously, insightfully, and with deep feeling. "I was just astonished at all the color that's in this work that appears to be basically gray with little touches of violet and yellow and blue," he said of Morandi's 1943 *Still Life*. "This background color—all kinds of pinks and yellows there." All the others had talked about what their works meant to art history or to their institutions. With Demetrian, the tour was about what they meant to *him*. I'd never heard a museum director talk like that before, nor have I since.

Sadly, the post-Demetrian Hirshhorn has become a very different place. Where he stood for substance, his two most recent successors (there have been four since he retired) have opted for spectacle. Richard Koshalek took over in 2009 and immediately started planning "The Bubble," an inflatable event space designed by Diller Scofidio + Renfro that would have protruded 150 feet up through the central opening and out one side at ground level like a bubble-

gum balloon on a rampage. By 2013, delays, escalating costs, and projections of millions in operating losses doomed the project, causing Koshalek to resign. Since succeeding him, Melissa Chiu, like so many of her colleagues, has gone all in on contemporary art. And she has opted for crowd-pleasing extravaganzas like the 2017 retrospective of Yayoi Kusama, a serious artist whom that show Disneyfied. It was such a box-office success that Chiu decided to come back for seconds with another Kusama show last year that was postponed owing to COVID-19. And not a single scholarly, historical show has been originated on her watch. On the extracurricular front, for the past two summers Washingtonians have been able to attend the Hirshhorn Ball, hosted on both occasions by a drag queen.

In the wider world of museums, directors no longer organize big shows. They are now more focused on the physical plant—renovating and/or expanding it—than the objects it contains, their removal from art symbolized by the CEO title many have adopted in addition to that of director. Collecting is no longer about connoisseurship but a kind of defensive play—ensuring your institution has a sufficient number of the right sorts of individuals and groups to appease the social media furies.

Then there's deaccessioning. A fact sheet issued by the Hirshhorn following Demetrian's death praised his "deft and prescient" approach. How those words resonate! They came little more than a month after the Baltimore Museum of Art was forced to abandon a plan to sell works by Clyfford Still, Andy Warhol, and Brice Marden to raise money to, among other things, "purchase new works by women and artists of color." In other words, time-tested, irreplaceable paintings were to have been disposed of for work of unknowable long-term significance. And Baltimore is hardly the only museum to have adopted such an ideological, blunt-instrument approach to deaccessioning.

Jim Demetrian was too modest a man ever to have thought of himself this way, but the fact is that he did more than build a great museum collection. He set a standard for the profession—one sorely missed today.