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Commonweal

APRIL 15, 2016

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LETTERS

Unions, Scalia, philosophy requirements

NO FREE RIDES

If Richard W. Garnett's contentions (Letters, March 11) are upheld by the Supreme Court, it is my suggestion to all labor unions that the collective bargaining agreement (CBA) be modified so that only dues-paying members are entitled to the protections of the grievance and arbitration provisions of the agreement. In other words, free-riders would be considered "at will" employees who the employer could discipline or discharge for any reason. Only dues-paying members would have the "just cause" protections of the CBA. Principled free-riders should be willing to accept this difference in their conditions of employment.

MICHAEL PETRELLI
Haddon Township, N. J.

PICK & CHOOSE

Antonin Scalia was well known for the positions you mention in your editorial "An Original" (March 11), to which he held fast except in some of his most memorable cases. He believed in strictly following the words of the Constitution, except for the Second Amendment. He did not think the Court should legislate from the bench, except for campaign finance reform. He thought the Court should honor the democratic processes, except in disputed presidential elections. Some future historian of the Supreme Court, perhaps, will uncover the unifying system that held all this together in Scalia's mind.

LEO GAFNEY
Lakeville, Conn.

UNPROTECTED TEXTS

I want to reply to Robert Harley's letter in your March 11 issue, which itself is a response to Gary Gutting's recent article on Catholic university philosophy requirements ("Intellectual Maintenance," February 12). Harley describes a lackluster experience studying philosophy at Georgetown University more than five decades ago, with the general suggestion that it might not be ideal for philosophy to be a general requirement.

I thought I might offer my take on what it is like to teach freshman philosophy at Duquesne University—right now, in 2016. Our introductory philosophy course is required of all students, irrespective of major, as is a course in ethics. The sole curricular requirement imposed upon those of us who teach the philosophy course is that we cover two Platonic dialogues of our choosing, and either the Descartes' *Meditations* or *Discourse*. The rest is up to us, and every semester in these introductory courses I teach figures like Nietzsche, Marx, and Alison Jaggar. The only other rule is that we are to engage primary sources rather than commentaries. This means that the students actually read Descartes, and they actually read Plato—the opposite of Harley's Georgetown experience. While some students begrudge our philosophy requirements from day one through final exams, every single semester a multitude of students express to me, often anonymously in course evaluations, their very pleasant surprise at what we do in these courses. Philosophy, at least as we approach it at Duquesne, is far from a waste of time—and I think that many students would agree.

PAUL ANTHONY DI GEORGIO
Pittsburgh, Penn.

Let Trump Be Heard

Last month in Chicago, just before the Illinois Republican primary, violence broke out at a Donald Trump rally. Hundreds of anti-Trump demonstrators had gathered in the hall, with protests starting before the candidate was scheduled to appear on stage. Tensions escalated, and Trump postponed the event; when the announcement came that Trump would not appear, punches were thrown and the fighting began. As police tried to restore order, the protesters, and many of their supporters, celebrated. One of them declared, "This is a victory. This is an absolute victory."

It was no such thing. The real victory, of course, would be Trump's: he handily won the Illinois contest, taking more than three-quarters of the state's delegates. And the protests didn't slow his momentum or change the trajectory of the race. What they did do, however, was confirm that the Trump campaign is not the only troubling force in American politics.

The Chicago anti-Trump protests exemplify an ugly strain of illiberalism at work in many corners of American society, one that dismisses freedom of speech as the tool of the privileged and makes the right to political expression contingent on the content of a speaker's views or on one's status as the member of an oppressed group. This would be worrying at any time, but the rise of Trump only makes it more so. It is difficult to imagine a worse context for repudiating liberal, democratic norms than in the face of a Trump candidacy—after all, these are the very norms to which authoritarian demagogues like Trump have so little attachment, and which his presidency would imperil.

No reasonable observer can deny that Trump has, at the least, come very close to encouraging violence at his rallies. His broader views—about Muslims, about immigrants, about women—are appalling. But forcibly shutting down his political events is no answer. Worse, no one stands to lose more from the flouting of constitutional rights and liberal norms than minorities—the very groups the protesters claim to be defending. Would those who disrupted Trump's rally in Chicago be comfortable with giving Trump—or anyone with whom they disagree—the power to shut down their political events and activities? The question answers itself.

The illiberalism of such protests is perhaps most evident on today's college campuses. Take, for example, the dispiriting case of the Emory University students who, last month, saw "Trump 2016" chalked on their sidewalks. The responses were over the top. "I legitimately feared for my life," one undergraduate told the *Daily Beast*. "Some of us were expecting shootings. We feared walking alone," said another. Responding to the demands of the protesters, Emory's president, James W. Wagner, promised to punish those responsible for the Trump graffiti.

In the Emory case and others, the old cliché is true: sunlight is the best disinfectant. Erroneous opinion and bigotry, especially when driven by ignorance, should be held up to public scrutiny, to be seen for what they are. Suppressing the views of Trump's supporters prevents the absurdity of those views from being exposed, while increasing sympathy for him and his "cause" from all those who rail against the strictures of political correctness.

Trump makes a mockery of the most basic principles of democratic self-government and our constitutional order. In place of reason and argument, he threatens to substitute bombast and even force. He disdains freedom of the press, advocating the expansion of libel laws to intimidate reporters. He seems bound by nothing but his own ambition and desire. Trump is the kind of figure that Abraham Lincoln warned of in his Lyceum Address, the would-be American Caesar, the tyrant hailing from "the family of the lion, or the tribe of the eagle." How, Lincoln asked, could our political institutions be perpetuated when such a man arose? Disruption and revenge would do little good against the mob he commanded. Instead, in Lincoln's word, "reason—cold, calculating, unimpassioned reason—must furnish all the materials for our future support and defense." The same could be said today. That means Trump must be allowed to have his say, without interference, so that his own words continue to indict him. There should be no distraction from, or excuse for, his vast ignorance and hate. ■

Paul Baumann

Mailer on Trump

I'm hardly the first person to lament the fact that Norman Mailer, who died in 2007, is not around to help explain what Donald Trump's political apotheosis means for the future of democracy and the fate of the nation. In *Armies of the Night* and *Miami and the Siege of Chicago*, Mailer brought his novelist's skills and mythologizer's imagination to bear on the issues at stake in the Vietnam War and the 1968 political conventions. The Democrats' deliberations in Chicago ended in riots splitting the party, galvanizing "The Silent Majority," and helping Richard Nixon defeat Hubert Humphrey. Trump has predicted riots if he is denied the Republican nomination in Cleveland in July, while simultaneously encouraging and disavowing the violence that has plagued his campaign rallies. What forces and resentments has Trump tapped into in this increasingly polarized nation, for they are surely more than just political? That is the sort of existential question Mailer had an uncanny ability to illuminate.

I've recently reread another of my favorite Mailer pieces, "In the Red Light," on the 1964 Republican convention in San Francisco. That gathering, which also bristled with the threat of violence, carved out a place for movement conservatives in the Republican coalition. The raw antagonism between supporters of Barry Goldwater and the largely East Coast, Waspy Republican "establishment" was as visceral as the much-commented-on "anger" of Trump devotees. *Life* magazine, house organ of the Republican establishment, had dismissed Goldwater as someone with "Guts without depth," "a man of one-sentence solutions." With Trump we seem to have been given a man with no guts, no depth, and one-word solutions.

Mailer had a measure of sympathy and admiration for Arizona Sen. Barry Goldwater and his supporters. He was leery of President Lyndon Johnson's grandiosity, social engineering, and cynicism. Liberalism, Mailer argued, could be as great a threat to individual freedom as the more conservative strains in American politics. "A new leader, a mighty Caesar had arisen," Mailer wrote. "Lyndon Johnson was his name, all hail Caesar. Caesar gave promise to unify the land. But at what a cost.... [Johnson] had vast competence, no vision, and the heart to hold huge power, he had the vanity of a Renaissance prince or a modern dictator."

Despite Mailer's conviction that corporate capitalism was despoiling nature and turning grown Americans into frustrated children—"full of moral indignation and moral vacuity"—he was determined to give a fair hearing to Goldwater and those drawn to him. The clean-cut young people rallying to Goldwater's cause in San Francisco were clearly "idealists," Mailer perceived. "They were thrifty young men, hardworking young men, polite, slightly paralyzed before the variety of life, but ready to die for a cause." For them Goldwater was the leader, not just of a political movement, but of a moral crusade.

Among the delegates, the stakes were more immediate and personal. They were dreaming of a "Republican purge." Their ancestors, in Mailer's accounting, had "won the country, and now they were losing it to the immigrants who had come after and the descendants of slaves." They were aggrieved and appalled at how their homogeneous culture had been hijacked by the moneyed, the glamorous, and the unconventional. "They were loaded with one hatred: The Eastern Establishment was not going to win again, this time Main Street was going to take Wall Street." Sound familiar?

Every decade or two, Mailer speculated, a hurricane blows through one of the nation's political parties. In San Francisco in 1964, the convention was "murderous in mood." Republican belief in moderation and stability, embodied in the presidency of Dwight Eisenhower, gave way, in Goldwater's immortal words, to a new credo: "Extremism in the defense of liberty is no vice.... Moderation in the pursuit of justice no virtue." Or as Donald Trump might express that sentiment, "I'd like to punch him in the face."

Goldwater, an unapologetic advocate of states' rights, had voted against the Civil Rights Bill and called for the use of nuclear weapons in Vietnam. There was little room to his right when it came to combating Communism. As much as Mailer grudgingly admired aspects of Goldwater's character and philosophy, he could not take the Republican Party's anti-tax and small-government hymnal seriously. As long as the United States was determined to be a military superpower and a commercial empire, talk of shrinking government was little more than cynical misdirection from those who had profited enormously by keeping the nation on a constant war footing.

Goldwater, of course, lost to Caesar...er, Lyndon Johnson, in a landslide. He presented a frightening figure to many at the time, but compared to Donald Trump he now seems like a paragon of principle. It was Goldwater's personal integrity that made him a hard case for Mailer. "Goldwater was a demagogue," Mailer conceded. "He was also sincere. That was the damnable difficulty."

Can anyone imagine that Donald Trump is sincere about anything other than his unquenchable love of self and need for adulation? Mailer would have had a field day with Trump's personal crudeness, his lack of wit and imagination, his confidence man's hauteur. Mailer concluded that Goldwater's eagerness to pay any price to fight Communism *everywhere* was finally a "swindle," an "extinction of the best in conservative thought." Is Trump ushering in the end of that swindle or its renewal, only this time with Muslims and Mexicans as our diabolical enemies? ■

Jo McGowan

Comedian & Crusader

WHY BARRY CRIMMINS CALLS HIMSELF LUCKY

Barry Crimmins is a funny, frightening man. His humor has an edge so sharp it feels almost dangerous to laugh. There's no telling when it could turn, or in what direction. Sometimes he can be gracious and forgiving: "Hey, there's just a lot of bullshit out there and I have all week to notice it and you don't," he says understandingly to an audience. "I just try to report to you." But he is just as likely to attack, and when he does, it's savage. "F*** you," he snarls at someone who dares to disagree with him during his show at a standup comedy club. "F*** your family."

Once you hear his story, the anger is understandable. As a small boy, Barry Crimmins was raped several times by the boyfriend of his babysitter's mother. Each rape was brutally painful; the abuse nearly killed him. It did not, however, silence him. Instead, the trauma seared his mind and heart with a kind of messianic fervor for justice, coupled with an intense identification with the vulnerable and the weak.

Call Me Lucky is the title of a recently released documentary on Crimmins's life and work. I cannot recommend it highly enough. Evocatively directed by the comedian Bobcat Goldthwait, the film challenges, provokes, and calls each one of us to account. "You know," Crimmins says, "if I can survive what happened to me, you can at least hear or think about it…it's not that much to ask." Crimmins has certainly thought about it. After revealing his story before a live audience, he began grappling with his past and moving on. Part of the process was to find other survivors. But as he was searching online for people who had endured childhood sexual abuse, he stumbled on the sickening world of child pornography.

Bobcat Goldthwait and Crimmins have been friends for thirty-seven years. Goldthwait believes that Crimmins's experiences as a child "formed who he is as a man, somebody who has no tolerance for bullies. He is extremely consumed with justice and what is right." The discovery of the underworld of child pornography that was thriving on America Online spurred Crimmins to a crusade that almost destroyed him. *Call Me Lucky* chronicles that story.

Crimmins repeatedly informed AOL of what was going on in its chat rooms, supplied the company with copious, graphic evidence, and pleaded with it to take action for more than two years. In those days, when there was a charge for every download, AOL was profiting enormously from the compulsions of pedophiles. The internet giant ignored Crimmins, issued vague pronouncements, and essentially did nothing.

Crimmins then notified the FBI. One of the agents who came to his house remembers: "[Crimmins] was a man that I could describe as crazed at the time. He said that [pedophiles] were sending images of children who were being raped and or having sex with adults. We had never heard of this before. We were shocked…astonished. I mean, I left there fairly shaken and not knowing how our office was going to deal with [it]. He essentially left us with a big problem." Crimmins ended up testifying before a Senate Committee investigating online porn, and eventually the FBI indicted over a hundred people for sharing child pornography.

But Crimmins wasn't finished. The pedophilia scandal that rocked the Catholic Church was emerging at around the same time. Crimmins had been raised Catholic and, looking back, he suddenly understood the strange behavior of a particular priest he had known as a child. Old friends got in touch with him and revealed how they had been abused by this priest, whose advances Crimmins had managed to rebuff. For Crimmins, who put it all together long before the *Boston Globe* broke the story, the problem was systemic: it was about adults covering for each other when they should have been protecting children. "I saw people keep their mouths shut and not break silence and not take action when a child was being harmed right in front of their eyes."

Today, Crimmins despises both the Catholic Church and his own obsession with it. "I *was* Catholic, but it's in remission. [The church] is based on fear and real estate. But I don't want to talk about this!" he protests during one of his standup routines. "Atheists are just so evangelical." He tweets the pope every day, almost like his own Morning Offering, demanding to be excommunicated, and he never misses an opportunity to point out the church's hypocrisy and misplaced priorities. The church should be grateful. Crimmins the evangelist has something important to say, and we need to hear it.

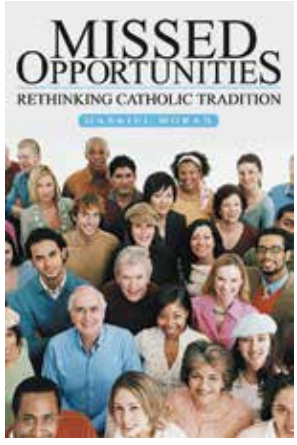
As a Catholic who is no longer a Catholic and an American who rejects his own country's moral vanity, Crimmins stands for something larger than blind belief or patriotism. "I'm of the country of the raped little kids, the country of the f***ing heartbroken. And the screwed over. And the desperate with no chance to be heard. That's the country I'm from." The end of *Call Me Lucky* is shot in the very basement where Crimmins was raped and tortured as a child. Standing there, looking around the room where his abuse took place, the grownup Crimmins is both rueful and victorious: "I'm not a victim. I'm a witness. And my life is a testimony to what you can go on to do, what you can become. Call me lucky." ■

A New Book by Gabriel Moran

Missed Opportunities: Rethinking Catholic Tradition examines problems confronting the official teaching of the Catholic Church. Catholic tradition contains rich possibilities that have not been explored by church officials. Radical changes in language and church structure are proposed here to confront a crisis in the church's intellectual foundations.

The book considers what changes are possible and necessary in areas such as birth control, abortion, euthanasia, homosexuality, environment, nonviolence, and human rights. The church's contribution to contemporary discussions is undermined by a failure to understand the basis for changes in church teaching.

Gabriel Moran has written on education and the church for over 50 years. His recent books include *Fashioning a People Today* (2007), *Believing in a Revealing God* (2009), *Living Nonviolently,* (2011), and *Uniquely Human: The Basis of Human Rights* (2013).



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Christopher M. Duncan

The Voice of the Faithless

COULD THE ELECTORAL COLLEGE STOP TRUMP?

All Christians must be aware of their own specific vocation within the political community. It is for them to give an example by their sense of responsibility and their service of the common good.... Political parties, for their part, must promote those things which in their judgment are required for the common good; it is never allowable to give their interests priority over the common good. —Gaudium et spes

Forgive me, Father, for I am about to sin. Not against my Catholic beliefs, but against my democratic faith. I write today to do something I have never done, to defend the faithless. Faithless electors, that is. I am writing in defense of the Electoral College. What has precipitated my fall from democratic grace? One word: Trump.

For twenty-five years as a professor of political science I have taught American Government. I have a special historical interest in the American Founding. During class discussions about the unique way in which our Constitution provides for the selection of the president, I have always gone to great lengths to explain why our process was designed to be intentionally undemocratic. The argument, in simplified form, goes like this: The authors of the Constitution were afraid of democracy and its tendency to degenerate into mob rule. They were also afraid of its perceived proclivity to produce demagogues who could win support by flattering the electorate. And so they set up a system of election with more than a few fail-safe structures to prevent this from happening—to keep The People from running amok.

One of those structures was the one that allowed slates of electors—the Electoral College—to cast the actual votes for the American chief executive, rather than simply tallying up the popular vote. No constitutional or legal provision required those electors to follow the popular will, so the thinking went that if a dangerous or radical candidate somehow managed to win a majority of the vote, his election could be thwarted (that is, checked and balanced) by the members of the Electoral College, who could vote for another candidate of their own choosing. Given the political crisis such a brazenly antidemocratic move would beget, we can be thankful that electors have done so only in isolated individual cases, without any noticeable change in the democratic outcomes of particular elections. (Yes, presidents have been elected who lost the popular vote and won the Electoral College—as with George W. Bush in 2000—but this was not a result of faithless electors).

While I always tried to be fair to the Federalists who supported this constitutional provision, I have never entirely hidden my "antifederalist" bias in favor of a more democratic

CNS PHOTO / JIM YOUNG, REUTERS

system. As laid out in my first book, *The Anti-Federalists in Early American Political Thought*, my own interpretation of the historical context of the founding differs somewhat from the classroom version I just sketched. I contend that not only did the framers of the Constitution seek to install a check on democratic excess, but that many of them believed that most presidents would never be selected by the people in any direct fashion whatsoever. Remember, the Constitution stipulated that the president must receive an absolute majority of all electoral votes cast. If no one managed this feat, the election of the president would then fall to the House of Representatives, who could choose from among the top five vote-getters, with each state delegation casting one vote. This, indeed, was how one of the most democratic founders, Thomas Jefferson, was actually elected president. And there were good reasons to think that it would be the norm—that the lack of any national media, the extreme localism of most citizens, and a strong distaste for political parties would logically produce multiple favorite sons and regional candidates, none sufficiently well known to garner a national majority. (The exception, of course, would be a heroic figure like George Washington.) On this reading, a Constitution already built on a fear of democracy shows itself to be even more aristocratic than its most undemocratic provisions appear at first glance. No wonder that even today, the Electoral College provision remains one of the most perplexing sections of the Constitution, for students and citizens alike.

Because of its antidemocratic potential and the difficulty of amending the Constitution, twenty-six states and the District of Columbia have passed legislation or created "party pledges" requiring their electors to follow the popular vote.

Twenty-four states have no such legislation, however, and in those cases, "faithless" electors remain a real possibility. Before this current election cycle, I would have regarded that potential warily, and certainly would not have defended the notion that exploiting it might be a valid political strategy. But, true to the old adage about a conservative being a liberal who was mugged by reality, Donald Trump and his supporters are making me rethink my position. While throughout the fall and into winter I continued to view the possibility of Trump getting the nomination as slim, and his chances of winning a general election as virtually nonexistent, his persistence and the vehemence of his supporters cannot be ignored. The likelihood of a Trump nomination is now staring us right in the face, and a Trump win in November is far from unthinkable.

I won't rehash the moral, political, and intellectual problems with his candidacy, which are obvious to many voters, Republicans and Democrats alike. Nor will I map out all the ways in which his positions and personality are at odds with Catholic social teaching and any semblance of faithful voting as promulgated in numerous church documents. Instead, I want to start a conversation about the antidemocratic responsibilities of a faithful democratic elector, should the worst come to pass. While the founders of this nation certainly believed in the rule of law rather than the rule of men, they also knew that from time to time it would be necessary, to steal a phrase, "to defend democracy, not to practice it." Perhaps the most important president in the nation's history, Abraham Lincoln, knew this better than most.

It is not a position I entertain lightly. An old phrase, coined by John Courtney Murray, SJ, asserts that the framers "built better than they knew." That phrase allowed him to argue that faithful Catholics could support the American liberal-democratic regime in a way that they could not support ostensibly similar regimes in the European context, like France. In his reading, Murray provided the necessary space for members of a suspicious church to find their way to a positive defense of liberal democracy, so long as it did not degenerate into the solipsistic secularism and individualism associated with its continental iterations.

Murray's phrase gives me a place to stand as I defend what I once would have argued is indefensible. From a small "d" democratic position, and as a Catholic who knows that the primary goal of politics must always be the common good, I grudgingly have to give the founders their due. They truly did build better than they knew. While I hope it never comes to it, if it does come, and Donald Trump somehow manages to win the race for the most powerful position on earth, I hope that our electors will have the courage and the will to use the tools that the founders gave them and embrace the cause of the faithless in the name of the common good. May God, or at least the ghost of Jefferson, forgive me. ■

Christopher M. Duncan *is dean of the College of Arts and Sciences and professor of political science at Saint Louis University.*

'THERE BUT FOR THE GRACE'

I. Strophe

"Whoever does this for the least of these
does it for me," says Jesus Christ my King
to Whom I offer thanks on bended knees.
Now to my brother drunkards I must bring
shelter and provender, a chance to seize
pants by their belts, whatever ill they've done,
and lift their bloodshot eyeballs to the sun.

II. Antistrophe

For decades I gave nothing to the poor,
nothing to those less fortunate than I,
oblivious to their needs, but by and by
in dread of Peter waiting at his door,
in dread of Judgment at the Last Assize
when we are sorted for our works and faith
and every one of us, a frightened wraith,
averts his gaze from our Redeemer's eyes,
penitent prayer when I lay down to rest
softened the stone I carried in my breast.

III. Epode

Behold the birds, the lilies of the field
which neither spin nor sow.
St. Michael wards our planet with his shield,
and its refulgent glow
illumines dusty footpaths to the grave
where mercy wields its mighty power to save.

Sola fide? Judge also by my works;
the lyrics that I write,
the callings which this servant seldom shirks
however recondite,
my nameless gifts of kindness to the poor
make my salvation seem less insecure.

—Timothy Murphy

Timothy Murphy's books include Mortal Stakes *and* Faint Thunder and Hunter's Log, *both from the Dakota Institute Press.*

Agnes R. Howard

From Rubella to Zika

NEW LESSONS FROM AN OLD EPIDEMIC

A woman feels under the weather, achy and feverish, and then recovers. All is well until she learns soon after that she is pregnant. Her mild bout of sickness could leave her baby with developmental delays, mental impairment, lifelong suffering. In 2016, that is the fearful scenario associated with the Zika virus, which arrived in the western hemisphere last year and is now spreading rapidly. But in the 1960s the same scenario was associated with rubella here in the United States. Remembering responses to the rubella crisis might inform our reactions to the current one. Advocacy for mothers, care for children with disabilities, and appreciation for the fragile, essential work of pregnancy should be our priorities, not recourse to abortion.

In 1964 an epidemic of rubella, or German measles, hit the United States. The disease had come before under different names in the late nineteenth century. But its arrival in 1964 was much more alarming. Researchers in Australia discovered a correlation between rubella and serious birth defects in 1941. Dr. Norman Gregg, a Sydney ophthalmologist, had noticed cataracts and unusual behavior among infants whose mothers had rubella during pregnancy. Other doctors observed more birth defects from gestational rubella, a group of problems eventually labeled Congenital Rubella Syndrome (CRS), including complications with the heart, vision, and hearing, and delays in mental development. Maternal rubella could also cause miscarriage or infant death. In 1960s America, the fear rubella generated was sharpened by the thalidomide scandal that preceded it. While the drug thalidomide was not approved for use in the United States, it had been widely prescribed in Germany and the United Kingdom in the 1950s and declared safe for pregnant women. But children exposed to it in utero were born with missing or malformed limbs. Pictures of "thalidomide babies," which circulated widely in the United States, heightened public concern about the dangers of maternal behavior. They showed that a mother's actions could, wittingly or unwittingly, wreak harm on her unborn child.

As historian Leslie J. Reagan argues in her study of America's rubella epidemic, *Dangerous Pregnancies: Mothers, Disabilities, and Abortion in Modern America*, the outbreak helped reshape abortion debates in the United States, building support for termination when the fetus was likely to be disabled. Consistent with mid-twentieth-century emphases on family planning and responsible parenthood, women who sought abortion because of rubella were portrayed in news reports as acting conscientiously, sparing children from suffering, protecting a family's other children from the difficulties and costs of a disabled sibling. While women could not be sure their children would be affected, the risk was especially high if the disease came early in pregnancy. Fears of having a "damaged" child helped make abortion a socially acceptable choice for white middle-class families and not only for the marginal. When the disease struck in the 1960s, therapeutic abortion was legal in some parts of the United States but access was limited, granted by hospital committees on a case-by-case basis. Testimony of "damaged" babies and agonized accounts of parents denied abortions and struggling to care for severely disabled children helped tip the balance of public opinion in favor of liberalized abortion laws.

Efforts to expand access to therapeutic abortion strengthened the push for abortion rights more broadly. Rubella-inspired reform efforts dovetailed with movements for women's rights and reproductive-health changes. In California, a group of doctors, lawmakers, and citizens collaborated to advocate a Humane Abortion Act, though by the time it was passed in 1967 (and signed by Governor Ronald Reagan), it was more moderate than the law changes many abortion-rights advocates sought.

Catholics were prominent in opposing abortion as a response to rubella. Amid California's 1965-6 debates, Catholic clergy, doctors, and laypeople testified against abortion in front of legislative committees. Priests preached against abortion at Easter Sunday Masses in California. In New York, amid that state's 1967 debates, bishops signed a letter against abortion and ordered it to be read at Mass in churches across the state. Of course, Catholics were not united against abortion, and some organized groups to endorse legal access to it. But before and after *Roe v. Wade*, Catholics were conspicuous in opposition to legalized abortion.

The Zika virus now plaguing Latin America replays some features of the 1960s rubella epidemic. First identified in 1947, the virus was named for its source, the Zika Forest in Uganda. It spread through Africa and Asia, then to the South Pacific in 2007, and arrived in Brazil in May 2015. While the virus sometimes travels by sexual contact, it is mostly borne by two species of mosquitoes: the *aedes aegypti* and *aedes albopictus*. Like rubella, the Zika virus was tolerated without great alarm until a connection to birth defects was discovered. Though the link is still unclear, a spike in the number of cases of microcephaly—a condition in which babies are born with an unusually small head and brain—suggests causal connection between maternal exposure to Zika virus and fetal damage. Brazil has found over four thousand cases of microcephaly since October 2015.

Ana Beatriz, a four-month-old girl with microcephaly, in Lagoa do Carro, Brazil

CNS PHOTO / PERCIO CAMPOS, EPA

In February, public-health officials predicted the Zika virus would move through all of the Americas, except Canada.

Though the worry about Zika has spread widely, those most at risk are a very particular group. A few who get sick from Zika are at risk for Guillain-Barre syndrome, which causes temporary paralysis. Others experience symptoms like the flu, symptoms generally milder in strength than those caused by related viruses, dengue fever and chikungunya. But about 80 percent of those who get the Zika virus experience no symptoms at all. Public health officials are mainly concerned about childbearing women, who can pass the virus on to their unborn children, on whom it seems to have much more serious effects.

In contrast to the 1960s rubella outbreak, the Zika virus arrives with only a strong correlation rather than a confirmed understanding of how maternal sickness causes harm to babies. While consensus for therapeutic abortion was just beginning to form in the 1960s, childbearing women now face heavier pressure not to bring to term a pregnancy with serious fetal problems. In the United States, where abortion is legal and accessible, abortion for therapeutic reasons has become a fairly standard feature of medically supervised reproduction. Diagnostic procedures and genetic counseling are integrated into prenatal-care regimes, with abortion made available when abnormalities are detected. While parents in the 1960s had to make decisions about continuing pregnancy based on probabilities, fetal imaging now allows parents to detect abnormalities early and with considerable certainty. In contrast to the United States, abortion laws tend to be more restrictive in Latin America. It is illegal in Chile, Nicaragua, El Salvador, and the Dominican Republic, and subject to limitations in other Latin American countries. Some Brazilian legislators are aiming to tighten their country's abortion laws in response to the virus.

Latin American clergy have offered a range of responses to the Zika crisis. Though 70 percent of Latin American adults still identify as Roman Catholic, the use of birth control is common. Bishop Leonardo Ulrich Steiner, secretary general of the National Council of Bishops of Brazil, upholds the traditional Catholic position against contraception, denouncing its use to control the Zika virus. But some church officials have taken a different line. Cardinal Odilo Scherer of São Paulo, for instance, acknowledges the use of contraception among Brazilian Catholics, which is likely to increase because of the virus. Strengthening the plausibility of birth control as a partial response to this crisis, in a February interview Pope Francis implied that contraception might be permissible under these circumstances since "avoiding pregnancy is not an absolute evil." He cited the purported approval of Pope Paul VI for the use of contraceptives by nuns in the Congo who were at risk of being raped.

But while there has been a range of responses to the question of whether contraception can be used to combat the Zika virus, Catholic officials consistently reject aborting microcephalic babies. Cardinal Óscar Rodríguez Maradiaga of Honduras, an advisor to Pope Francis, observes that therapeutic abortions do not cure—they kill. Urging "due vigilance" in response to the Zika virus, Archbishop Bernardito Auza, the Vatican's Permanent Observer to the United Nations, insists that "regardless of the connection to the Zika virus, it is a fact of human existence that some children develop conditions like microcephaly, and that these children deserve to be protected and cared for throughout their lives."

Protecting these children must begin with protecting their mothers. Archbishop Auza has addressed the problem with compassion, but Catholic opposition to abortion is sometimes expressed without much sensitivity to the realities of pregnancy. Stern warnings not to use Zika as

a justification for abortion can suggest that pregnant women are looking for any excuse to abort. What should come first is recognition of the struggle and sorrow of women who are unable to protect their children from the Zika virus and other such threats. The bearing of children entails special labor, relationships, and disciplines. There is a great deal to be done and said about this new threat to childbearing before abortion ever enters the discussion.

Alarmed at the dangers posed by the Zika virus, some have placed the responsibility for preventing harm squarely on women themselves. U.S. travel warnings advise women who are pregnant not to visit areas where Zika infection is possible. That might be doable. But Brazil, Ecuador, El Salvador, Colombia, and Jamaica have advised women to delay getting pregnant for a year or two. That recommendation is obviously much harder to follow. Not all pregnancies are planned, after all; nor are all women in a position to make and enforce unilateral decisions about contraception or abstinence. The counsel that women avoid danger by not conceiving seems as unrealistic as recommendations in the 1960s that women avoid exposing themselves to rubella, even though many of them already had children who brought the sickness home from school and needed to be cared for. The whole logic of prenatal precautions can magnify expectant mothers' fear and sense of guilt, since everything from canned tuna to a glass of wine might harm an unborn baby. (The Center for Disease Control recently announced its recommendation that women who drink any alcohol at all should be using birth control.)

Pregnant women have long been blamed when anything goes wrong between conception and birth. For centuries people in the West accepted the Aristotelian theory that men provided the seed of a new person, while women merely provided a place and matter for its growth. If that place turned out to be inhospitable, it was the mother's fault. Hence, men got all or most of the credit when reproduction went well, and women got most of the blame when it did not. Belief in "maternal impressions"—the idea that frightening sights or events encountered by the mother could be stamped on the child—continued even into twentieth-century America. Cravings were considered strong enough to mark an unborn baby: if a pregnant woman who wanted strawberries did not get them, the baby might be born with a tell-tale red blotch. In the middle of the twentieth century, doctors denounced belief in "maternal impressions" but warned women that their prenatal psychological problems could sicken, maim, or expel their babies. And in the past several decades, women have faced criminal prosecution for substances they deliver to a fetus. Cocaine use in the 1980s raised worries of an epidemic of crack babies, and more recently, methamphetamine and opioid addiction have drawn critiques of women who harm their children through those drugs.

The fact that the Zika virus wreaks its most serious damage through the bodies of pregnant women naturally focuses our attention on pregnancy itself. A woman expecting a child spends the months of her pregnancy doing a range of works intended for the child's benefit, the chief of these being provision of nutriment and protection from harm. Some of this work is unconscious, as the pregnant body reconfigures organs to accommodate the fetus. But much of the work women do to protect their unborn children is intentional and difficult: avoiding certain foods or medicine, abstaining from alcohol, changing jobs, moving from one place to another, even taking to bed if there are complications.

Environmental hazards reach the next generation through the bodies of mothers. Many threats to a fetus are outside the control of the expectant mother, who may be unable to avoid drinking contaminated water or consuming toxins from food, soil, or air. As with many environmental harms, the poor are particularly vulnerable. The Zika virus, like rubella and certain environmental threats, perniciously inverts the protective nurture of pregnancy, leaving a woman powerless to ward off danger—or, worse, delivering harm to a child through her mother's body.

What, then, is to be done about the Zika virus? Public health officials can work to limit contagion, eliminate breeding grounds for mosquitoes, educate populations at risk, improve understanding of the link between the disease and birth defects. Above all, they can work to develop a vaccine. Researchers now say that a vaccine for the Zika virus is at least eighteen months away. Past experience with rubella vaccination is instructive here. Nearly five years after the height of the American epidemic, large-scale public and private investment did finally lead to a rubella vaccine, but persuading people to get themselves and their children vaccinated was not always easy. It required making arguments about the common good and taking collective responsibility for the health of the children yet to be born. Most vaccines are intended to benefit the people to whom they are administered, but the rubella vaccination in the late 1960s and early '70s was different. It prioritized children not in order to spare them the rash and fever, but for the protection of their mothers, their future siblings, and their own future offspring. Similarly, a vaccine for the Zika virus should be targeted to protect the work of childbearing, keeping children safe by protecting their mothers.

But maybe the most important lesson we can learn from the rubella scare is that the fear of birth defects should not lead to the further embrace of therapeutic abortion. We are already all too willing to accept the elimination of fetuses with defects or disabilities. Instead, the fact that the Zika virus has its worst effects on the unborn should refocus our attention on the welfare and safety of those who bear the burdens and risks of pregnancy and suffer most of the sorrow this virus can cause. ■

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A Place at the Table

The Story of 'Catholic Women Speak'

Tina Beattie

When cardinals and bishops entered the Vatican meeting hall for the Synod on the Family in October 2015, they walked past a table inviting them to take a free copy of the book, *Catholic Women Speak: Bringing Our Gifts to the Table*. The book was edited by the Catholic Women Speak Network and published by Paulist Press. Three hundred books were delivered to the hall, and they were nearly all taken.

That felt like the miraculous culmination of an odyssey that began on a wet British Sunday afternoon in December 2014, when I impetuously started a Facebook group called "Catholic Women Speak." That would be the beginning of an ongoing adventure in faith that would bear fruits beyond my wildest imaginings, culminating (so far) in the synod book. Further projects are in the pipeline.

I started the group because, like many others, I was beginning to realize that tackling the issue of the role of women in the church was not one of Pope Francis's priorities, however much he acknowledged the problem. The initial euphoria of his election was gradually being replaced by the realization that we women would continue to be joked about, patronized, and romanticized, but the chances of our being treated as full and equal members of Christ's church seemed as remote as ever. I wondered if there were others who felt the need for a place where we could share the challenges we face as we seek to sustain a vibrant and hopeful faith amid the often conflicting demands of the institutional church and secular society. With that in mind, I made it a closed group, with membership restricted to those who identify as Catholic women.

The group grew quickly, and today it has nearly fifteen hundred members. We get occasional requests to join from men in blonde wigs and Barbie dolls in bikinis, as well as several from Pope Francis, but the moderators have become adept at spotting imposters. It is a lively forum where women discuss issues ranging from biblical interpretation, social and political commentary, church teachings and their impact on women's lives, the quality of the Sunday homily, and women's ordination, to natural family planning, contraception, gender, and sexuality. In our discussions we resist being limited to any single issue, for we have a collective commitment to ensuring that our dialogues reflect the diversity and complexity of women's lives in the worldwide church. Our debates are sometimes robust and occasionally have to be moderated when they become overheated, but on the whole they are theologically literate, personally engaged, and respectful. Membership is drawn from the global church, though most of those engaging regularly are in Britain and the United States. Some have left because they regard the group as lacking in obedience to church authorities, but many say that it has revitalized their faith. One woman recently posted that she has started going to Mass again, as a result of her involvement with the group. That Facebook community forms a crucial part of this story.

In late April 2015, I went to see somebody I know in the Pontifical Council for Culture to ask how women might be given a greater presence in the October Synod on the Family. He jokingly said that we should have published a book, because that seemed to be how different interest groups

Colette Joyce presents a copy of Catholic Women Speak *to Cardinal Vincent Nichols.*

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CATHOLIC WOMEN SPEAK NETWORK

attracted the attention of the media and gained publicity for their cause. I left his office knowing that it was, practically speaking, impossible to publish a book in time for the synod, but I had a jingle singing in my soul: "With God all things are possible." I had met Fr. Mark-David Janus, president of Paulist Press, in Rome the year before. Serendipitously (I always think "serendipity" is another word for "miracle"), I had kept his visiting card and even remembered which drawer I had shoved it into. I emailed him late at night on May 4 and asked if Paulist Press would be willing to publish a book in time for the synod, and what kind of deadlines we would have to work to. He responded immediately and positively. That began one of the most intense and exciting projects of my life.

The suggestion was for me to put together a very short book—about ten thousand words—with a few well-known contributors, to be delivered by the end of June. I decided we could be more ambitious than that. I sent out an appeal to the Facebook group and emailed Catholic women theologians working in the areas of feminism, gender, and moral theology. My vision was to put together a book of short, accessible essays weaving together academic theological perspectives and personal narratives, and ensuring the widest possible representation of Catholic women's voices.

I wanted the book to be a collaborative endeavor, so we formed an editorial team through the Facebook group. I took on responsibility for the overall editing and structure of the book; Diana Culbertson, OP, agreed to act as co-editor; and essays were circulated to a wider group for review, translation, and proofreading.

The three criteria for inclusion were that contributors should be practicing Catholics, they should be writing on issues relevant to the synod, and they should offer perspectives that revealed some of the struggles women face in seeking to be faithful to church teaching while living in accordance with their consciences. We agreed that the tone should be irenic, inviting dialogue and engagement, and we set ourselves a goal to give a copy of the book to everybody attending the synod. The book was written primarily with that ecclesiastical readership in mind.

We delivered a forty-five thousand word manuscript with forty-four contributors from sixteen different countries to the publishers at the beginning of July. Contributions included reflections on Scripture, history, and theology; on marriage and family life, divorce and remarriage, and same-sex love; on motherhood, sexuality, and birth control; on celibacy and the single life; on poverty, migration, and violence; and on women in church institutions and structures. Many of the contributions were original, but there were also several previously published pieces. Contributors included some of the best known Catholic women theologians from around the world (Agnes Brazal, Lisa Sowle Cahill, Margaret Farley, Nontando Hadebe, Elizabeth Johnson, Ursula King, Cettina Militello, Jean Porter, Janet Martin Soskice, and others), as well as women telling their sometimes heart-breaking personal stories of faith and failure, healing and hope. Because we were committed to making the essays short and easy to read (hoping that some cardinals and bishops might read them during their coffee breaks at the synod!), we had to whittle down a number of substantial academic essays to a fraction of their original length. It was a remarkable experience of cooperation and indeed of scholarly humility, because not a single theologian protested when we reduced her finely honed and nuanced piece to the bare bones of an argument, with a reference to the full piece for those who wanted to read more.

> It is hard not to conclude that the men who rule the church are willing to listen only to women whom they themselves select, and who are guaranteed to tell them only what they want to hear.

Behind the scenes, Cardinal Gianfranco Ravasi of the Pontifical Council for Culture was quietly supportive of the project. He sent us a letter of support that he agreed we could quote from in the book's Introduction. Former Jesuit Provincial of East Africa and Principal of Hekima University College in Nairobi, Orobator Agbonkhianmeghe, agreed to write the Foreword.

In the meantime, the project had begun to experience the Topsy effect—it was growing and growing. Negotiations to have the book distributed to synod participants were proving difficult and time-consuming, with every avenue of enquiry turning out to be a dead end. However, we decided to organize a launch event in Rome in the week prior to the opening of the synod, to publicize the book and raise awareness of women's presence in the church. An appeal to foundations and religious orders resulted in our having sufficient funds to plan a major event bringing together contributors from around the world. By now, the jingle in my soul had changed from everything being possible with God, to walking on water. I began to understand how Peter must have felt when he clambered over the side of the boat

and suddenly thought, "What am I doing?!" I kept telling myself, "Don't waver, keep eye contact with Jesus, and believe this is possible."

Earlier in the year, I had attended an excellent event on women in the church at the Pontifical University Antonianum in Rome, organized by the Rector Sister Mary Melone and the Chilean ambassador to the Holy See, Monica Jiménez de la Jara. I asked Sister Mary if she would allow us to use the Antonianum for our launch. She responded enthusiastically and offered us gracious and continuing support throughout our time in Rome, as did Ambassador de la Jara and the British ambassador to the Holy See, Nigel Baker. Twenty contributors agreed to take part from Argentina, Chile, Italy, Germany, Ireland, South Africa, the Philippines, Nigeria, the United States, Canada, and Britain. I found myself making travel arrangements, booking accommodation, and putting upon the hard-working finance administrators at the University of Roehampton, where I work, to manage the budget. They kept reminding me that I should have gone through several form-filling exercises and procedures before embarking on such a project, but it was good to discover that even in the tightly controlled bureaucracies of modern academia, one can still sometimes find creative gaps in the system. Besides, one of my favorite sayings in such situations is that it's easier to get forgiveness than permission. We wanted the launch to be an occasion of celebration, so we decided to end with a performance of music and dance and a reception.

We gathered in Rome on September 30 for a party at the flat of Kate and Josh McElwee, the *National Catholic Reporter*'s Rome correspondent, where we gift-wrapped a number of the books. The event on October 1 began with a joyful Mass, celebrated by Argentinian priest Fr. Augusto Zampini, with much singing and dancing and thanksgiving. There was only one remaining problem. We had not yet managed to find a way to distribute our books at the synod. The publishers had airfreighted three hundred copies hot off the presses to a convent in Rome for collection, and some members of the Network had already given copies to priests, bishops, and cardinals they knew, but giving it to every synod participant was beginning to seem like one ambition too many.

The McElwees agreed to store the books in their flat while we negotiated with the synod organizers. My long-suffering husband made several taxi trips across Rome with boxes of books as we followed up various leads, only to find they were not leading anywhere. Finally, as we gathered in the Antonianum auditorium to begin the launch with an afternoon of panel discussions, we received a message that the final answer was no. We would not be allowed to distribute our books to the synod Fathers because they already had too much to read.

My head told me to give up, but my heart told me to keep trusting. An hour after receiving that message, and with much behind-the-scenes activity, we were given the telephone number of a contact at the Vatican publishing house, Libreria Editrice Vaticana. They offered us a table in the Synod Hall on which to display and distribute our books—a solution beyond anything we would have dared to ask for.

As we had hoped, the book received widespread media coverage and many positive reviews. The enthusiasm continues unabated. We have had launches in New York, Johannesburg, and London as well as Rome, a number of groups are using the book as a study resource, and we are planning a follow-up publication. The book is already on its fifth reprint.

Nevertheless, none of this was enough to solicit a response from the hierarchy. We sent out invitations to a number of cardinals and archbishops to attend the launch, but only received three acknowledgements and no acceptances. We asked if Pope Francis would send us a message of welcome, but again we received no response. It is hard not to conclude that the men who rule the church are willing to listen only to women whom they themselves select, and who are guaranteed to tell them only what they want to hear.

The synod itself gave women little reason to hope for change in the areas that most affect women's lives. Canadian Archbishop Paul-Andre Durocher was a lone voice when he drew attention to the need for greater inclusion of women in decision-making positions in the church, including the possibility of female deacons. The few women auditors—thirty in all—were not allowed to vote. The question of women's roles and responsibilities in the context of family life and church institutions had a lower priority than many other issues, such as divorce and remarriage and same-sex relationships. Important though these are, the centrality of women's roles in families and in the care of children, the exodus of women from the church, the marginalization of women in church institutions and structures, and the disproportionate effects of poverty, migration, and violence on women's lives should have made women the most important topic of discussion at the synod—with their full and equal participation. Lucetta Scaraffia, editor of the "Women, Church, World" monthly supplement in *L'Osservatore Romano* and a contributor to our book, wrote a scathing account of her experience as one of the women auditors in the French newspaper *Le Monde*. She describes the inability of the assembled prelates to recognize women as their equals, and she speaks of being ignored and belittled by her clerical counterparts.

Yet if the synod gave little scope for optimism, recent developments suggest there may be a movement for change that is gradually gaining ground. I dare to hope that Pope Francis might be working quietly behind the scenes, aware perhaps that improving the position of women in the church remains the most neuralgic of tasks in light of the deep-rooted misogyny that still infects some of his clerical counterparts, and the cowardice that prevents others from speaking out. He has officially decreed that women are to

ANTI-NARCISSUS

I can't be fast as the filmed snake whiplashes.
I can't be fast as the heron snaps.
I can be slow.

The child streaked from crying against its mother in the bus shelter
clutches the plastic chess-piece
picked from the complex's dumpster.

Under a stoplight at night, someone's son's pimpled face glares red. It is so quiet,
a little down from here the roads may no longer intersect.
The sumac lamps

have flaked flameless.
In the import store I lifted a plastic sack
of red powder from Turkey, turned it hourglass-over,
put it back

still as the handful-sized heap of maple seeds
nestled by the engine block
all winter is now,

scooped out and scattered on the snow-crust
like chips of moon in
Antarctic ice.

Each moon-chip is a seed. No human will live
to see it flower. There is something in me so slow

it will be around even then.

But to know what that is
would be like seeing in this bucket's disk of frosted ice
my reflection.

—Brandon Krieg

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be included in the foot-washing ceremony at the Holy Thursday liturgy. While many parishes already do this, it will now be the norm. An article in the semi-official Vatican newspaper *L'Osservatore Romano*, advocating that members of the laity, including women, might preach the homily during Mass has caused widespread debate and much celebration among Catholic women's groups. Yet these remain piecemeal gestures. Sooner or later, church authorities are going to have to accept the need for free, informed, and inclusive theological reflection about all these issues, including contraception and women's ordination, if the *sensus fidelium* is to have any meaning at all.

The experience of the past year has been a profound affirmation of my Catholic faith, not because of, but in spite of, the institutional church. The Holy Spirit is more powerful and more subtle than all the bumblings of the institution with its androcentric and anachronistic hierarchies and its appalling abuses of power, including the ongoing scandal of sexual-abuse cover-ups. Our book might be nothing more than a smoldering wick in the embers of the synod. We women might often feel that we are the bruised reeds struggling to grow in the marshy margins of the visible church. Yet we place our hope in the Christ who fulfils the words of the prophet: "A bruised reed he will not break, and a smoldering wick he will not snuff out, till he has brought justice through to victory" (Matthew 12:20).

Whatever obstacles and injustices we encounter, we must continue to work prayerfully, trustingly, collaboratively, and hopefully in order to become the change we wish to see, and we must make music and dance in the midst of our struggles and disappointments. Sometimes, we must also be willing to rage and overturn the tables in the temples of power—though I'm glad to say that, as far as I know, nobody overturned our book table in the synod hall. ■

The Hubris of Culture

And the Limits of Identity Politics

Terry Eagleton

Unlike media moguls, literary critics have always harbored doubts about their own importance. On the one hand, there is no denying that literature deals with the most fundamental of human realities, which may be enough to confer a degree of status on those who trade in it. On the other hand, ever since it deserted the public sphere to enter academia, the study of literary works has been a peripheral pursuit, to the point where it is not hard to imagine university departments of literature (indeed of the arts and humanities in general) becoming a thing of the past. Academic literary studies were greeted with cries of genteel derision when they first emerged (did a gentleman really require formal instruction in the literary arts of his own language, any more than in the art of how to carry his rifle while out on a shoot?), and must nowadays confront a more streetwise form of skepticism (do such recondite pursuits really contribute anything to a buoyant economy?).

It was the concept of popular culture, among other new developments, that rode to the rescue of a literary criticism at risk of losing its social relevance altogether. Once literary scholars ventured into the study of film, media, and popular fiction, there could be no doubt that they had some plausible claim to centrality. They were, after all, engaged with artefacts consumed by millions of ordinary people. A different kind of centrality was assigned to those literary intellectuals who, decades earlier, threw in their lot with revolutionary nationalism—men and women who, in exchanging the seminar room for the battlefield, could lay claim to world-historical status. The Irish revolutionary Thomas MacDonagh, having conducted his last university class (on Jane Austen) in Dublin, left the campus to take part in the anticolonial insurrection of Easter 1916, and later met his death at the hands of the British army. The road from Mansfield Park to militant patriot proved shorter than one might imagine. Once the revolutionary nationalist tide began to ebb, it was ethnic politics and postcolonial issues that helped secure a broader role for cultural theory, just as the growth of the culture industry had done already. The so-called War on Terror played its part, too, as cultural affinities, ethnic identities, and religious convictions billowed into global political discord. Before then, however, cultural and literary studies had been lent a powerful new lease on life by the rise of sexual politics, which for the past few decades has been one of its major preoccupations. By the beginning of the twenty-first century, then, there seemed no doubt that the concept of culture had a future which would last at least as long as jihad, and which only the demise of cinema and television, along with the disappearance of libido from the face of the earth, might seriously imperil. Culture as a concept had not only come of age, but seemed in some quarters to reign supreme.

It was, however, in danger of overrating its own importance. Take, for example, the ambiguity of the term "culture industry." If the word "industry" is a measure of how far cultural production has extended its reach throughout modern civilization, it is also a reminder that the chief motives for this are by no means cultural ones. Like General Motors, Hollywood and the media exist primarily for the sake of their shareholders. It is the profit motive that impels culture to spread its sway across the globe. The culture industry testifies less to the centrality of culture than to the expansionist ambitions of the late capitalist system, which can now colonize fantasy and enjoyment as intensively as it once colonized Kenya and the Philippines. In a curious irony, then, the larger mass culture looms, the more it appears as a phenomenon in its own right, but the less of an autonomous zone it actually is. Besides, the more influential this culture grows, the more it reinforces a global system whose ends are for the most part inimical to culture in the normative sense of the term.

The conventional postmodern wisdom is that this system has now taken a cultural turn. From the rough-spoken old industrial world, we have now evolved to capitalism with a cultural face. The role of the so-called "creative" industries, the power of the new cultural technologies, the prominent role of sign, image, brand, icon, spectacle, lifestyle, fantasy,

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design, and advertising: all this is taken to testify to the emergence of an "aesthetic" form of capitalism, in transit from the material to the immaterial. What this amounts to, however, is that capitalism has incorporated culture for its own material ends, not that it has fallen under the sway of the aesthetic, gratuitous, self-delighting, or self-fulfilling. On the contrary, this aestheticized mode of capitalist production has proved more ruthlessly instrumental than ever. "Creativity," which for Karl Marx and William Morris signified the opposite of capitalist utility, is pressed into the service of acquisition and exploitation.

There is no clearer example of the way capitalism is intent on assimilating what once seemed its opposite ("culture") than the global decline of the universities. Along with the fall of Communism and the Twin Towers, it ranks among the most momentous events of our age, if somewhat less spectacular in nature. A centuries-old tradition of universities as centers of humane critique is currently being scuppered by their conversion into pseudo-capitalist enterprises under the sway of a brutally philistine managerial ideology. Once arenas of critical reflection, academic institutions are being increasingly reduced to organs of the marketplace, along with betting shops and fast-food joints. They are now for the most part in the hands of technocrats for whom values are largely a matter of real estate. A new intellectual proletariat of academics is assessed by how far their lectures on Plato or Copernicus boost the economy, while unemployed graduates constitute a kind of lumpen intelligentsia. Students who are currently charged fees by the year will no doubt soon find their tutors charging by the insight. In moving some of its academic staff to new premises, one British university recently issued an edict severely restricting their ability to keep books in their minuscule offices. The dream of our universities' boneheaded administrators is of a bookless and paperless environment, books and paper being messy, crumply stuff incompatible with a gleaming neo-capitalist wasteland consisting of nothing but machines, bureaucrats, and security guards. Since students are also messy, crumply stuff, the ideal would be a campus on which no such inconvenient creatures were in sight. The death of the humanities is now an event waiting on the horizon.

What ought finally to have discredited the faith that capitalism has shifted to a new cultural mode was the financial debacle of 2008. One consequence of such upheavals is that, for an inconvenient moment, they strip the veil of familiarity from a form of life that has ceased to be regarded as a specific historical system. By throwing its inner workings into relief, they allow that life-form to be framed, objectified, and estranged. As such, it ceases to be the invisible color of everyday life and can be seen instead as a historically recent mode of civilization. Significantly, it is in the throes of such crises that even those who are supposed to run the system begin for the first time to use the word "capitalism," rather than to speak more euphemistically of Western democracy or the Free World. They thus steal a march on some sectors of the cultural left, which in their zeal for a discourse of difference, diversity, identity, and marginality ceased to use the word "capitalism"—let alone "exploitation" or "revolution"—some decades ago. Neoliberal capitalism has no difficulty with terms like "diversity" or "inclusiveness," as it does with the language of class struggle.

It is imprudent for the Masters of the Universe to talk of capitalism, since in doing so they acknowledge that their form of life is simply one among many, that like all other such life-forms it has a specific origin, and that what was born can always die. It may be that capitalism is simply human nature, but it is hard to deny that there was a time when there was human nature but not capitalism. What the crisis of 2008 put most embarrassingly on show, however, was how little the system had fundamentally changed, for all the excited talk of lifestyle and hybridity, flexible identities and immaterial labor, rhizome-like organizations and CEOs in open-necked shirts, the disappearance of the working class and the shift from industrial labor to information technology and the service industry. Despite these innovations, the momentary crackup of the system revealed that we were still languishing in a world of mass unemployment and obscenely overpaid executives, gross inequalities and squalid public services, one in which the state was every bit as obedient a tool of ruling-class interests as the most resolutely vulgar of Marxists had ever imagined. What was at stake was not image and icon but gargantuan fraud and systemic plunder. The true gangsters and anarchists wore pinstripe suits, and the robbers were running the banks rather than raiding them.

> Culturally speaking, late capitalism is for the most part a matter not of hierarchy but hybridity—of mingling, merging, and multiplicity—while, materially speaking, the gulf between social classes assumes ultra-Victorian proportions.

The idea of culture is traditionally bound up with the concept of distinction. High culture is a question of rank. One thinks of the great *haut-bourgeois* families portrayed by Marcel Proust and Thomas Mann, for whom power and material wealth are accompanied by a lofty cultural tone and bear with them certain moral obligations. Spiritual hierarchy goes hand in hand with social inequality. The aim of advanced capitalism, by contrast, is to preserve inequality while abolishing hierar-

chy. In this sense, its material base is at odds with its cultural superstructure. You do not need to proclaim your superiority to other peoples in order to raid their natural resources, as long as by doing so you maintain the material inequalities between them and yourself. Whether Americans regard themselves as superior to Iraqis is really neither here nor there, given that it is political and military control over an oil-rich region they have in their sights. Culturally speaking, late capitalism is for the most part a matter not of hierarchy but hybridity—of mingling, merging, and multiplicity—while, materially speaking, the gulf between social classes assumes ultra-Victorian proportions. There are plenty of exponents of cultural studies who take note of the former but not the latter. While the sphere of consumption is hospitable to all comers, the domain of property and production remains rigidly stratified. Divisions of property and class, however, are partly masked by the levelling, demotic, spiritually promiscuous culture in which they are set, as they were not in the era of Proust and Mann. In contrast to that stately milieu, cultural and material capital now begin to split apart. The brokers, jobbers, operators, and speculators who float to the top of the system in their spiritual weightlessness are hardly remarkable for their aesthetic wisdom.

The breaking down of cultural hierarchies is clearly to be welcomed. For the most part, however, it is less the upshot of a genuinely democratic spirit than an effect of the commodity form, which levels existing values rather than contesting them in the name of alternative priorities. Indeed, it represents an assault less on cultural supremacism than on the notion of value as such. The very act of discrimination becomes suspect. Not only does it involve exclusion, but it must inevitably imply the possibility of a superior vantage point, which seems offensive to the egalitarian spirit. Those who prefer Billie Holliday to Liam Gallagher (and what right have they to judge in any case?) are simply being elitist. Since nothing is more common than evaluation in pubs and sports stadiums, this aversion to ranking is itself an elitist posture. Distinctions give way to differences. The cuisine of Florence, Arizona, is neither better nor worse than that of Florence, Italy—simply different. To discriminate is unjustly to demean one thing while falsely absolutizing another. To judge that Donald Trump has less humility than Pope Francis is to thrust Trump self-righteously into the outer darkness, thereby flouting the absolute value of inclusivity; and who am I to arrogate such authority? From what odiously Olympian standpoint has one the right to pontificate that feeding a gerbil is preferable to microwaving it?

The bogus populism of the commodity—its warm-hearted refusal to rank, exclude, and discriminate—is based on a blank indifference to absolutely everyone. Careless for the most part of distinctions of class, race, and gender, impeccably even-handed in its favors, it will yield itself, in the spirit of a whorehouse, to anyone with the cash to buy it. A similar indifference underlies the historic advance of multiculturalism. If the human species now has a chance, for the first time in its history, to become thoroughly hybrid, it is largely because the capitalist market will buy the labor-power of anyone willing to sell it, whatever their cultural origins. There are, to be sure, some transitional tensions at work here. At present, it is the economy that is promiscuously open to all comers, and a certain current of racist culture that wishes to discriminate. A capitalist market accustomed to being culturally embedded in the nation state, whose military firepower and social homogeneity served it well over the centuries, now pitches different ethnic groups together; and the racist and neo-fascist forces that this unleashes threaten to splinter the national cohesion on which a globalized economic system continues to depend.

Today's cultural politics is not generally given to challenging capitalism. It speaks the language of gender, identity, diversity, and oppression, but not for the most part the idiom of state, property, class-struggle, and exploitation.

For the moment, then, culture and the economy are in some sense out of synchrony. While the latter can go global, it is not so simple for the former to wax cosmopolitan. One can, to be sure, hang around polyglot cafés or enjoy the music of a score of nations, but culture in this sense of the term lacks the depth in which values and convictions need to be rooted. There are indeed international allegiances for which men and women have been ready to die, not least in the socialist tradition; but culture, as Edmund Burke was aware, draws much of its resilience from local loyalties. It is hard to imagine the citizens of Bradford or Bruges throwing themselves on the barricades crying "Long live the European Union!" Far from producing citizens of the world, transnational capitalism tends to breed parochialism and insecurity among a large swathe of those subject to its sway; and it is toward racism and chauvinism, not into cosmopolitan cafés, that this insecurity is likely to impel them.

While some forms of culture have increased in significance, others have diminished. Nobody believes any longer that art can fill the shoes of the Almighty. Culture as a critique of civilization has been increasingly eroded, undermined among other things by the postmodern prejudice that any such critique must address itself to an illusory social totality from an equally illusory standpoint of absolute knowledge. It has also come under siege from the intel-

lectual treason of the universities. The critical or utopian dimensions of the concept of culture are rapidly declining. If culture signifies a corporate way of life, as it does when we speak of deaf culture, beach culture, police culture, café culture, and so on, then it is hard for it to serve at the same time as a yardstick by which to assess such forms of life, or to evaluate social existence in general. So-called identity politics are not remarkable for their self-critical spirit. The point of engaging in, say, English folk culture is to affirm English folksiness, not to question it. Nobody becomes a Morris dancer in order to satirize the whole sorry business.

At the same time, there are political cultures (gay, feminist, ethnic, musical, and so on) that are indeed deeply critical of the status quo. They inherit the dissenting impulse of *Kulturkritik* while jettisoning its spiritual elitism. They also reject its abstract utopianism for a specific way of life. If they challenge the patrician remoteness of the tradition that passes from Friedrich Schiller to D. H. Lawrence, with its disdain for modernity, they also differ from those corporate life-forms that exist simply to affirm a particular social identity, rather than to cast a cold eye on the social order as a whole. Nobody but the most sorely misguided of citizens becomes a Morris dancer in order to overthrow capitalism, whereas many a feminist has greeted the prospect with acclaim. Political cultures of this kind combine critique with solidarity in something like the style of the traditional labor movement.

Yet though identity politics and multiculturalism can be radical forces, they are not for the most part revolutionary ones. Some of these political currents have largely abandoned their hopes in this regard, while others never entertained them in the first place. They differ in this respect from the powers that drove the British from India and the Belgians from the Congo. Those campaigns were quite properly a matter of expulsion and exclusion, not in the first place of plurality and inclusivity. They also envisaged a world beyond the horizon of capitalist reality, even if those visions were to be for the most part thwarted. Today's cultural politics, by contrast, is not generally given to challenging those priorities. It speaks the language of gender, identity, marginality, diversity, and oppression, but not for the most part the idiom of state, property, class-struggle, ideology, and exploitation. Roughly speaking, it is the difference between anti-colonialism and postcolonialism. Cultural politics of this kind are in one sense the very opposite of elitist notions of culture. Yet they share in their own way that elitism's overvaluing of cultural affairs, as well as its distance from the prospect of fundamental change.

What, finally, of the so-called War on Terror? Is it not here that we should look for the persistence of cultural questions in political society? Perhaps one might see the collapse of the World Trade Center as a surreal explosion of archaic cultural forces at the very heart of modern civilization. The clash between Western capitalism and radical Islam, however, is primarily a geopolitical affair, not a cultural or religious one, rather as the recent conflict in Northern Ireland had little to do with religious conviction. There has been much talk in the region of the need for an amicable encounter between what is blandly known as "the two cultural traditions," Unionist and nationalist. It is thus that a history of injustice and inequality, of Protestant supremacy and Catholic subjugation, can be converted into an innocuous question of alternative cultural identities. Culture becomes a convenient way of displacing politics.

As in the case of revolutionary nationalism, culture may supply some of the terms on which material and political battles are joined, but it does not constitute their substance. By and large, fundamentalism is the creed of those who feel abandoned and humiliated by modernity, and the forces responsible for this pathological state of mind, like those that give birth to multiculturalism, are far from cultural in themselves. In fact, the central questions that confront a humanity moving into the new millennium are not cultural ones at all. They are far more mundane and material than that. War, hunger, drugs, arms, genocide, disease, ecological disaster: all of these have their cultural aspects, but culture is not the core of them. If those who speak of culture cannot do so without inflating the concept, it is perhaps better for them to remain silent. ■

Hidden in Plain Sight

Three New Books on the Holocaust

James J. Sheehan

By July 1944 most of the Jews living in German-controlled Europe had been killed. Some survived as slave laborers (many of them in the factories run by German firms at Auschwitz), in hiding (Anne Frank and her family would be arrested in early August), or in isolated communities scattered throughout the Nazi empire. Among the latter was the ancient Jewish community on Kos, a Greek island a mile off the Turkish coast. Although the majority of Kos's Jews had fled to the mainland, around a hundred remained. On July 24, they were rounded up, loaded onto barges, brought to Athens, and from there transported to Auschwitz—along the way, their captors stopped at the neighboring island of Leros, whose one Jewish resident was added to the group. Many of these people died en route, most of the rest perished soon after they finally got to the camp in mid-August. As so often when we are confronted with scenes from these terrible times, the story of Kos's Jews challenges our capacity to imagine and understand. What must it have been like to endure that long and painful journey to the gas chambers? And what combination of ideological fervor, racial hatred, and demented devotion to duty led those German officials to spend so much time and energy on the destruction of a few dozen people, most of them elderly and infirm, who had been living in harmless obscurity on the far fringes of the Nazis' rapidly shrinking domain?

Although the fate of Europe's Jews has been the subject of intense scholarly investigation for more than half a century, the three works reviewed here demonstrate that there are still new and important things to say about the twentieth century's emblematic tragedy. In quite different ways, these books deepen our understanding of the Holocaust by setting it in a broad historical context, showing both its centrality and its connection to other dimensions of the Nazi project.

As Nikolaus Wachsmann makes clear in his massive, comprehensive, and altogether compelling new book, *A History of the Nazi Concentration Camp* (Farrar, Straus & Giroux, $40, 865 pp.) the initial purpose of the concentration camps was political terror, not mass murder. In the months immediately following Hitler's appointment as the German Republic's chancellor in January 1933, he preserved the trappings of legality by holding elections, passing legislation, and retaining or co-opting a number of existing institutions. Behind this legal façade the Nazis carried out a reign of terror in which tens of thousands of the regime's opponents, most of them Social Democrats or Communists, were incarcerated in hastily constructed prison camps where they were humiliated, tortured, and sometimes murdered. This period of intense repression did not last long, and most of those arrested were eventually released, but it had three significant, lasting results: first, it permanently weakened any opposition to the regime, especially from the once formidable ranks of the labor movement; second, it forged a cadre of men with an appetite and aptitude for violence and cruelty who would continue to operate the Nazis' terror apparatus; and, finally, it taught Germans to avert their gaze (sometimes literally) from other people's suffering. Like the

A parade of paramilitary troops marches past Hitler in Nuremberg, November 1935.

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many atrocities that would be committed by the Nazis over the next twelve years, the concentration camps were hidden in plain sight, threateningly sinister because they were shrouded in secrecy, politically effective precisely because everyone knew they were there.

From the beginning the camps were deadly places; in 1941 they became the sites of mass extermination. The first victims were Germans who were judged unfit to live because they were chronically ill, mentally handicapped, or allegedly "habitual" criminals. From lethal eugenics it was a short path to racial murder, initially of Polish prisoners of war and then, systematically and comprehensively, of every Jewish man, woman, and child whom the Germans and their allies could apprehend. Wachsmann estimates that between 1933 and 1945, 2.3 million people ended up in a concentration camp, where over 1.7 million of them perished.

In our historical image of the Holocaust, Auschwitz has a special place. And for good reason: a million Jews died there, more than at any other single location. But, as Wachsmann points out, there is something paradoxical about Auschwitz's exemplary status. In the first place, most of the Nazis' victims did not die in a concentration camp, but were shot, intentionally starved to death, or gassed in one of the killing centers that had been established with the singular purpose of murdering Jews. Moreover, Auschwitz was not a typical camp; it was both killing center and an industrial complex where thousands of slave laborers worked to produce materials for the German war effort. Auschwitz's historical prominence comes in part from this dual function: we know what happened there because a few of those who worked in its factories survived to tell us about it. There are no memoirs describing a death camp like Treblinka because no one lived to write them.

If, as Wachsmann argues, "the concentration camps embodied the spirit of Nazism like no other institution in the Third Reich," then the activity that best represented Nazism's spirit was waging war. The kind of war the Nazis fought, a total war against entire societies, revealed the movement's essential purpose and aspirations, its hideous strength and ultimately fatal weakness. There are scores of excellent studies of Germany between 1939 and 1945, but none quite like Nicholas Stargardt's truly remarkable book. Better than any other work I know, *The German War* (Basic Books, $35, 704 pp.) tells us what the war meant for ordinary Germans, both at home and at the front. By skillfully weaving together a collection of brilliantly rendered individual portraits with an astute analysis of institutional structures, he shows us why and how German soldiers and civilians fought, the destructive fury they inflicted on others, and the devastating losses they themselves endured. At the core of Stargardt's story is the perplexing fact that, alone among the war's losers, the Germans kept fighting until they could fight no more, giving up only when Soviet troops reached the underground bunker in which Hitler had taken refuge and, at the very end, killed himself. With great subtlety and skill, Stargardt uncovers the complex combination of coercion and compliance that sustained the German war which, he argues, retained its legitimacy even after many people's commitment to the regime had begun to ebb. Germans kept fighting because, as Stargardt's title underscores, most of them continued to regard the conflict not as a *Nazi* war, but as a *German* war, essential for their own survival.

Eventually a new generation of Germans would begin to ask how their nation could have brought such destruction on the world, but those Germans who directly experienced the war frequently remained obsessed by what they had themselves suffered.

As in Wachsmann's account of the concentration camps, in Stargardt's history of the war the Holocaust begins on the periphery and then gradually comes to dominate the stage. Although anti-Semitism was always among Nazism's core beliefs, the pace of anti-Jewish measures was shaped by military circumstance and political calculation. In 1939, during the opening months of hostilities, there was a slight (if surely temporary) easing of the repressive policies toward Germany's Jews because Hitler hoped to reach some accommodation with the Western powers. In the east, Jews were immediately caught up in the rising tide of violence that swept across Poland and then, after June 1941, the conquered regions of the Soviet Union. Stargardt emphasizes the ideological importance of the myth of "Judeobolshevism"—the insistence that Communism was, above all, a Jewish plot against German culture and society. This toxic blend of traditional anti-Semitism and modern anti-Communism legitimized Germany's military conquests as well as its comprehensive campaign of racial murder.

Like the political terror of the concentration camps, the killing of Europe's Jews was hidden in plain sight. Many, probably most Germans knew that terrible things were happening in the east; if they talked about these things, it was

with friends and family, in the safe but isolated confines of their homes. Stargardt forcefully and correctly argues that, because the churches were the only relatively autonomous public forums left in Nazi Germany, their leaders bear a particular responsibility for the nearly universal conspiracy of silence that surrounded the Holocaust. Following the example of their ministers, priests, and bishops, it was easy for most Christians to turn away from what was being done in their name.

Among Stargardt's most striking insights is the connection he makes between the killing of Jews and the strategic bombing of German cities, which by 1943 had begun to bring the war home to millions of Germans. The Nazis, of course, blamed "world Jewry" for the death and destruction that allied aircraft rained down on German civilians. Many ordinary Germans also linked the two, sometimes viewing the bombing as retaliation for the atrocities committed in the east. As a result, the suffering Germans caused and the suffering they endured became entangled in people's consciousness, with the latter dissipating and in many cases overwhelming the former. This complex compound of guilt and a sense of victimization, Stargardt concludes, was carried over into the public memory of the war. Eventually a new generation of Germans would begin to ask how their nation could have brought such destruction on the world, but those Germans who directly experienced the war frequently remained obsessed by what they had themselves suffered.

Timothy Snyder brings to the study of the Holocaust an extraordinary set of linguistic skills and a deep knowledge of the sources and problems of Eastern European history. In *Bloodlands* (reviewed in *Commonweal*, February 25, 2011), Snyder recounted the tragic history of an area in which the Soviet and Nazi regimes—sometimes together, more often as competitors—killed 14 million innocent civilians. The focus of *Black Earth* (Tim Duggan Books, $30, 462 pp.) is on the killing of European Jews, but here too their story is entwined with that of others, especially Poles and citizens of the Soviet Union, who were, Snyder insists, both victims and perpetrators. In his account, Judeobolshevism, the linkage between hostility to Jews and hatred of Communism, plays a central role, particularly in those areas that had the profound misfortune of being occupied first by the Soviets and then by the Germans. Here anti-Communism became both the occasion and the excuse for killing Jews and taking their property.

Another important theme in *Black Earth* is what Snyder calls "statelessness." In contrast to those scholars who emphasize the state's role as the primary instrument of racial murder (this was, for example, the argument in Raul Hilberg's classic book, *The Destruction of the European Jews*, first published in 1961), Snyder maintains that Jews were most at risk where states were weak or had been destroyed. Stripped of the protective cover of sovereignty, Jews (and other victims) were exposed to the murderous policies of their oppressors. There is, I think, an important element of truth in Snyder's intentionally provocative argument. In the parts of Europe that he knows best, the "bloodlands" of Poland and the western regions of the Soviet Union, state structures were demolished and replaced by a kind of racial imperialism. In most of Europe, however, statelessness meant the loss of juridical identity for certain groups of potential victims, not the disappearance of political institutions. Among Germany's allies and satellites, states continued to exist. In some cases, these states attempted, at least for a time, to protect "their" Jews, but eventually most of them (Denmark is the obvious exception) were unable, and often unwilling, to do so.

As in *Bloodlands*, the strongest parts of *Black Earth* are those devoted to the immediate experience of particular victims and perpetrators, a small sample of the millions who suffered, the hundreds of thousands who did the killing, and the handful of those who tried to resist. Snyder is at his best when he remembers his own insistence that "no historical event, even the Holocaust, is of such a scale as to transcend the inherently specific character of each human interaction." No one captures the complexity of these human interactions with more restrained eloquence, scholarly rigor, and moral conviction.

As his subtitle suggests, Snyder wants us to learn from the Holocaust, to see it as a warning about what might happen to us, here and now. His conclusion is titled "Our World." While I share Snyder's anxieties about the dangers of climate change, environmental degradation, global exploitation and oppression, I am less sure about how the Holocaust helps us understand or resolve these pressing problems. It is, for example, not entirely clear to me how, as he writes, "Hitler channeled and personalized the inevitable tensions of globalization." Nor am I certain what lessons the Holocaust can teach us about specific policies and practices we need to confront globalization and its discontents. As the great nineteenth-century Swiss historian Jacob Burckhardt once remarked, we should not expect historical knowledge to make us shrewder for tomorrow but rather hope that it will give us wisdom for all times. The wisdom about the human condition that comes from these three books is harsh and bitter, but nonetheless essential as we try to find our way through this precious, fragile, fallen world of ours.

There is another reason why it is important to remember the victims of the Holocaust, as well as the millions of others who have been sacrificed on what Hegel called the "slaughter bench of history." In a small but not insignificant way, to keep the victims' memory alive frustrates their murderers' ultimate purpose, which was to exclude them from the world by denying their humanity. In remembering the Holocaust, therefore, we must seek to comprehend its massive scale without losing sight of the specific suffering of those who, like that small band of almost forgotten Greek Jews on the island of Kos, were sucked into its murderous vortex. ■

Richard Alleva

Fixed Focus

'SON OF SAUL'

Laden with awards (the Oscar for best foreign-language film, a Golden Globe, the Grand Prix at Cannes), the Hungarian movie *Son of Saul* proves to be a stark viewing experience in more ways than one. Writer-director László Nemes takes us into the Auschwitz death camp one day in late 1944. The camera immediately fastens on Saul Auslander and never lets go. Saul is a Hungarian Jew whose duties as *sonderkommando* include tricking newly arrived prisoners—the elderly, the infirm, and children—into the "showers," which are really cyanide-releasing death chambers, then carting the corpses off to a furnace to be incinerated. On the day we meet him, however, Saul discovers that one boy is still alive among the corpses, though in a comatose state. An SS officer soon smothers the survivor and turns the body over to an inmate-surgeon for autopsy. But Saul, possessed by the delusion that the boy is his son (we later learn that Saul has no son), is determined to give him a decent burial with the proper Jewish rite. The rest of the film deals with Saul's retrieval and concealment of the body, his search for a rabbi to perform the ceremony, and his on-again-off-again involvement with two plots—one to photograph some of the camp's horrors in order to inform the outside world, the other a revolt. (All these storylines are based on real events at Auschwitz.)

Géza Röhrig in Son of Saul

In the opening scene, as Saul ushers people to their doom with promises of soup and assigned tasks, the camera stays so close to his face that the victims remain shadows and blurs. These bodies rushing about him are perhaps not much more individualized to him than they are to us, and this indicates how the unending horrors of his assigned tasks have blunted his emotions. So this makes Saul's quest for a proper burial all the more remarkable: something in his nature is finally breaking through the callousness he's developed in order to survive.

Nemes's most radical artistic decision was to severely restrict us to Saul's point of view. Not only does the camera stick with him throughout the film; at times it seems perched on his shoulder. Employing only a few cuts (mostly to indicate jumps forward in time), the director keeps us in motion with his protagonist: we run when he runs, we see only what he sees, turn when he turns, cringe when he's pushed or pummeled. This isn't exactly the sort of flashy stunt that actor-director Robert Montgomery perpetrated with his crime drama *The Lady in the Lake* (1947), in which the subjective camera stood and moved in the place of the hero, whose face we saw only when he looked in a mirror. Saul's countenance is always visible, and the actor playing him, Géza Röhrig, has an appropriately stoic yet haunted mien. But we are so close to that face for so long that *Son of Saul* very nearly dispenses with any visual depth. This pictorial shallowness often enhances the movie's power, as in that unforgettable opening scene. It imprisons us so convincingly within Saul's horrible reality that we are kept from making facile judgments about a person whose enslavement has forced him to make choices no one should have to make.

If the film dealt only with a typical day in the life of a *sonderkommando*, Nemes's visual method would be completely justified. But *Son of Saul* takes place on a day that's far from typical, and progresses toward an explosive climax and tragic conclusion. Rebellion is fomented, gunpowder smuggled, a hidden camera passed around. People are bribed, blackmailed, threatened with death. False identities are uncovered. While we remain focused on Saul's features and movements, somewhere off-screen events that might fill an action movie are taking place. And though I never for a moment wanted Nemes's extraordinary project to become a conventional genre piece, I often felt that more than one point of view would have been necessary

SONY PICTURES CLASSICS

to tell the story of this uniquely tumultuous day with enough clarity to answer certain questions. In view of the fact that Saul holds a post that requires him to do detestable things to his fellow Jews, was he ever truly trusted by the conspirators, or was he simply in the right place to help them? What happened to the Jewish doctor Miklos, who was ordered by the SS to perform an autopsy on the boy's corpse and instead placed himself in grave danger by delivering the body to Saul? Was the conspiracy to smuggle a camera into the camp rendered redundant by the rebellion, or did the photos somehow make it to the outside world? These are plot points that could have been answered by a panoramic view of events, with the focus shifting from one character to another rather than fixed on one.

Oddly enough, that fixed focus also raises questions that can't be answered about Saul. What caused his delusion? Did he entertain delusions of paternity even before Auschwitz? And, for that matter, who was the pre-Auschwitz Saul? What was his profession? Who were his family? How many of them are still alive? Was he deeply religious—is that what his quest for a ritual burial is about, or is it merely an assertion of his ethnic identity and an act of defiance? And why was Saul chosen to be a *sonderkommando*? Did the SS officers detect in him an instinct for persuasiveness or cruelty or deceit that they could manipulate? Nemes's method does not allow him to answer any of these questions. By shunning flashbacks, exposition, depth of focus, crosscutting, and by refusing to clarify supporting characters, he casts a present-tense, you-are-there, hypnotic spell on the viewer, but also turns everything in the visual and narrative background into a blur. The film's virtuosic constraints make for a raw viewing experience that leaves us feeling as hunted and tormented as Saul. It has moments that I expect never to forget: Nazi medical officers surrounding Saul and forcing him to take part in their mockery of Jewish dancing; long stares between prisoners trying to strike a bargain but not knowing how much they can trust each other; and, near the conclusion, the astonishing appearance of a little blond Polish boy at the mouth of a cave where some prisoners are sheltering. Such images, visceral in their impact, could only have been created by an artist of the highest caliber.

Nevertheless, the film's tunnel vision makes me uneasy. What the Nazis intended to do to their Jewish prisoners before exterminating them was to reduce each one to the brutal solipsism of a hunted animal. After all, if an SS officer could convince himself he was wiping out predatory vermin, that made it easier for him to regard himself as a necessary servant of the state rather than a monster. As Primo Levi wrote about his fellow captives, "Whoever waits for his neighbor to die in order to take his piece of bread is, albeit guiltless, further from the model of thinking man than the most primitive pigmy or the most vicious sadist." But, as Levi himself demonstrated in his books, many of the captives avoided this fate by thinking and acting together, by evolving an underground economy, practicing occasional acts of altruism, and even collaborating in the rebellion dramatized in *Son of Saul*. But because Nemes restricts the viewpoint of his film to that of a mostly mentally isolated and monomaniacal individual, he pushes the social interactions of the other prisoners to the periphery and gives Saul, despite his quest for a religious burial, an air of solipsism. We can only guess at where his madness ends and where his real nobility begins. He seems to elude Levi's moral categories.

For me, at least, *Son of Saul* became less a portrayal of a person in torment than a study of a face, a face seen in perpetual close-up, one that reacts with minimal expressiveness to the encircling hell, turning this way and that as possible solutions give way to one menace after another, but always serving as a mask for the enigmatic Saul, who remains a stranger to be pitied rather than a man one can come to know. ■

Celia Wren

Beer Nuts

'HORACE & PETE'

Steve Buscemi & Louis C. K. in Horace and Pete

In the second episode of the new online show *Horace and Pete*, a young woman walks into a Brooklyn bar. She's pale, pretty, mild-mannered, and wears a preppy tomato-red coat. She asks for white wine, but amiably settles for Budweiser on hearing that the bar sells only hard alcohol and a single brand of beer. All in all, she appears much more genteel than the average customer of this neighborhood dive—until she throws her head back, pounds her hands on the bar counter, and shrieks like a chimpanzee.

Such disquieting moments abound in *Horace and Pete*, created and written by the comedian Louis C. K., who stars in the series alongside Alan Alda, Steve Buscemi, Edie Falco, Jessica Lange, and others. A tale of a dysfunctional family running a hundred-year-old watering hole, the series looks much like a sitcom. But it abjures that genre's breezy tone, slick banter, and tidy plot twists, and it takes a tonally complex approach to sobering and provocative topics, including guilt, bigotry, family rancor, sexual fantasies, and mental illness. Everything about *Horace and Pete*—its seriocomic ambivalence, its performance aesthetic, its production values—seems calculated to knock viewers out of their comfort zone.

There are moments when you don't know whether to laugh, cry, or wince, as you acclimatize to the travails of Horace (Louis C. K.), a divorcé who is glumly running his family bar with Pete (Buscemi), who has been hospitalized for mental illness. (While in the hospital, Pete met Tricia, the woman in the red coat, who has Tourette Syndrome.) Helping out as bartender is the mean and boorish Uncle Pete (Alda), to whom modern civilities are entirely foreign. "This place ain't racist. We served coloreds here in the '30s!" he barks at one horrified patron. "I got a picture of a n****r sitting right there on that stool in 1930!" With Uncle Pete serving the booze, even ostensibly casual barroom chat has a jagged edge. One conversation between customers and bartender devolves into an unpleasant and foul-mouthed argument about abortion, hell, and the fate of unbaptized souls. Another involves an unsettling anecdote about a U.S. soldier in a Nazi concentration camp. As if the Petes weren't enough of a handful, Horace also has to deal with his sister Sylvia (Falco), who is suing to gain control of the bar. And he longs to reconcile with his hostile daughter, Alice (Aidy Bryant), who at one point tells him, "I'm trying to be able to think about you without puking."

The tensions between the characters register all the more strongly because of the show's unfiltered production style. There's little camera movement or cutting as the action unspools on the show's two main sets: the bar and Horace's upstairs apartment. And aside from a few notes from the show's wistful theme song (by Paul Simon), no musical underscoring or processed sound effects have been laid on top of the scenes. So you often feel, a little disconcertingly, as if you're watching a filmed stage play. Adding to this theatricality, and further accentuating the tensions between characters, is the show's hypernaturalistic acting style, with ragged speaking rhythms, minutely shifting facial expressions, and excruciatingly long pauses. The performance style becomes downright harrowing in the third episode, which begins with a female character, filmed in close-up, recounting a humiliating sexual indiscretion in agonizing detail. The fact that we do not yet know the identity of the woman (she turns out to be Horace's ex-wife, played by Laurie Metcalf) adds to the sequence's disorienting power.

In a note on his website—where *Horace and Pete* is available for purchase, via a remarkably user-friendly process—Louis C. K. says that he wanted viewers to experience the show in unmediated fashion. He launched the series on his website (louisck.net), with no advance notice "to provide it to you directly and immediately, without the usual promotion, banner ads, billboards, and clips that tell you what the show feels and looks like before you get to see it for yourself." (The show's first episode costs $5; the second, $2; and subsequent ones, $3.)

Much of today's entertainment comes pre-branded and pre-pigeonholed, whether it's familiar TV genres, blockbuster film franchises, or Broadway musicals made from movies. *Horace and Pete* reminds us that life is often too layered and untidy for such simplistic categorizing. "You are not aware of anything!" Alice protests to her father at one point. "You look at a person's face, and if they're smiling, you're fine, and if they're not, then you're sad!" "Isn't that normal?" he asks, hesitantly. "Yeah," she scoffs. "For a five-year-old!" ■

CNS PHOTO / JIM YOUNG, REUTERS

Samuel Goldman

Make America Moderate Again?

Why the Right Went Wrong

Conservatism—From Goldwater to the Tea Party and Beyond

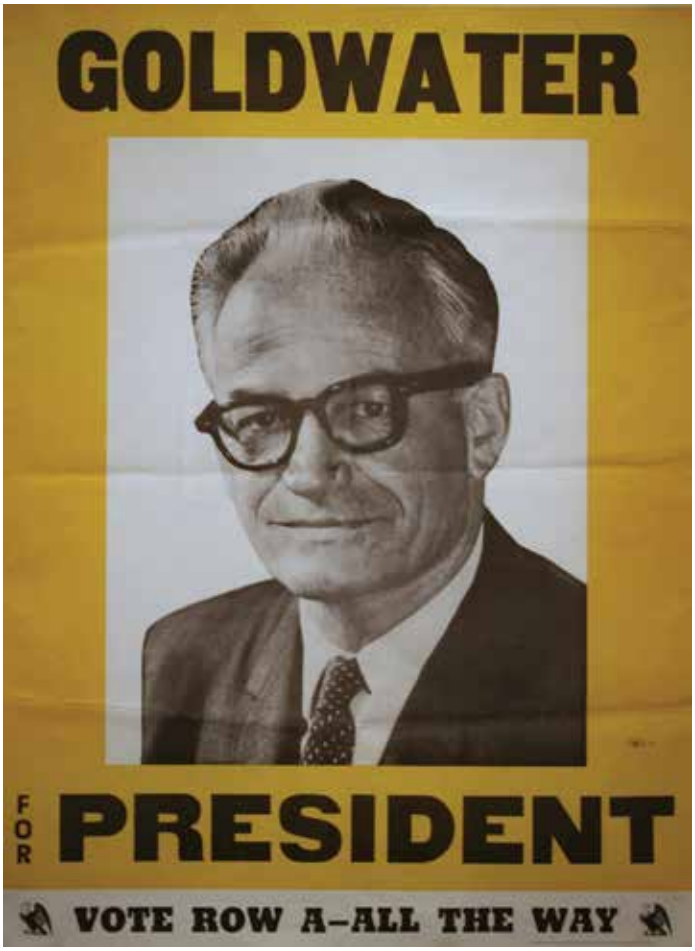
E. J. Dionne Jr.

Simon & Schuster, $30, 532 pp.

The history of the American conservative movement is usually written as a success story. Starting from the low tide of Lyndon Johnson's 1964 rout of Barry Goldwater, the standard account follows the rise of conservative arguments and personalities to influence under Nixon, power under Reagan, and bipartisan respectability under the two Bushes. Over less than half a century, ideas that had been considered nutty passed into conventional wisdom. Erstwhile kooks became gray eminences of American politics.

In *Why the Right Went Wrong*, the veteran journalist E. J. Dionne rejects this familiar narrative. Rather than a triumph, Dionne contends that "the history of contemporary American conservatism is a story of disappointment and betrayal." In the decades that followed Goldwater's defeat, conservatives won elections and established an unprecedented network of political, educational, and philanthropic institutions. But they never realized their basic promises: to reduce the size of government; to arrest the cultural transformations that followed World War II; and to secure prosperity for ordinary Americans.

Although he is a prominent progressive, Dionne's diagnosis is remarkably similar to the internal critique of conservatism associated with the Tea Party movement. The difference lies in his prescription for a movement gone astray. According to Tea Party tribunes like Ted Cruz, conservatives must press on to total victory. Dionne, on the other hand, urges conservatives to rediscover the path of compromise and moderation blazed by Eisenhower.



Dionne's argument relies on a kind of rhetorical misdirection. Intentionally or not, he combines expressions of sympathy for particular goals with the recommendation of tactics that prevent their achievement. *Why the Right Went Wrong* is not really an argument for conservatives to recover their principles. It is a case for abandoning those principles in favor of a very different style of politics.

One problem with Dionne's argument is philosophical. Invoking Edmund Burke, Dionne identifies authentic conservatism as a cautious, prudential attitude. Without opposing all reform, this approach accepts change only when it is manifestly necessary. According to Dionne, "a healthy democratic order" needs this "skepticism about the grand plans we progressives sometimes offer, and its skepticism of those who believe that politics can remold human nature."

There is much to be said for prudence, perhaps the most neglected of the virtues. But there is more to conservatism than hesitations about grand plans. Perhaps its most distinctive element is opposition to the centralization of coercive power and social welfare functions in the state. For conservatives, it matters whether we are moving in the right direction as well as how long it takes to get there.

This principle defines the American conservative movement. As Dionne shows in early chapters,

the conservatives of the 1950s regarded Eisenhower's acceptance of the New Deal as a shocking betrayal. In the lingo of the period, it was unprincipled "Toryism" rather than conservatism. The Goldwater campaign was built on this distinction.

So there is something curious about Dionne's account of "true" conservatism. Rather than describing the working basis of conservatism in the United States since World War II, he appeals to theoretical abstractions that sound more like Michael Oakeshott than anything published in *National Review*.

It is true that voters never fully endorsed the conservative vision on the national level. Goldwater went down to crushing defeat (although it might have been closer if Kennedy had lived). Nixon, Reagan, and both Bushes were willing to abandon conservative dogma when it became a political liability. Although they appreciate the rhetoric of personal responsibility, it turns out that Americans cherish the reality of Social Security, Medicare, and subsidies for homeownership.

But it does not follow that there is a broad demand for an updated version of Eisenhower's government-friendly "modern Republicanism." Although they are perennial favorites among pundits, figures like Michael Bloomberg, John Huntsman, and Arnold Schwarzenegger have demonstrated little appeal to ordinary voters, at least as national candidates. Part of the problem is that the best way to get a reputation for moderation is by denouncing conservatives, while offering non-conservatives little that they could not get from Democrats. The remaining constituency is simply not large enough to win national elections.

In fact, moderate Republicanism never was as popular as Dionne suggests—even in its heyday. Eisenhower's victory depended on his extraordinary personal prestige as much as his policies. Politicians who had not led the invasion of Western Europe had considerably more mixed records. Before Ike, Wilkie and Dewey failed to win the presidency on similar platforms. In the years that followed, eminent moderates such as Charles Percy and Mark Hatfield were never able to turn regional popularity into a national coalition.

Even at its apogee, then, modern Republicanism was extremely brittle. Seen as a commitment to moderation for its own sake, it was vulnerable to principled demands from the left that the state do much more as well as principled demands from the right that it do much less. Dionne's observation that conservative politicians have been flexible in order to get and retain power is absolutely correct—and a valuable lesson for their self-appointed heirs. But he provides few reasons to think moderation is, in itself, a recipe for success.

There are cultural and demographic reasons for moderation's diminishing returns. Although it attracted various types of supporters, the political style Dionne praises was the ideology of a particular class: the property-owning, mostly Protestant Yankees and descendants of Northern European immigrants who dominated the midcentury Establishment. The values these men (and they were almost all men) professed—responsible management, personal integrity, and foreign-policy internationalism—were not learned from books. They were elements of a broader culture.

That culture and the class that produced it were already embattled in the '50s and are now thoroughly defunct. Even in its historic strongholds, Waspy restraint has been replaced by the synthesis of meritocratic ambition and personal non-judgmentalism that appeals to today's professionals. Moderation, in other words, hasn't merely gone out of fashion; it has lost the social base that made it viable as a political stance.

As the social base of old-fashioned moderation has died out, Republicans have relied increasingly on the support of working-class whites, especially in the South and the Rust Belt. These voters are not necessarily ideological conservatives. But their nationalism and anti-elitism make them an unreceptive audience for the sort of thoughtful, empirically grounded approach that Dionne proposes.

So it is not altogether surprising that Dionne's hopes for a reformed conservatism have been Trumped over the past few months. It turns out that millions of Americans really were ready for a political alternative to movement conservatism. Rather than a second Eisenhower, however, the challenge comes from a loud-mouthed vulgarian who combines support for ostensibly earned benefits with denunciations of immigrants and criminals, and expressions of admiration for Vladimir Putin.

Dionne contends that the rise of Trump indicates the urgency of a return to moderation, before The Donald's supporters are alienated from even the possibility of responsible guidance. It is more plausibly interpreted as a sign that Dionne's argument is fundamentally misconceived.

The white working-class voters who are especially drawn to Trump do not seem overly concerned with questions about the purpose of the state or the structure of particular programs. Instead, they believe that they are being ignored or exploited by political, economic, and social elites—and they want a leader who will take on those elites. Trump's slogan, after all, is not "beware: accelerating change ahead." It is "Make American Great Again."

Conservatives who want to win must find ways to connect with these voters without rejecting their basic principles. They need a constructive agenda that does more than repeat stale, '80s-era slogans. That would be challenging at any time, but is particularly hard when the mediating institutions that once served as buffers between the individual and the state have almost completely unraveled. Discussions about how to do this should not be limited to true believers, and Dionne is to be praised for entering the debate. Even so, it's doubtful that conservatives will find the guidance they need in this book. ■

Samuel Goldman *is an assistant professor of political science and director of the Politics & Values Program at George Washington University.*

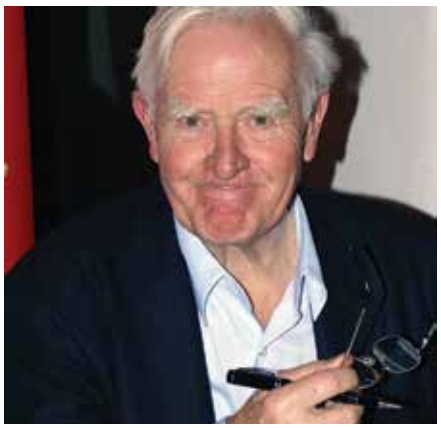
Jeffrey Meyers

Writer, Player, Soldier, Spy

John le Carré
The Biography
Adam Sisman
Harper, $28.99, 652 pp.

John le Carré—born David Cornwell in Poole, Dorset, in 1931—is a handsome and charming cartoonist, actor, mimic, raconteur, and linguist. He was also an expert skier and spy. His mother deserted her two sons and ran off with her lover when he was five years old, and the search for love and the theme of abandonment recur in his life and works. His charismatic, con-man father, Ronnie, could "rob you and love you at the same time." Le Carré's first wife thought Ronnie was absolutely evil; le Carré fantasized about killing him and his attempt to escape his father's influence was the crucial story of his life.

Ronnie Cornwell had three wives and several children, molested his son, shared a bed with a wife and mistress, was unfaithful and brutal to all his women, and infected le Carré's pregnant mother with syphilis. Ronnie's friends were sinister, his associates violent. Le Carré and his older brother lived like millionaires when Ronnie's plots paid off and he acquired racehorses, vast properties, and as much as £191,000. They lived like paupers when—as often happened—Ronnie was caught, convicted, and imprisoned. Everything about Ronnie was fake. His grand office, chauffeured Bentley, and box at Ascot were hired for the occasion and never paid for. Ronnie borrowed and then disposed of paintings, sold land he didn't own for a development scheme in Toronto, ran guns and ran from the police. He passed as an agent for a Malayan sultanate that had ceased to exist and defrauded many victims in Indonesia, Singapore, and Hong Kong. Some marks found him so attractive that they actually took pleasure in being swindled. One of Ronnie's jailers said he was "one of the finest men I ever met" and planned to hand over his own money to Ronnie as soon as he was released. Le Carré felt liberated, even jubilant, when his father died. He portrayed Ronnie in *A Perfect Spy* and *Single & Single*, about a father-obsessed son who "discovered the monster who ruled his life was just another sad and empty little man."



KRIMIDOEDEL

John le Carré

Le Carré left Sherborne School before his final year. He attended the University of Bern, where he first began to work as a spy, and interrogated refugees for army intelligence in Graz. It's not clear how he perfected his German accent when living in Switzerland and Austria. He also left Lincoln College, Oxford, before his final year; married the rather proper daughter of an air vice-marshal; taught school for a year; returned to Oxford, where he earned a first-class degree in German and French; and taught at Eton. He then joined the Foreign Service as cover for spying, and in Bonn collected intelligence and ran covert operations. In a bitter summation of his early years he exclaimed, "I hated teaching at Eton, was deeply depressed by the Foreign Service, and still have my gloomy memories of Sherborne."

But, according to le Carré, these early years formed him as a writer: "Nothing I have ever written in my life has been free of the German influences of my youth." In his new biography, Adam

Sisman does not specify which books le Carré studied at Oxford or taught at Eton. He doesn't mention Rilke and Kafka, merely notes Grimmelshausen and Schiller. But Thomas Mann's *Confessions of Felix Krull, Confidence Man* would surely have appealed to le Carré.

Though le Carré grew up in Nonconformist Congregational Chapels, he twice found solace during retreats in the Franciscan community at Cerne Abbas, Dorset. He became a close friend of the actor Alec Guinness, a Catholic convert who'd played le Carré's Smiley in two films. The older man assumed the role of confessor, "a sort of Father Brown figure."

Le Carré felt that Ronnie, who'd coerced and involved him in his schemes, had trained him from childhood in deception, betrayal, and lies, and taught him to have "a hidden life of outward conformity and inner rebellion." He thought that spies, like novelists, were not meant to tell the truth. Sisman, noting his subject's contradictions and mythical stories of his own life, does not say if they are based on false memories, heightened imagination, or deliberate mendacity. Le Carré confessed that after a lifetime of subterfuge "he no longer knew what was real and what was not."

He was born with the essential qualities of a spy: "class resentfulness, predilection for secretiveness, yearning to belong" and willingness to sacrifice moral standards. Sisman writes that le Carré's French pseudonym "remains obscure." But to have a *tête carrée* is to be level-headed, stubborn, and blunt—to be someone with the right stuff for espionage. He has always been hush-hush about his experiences as a spy, but he did reveal, "I ran one of the most prolific and successful agents for the better part of two years without mishap."

When le Carré was snooping in Bonn a series of dramatic events stimulated the public's response to his third novel and first spectacular success, *The Spy Who Came in from the Cold* (1963): the erection of the Berlin Wall, the Cuban missile crisis, President Kennedy's famous *Ich bin ein Berliner* speech, John Profumo's sex and spy scandal, Kim Philby's sensational defection to Russia, and the assassination of John Kennedy. Le Carré's main literary influences were Joseph Conrad's moral ambiguities in *Lord Jim* and *The Secret Agent*, Somerset Maugham's spy stories in *Ashenden*, and Graham Greene's *The Quiet American* and *Our Man in Havana*. But le Carré invented the literary spy thriller, which made the glamour and heroics of the contemporary James Bond novels seem absurd and obsolete. Le Carré's spies, seedy and squalid, unscrupulous and incompetent, all seemed to smell of failure. Greene called the novel "the best spy story I have ever read."

The novel was translated into thirty languages and sold a million copies. Like Byron, le Carré awoke to find himself famous. As the money poured in, he generously supported his relatives, many of whom had been cheated by Ronnie. He bought a Rolls Royce and some valuable art, extensive property on the cliffs of the south Cornish coast, a ski chalet in Switzerland, and a house in Hampstead. He also gave away £2.5 million, mostly to Cornish charities. But he confessed, "the sudden wealth, the fame, the recognition of his talents led to a deep and tragic change."

Needing a different woman for each big book, le Carré had love affairs with a married woman in Bonn and a Swedish student in Lund. During "six months' madness" he slept with any woman who would have him. His most serious affair was with Susan, the wife of his best friend, the novelist James Kennaway, which ended when Kennaway died in a car crash. Susan looked remarkably like his own wife Ann. His long-soured marriage, which had produced three sons, finally broke under the strain. Sisman says very little about the second wife, with whom le Carré had a fourth son. She'd worked in publishing and typed his manuscripts. Unlike Ann, she agreed to share him with other women and tolerated his infidelities.

He said his hopelessness about his first marriage and utter solitude drove him to write. He gives his characters bits of himself so he can better understand them. Like Balzac, he often has the same character recur in a series of novels. He writes fast and revises extensively, stops when he's making good progress and can pick up the next day. He advised a young writer to "begin the story as late as you can, write out key sentences and put them on the wall; rewrite; don't be afraid to throw away eighteen months' work." Before publication he solicits comments from trusted advisors, but when a friend once responded with harsh criticism he severed relations.

Le Carré granted Sisman access to his archives, provided introductions, and granted several long interviews. Sisman's many distracting footnotes should have been incorporated into the text, put in endnotes, or omitted. His discussion of the novels—composition, publication, reviews, sales and royalties—is tediously repetitive. But his biography is intelligent, thoroughly researched and well written, and it's especially good on the transformation of the novels into films.

In 1989 I had an angry exchange of letters with le Carré about my proposed biography, which he first allowed and then forbade. Later, he either forgot or forgave our quarrel and sent me two long handwritten letters. In a letter about Somerset Maugham as a spy during the Russian Revolution, le Carré got the facts completely wrong and condemned Somerset Maugham's brave and brilliant counterrevolutionary work: "I know that he was held to have made a complete hash of it, and behaved with a marked absence of courage." In an earlier letter about Orwell (real name: Eric Blair) at Eton, le Carré wrote, "It always amused me that Blair-Orwell, who had been to Eton, took great pains to disown the place, while Evelyn Waugh, who hadn't been to Eton, took similar pains to pretend he had." He added that "Orwell remains an ideal for me—of clarity, anger, and perfectly aimed irony." ■

Jeffrey Meyers *has recently published* Thomas Mann's Artist-Heroes *(2013) and* Remembering Iris Murdoch *(2014). His book* Robert Lowell in Love *appeared in January 2016.*

Jonathan Stevenson

Doomsday Machine

Big Science

Ernest Lawrence, the Cyclotron and the Birth of the Military-Industrial Complex

Michael Hiltzik

Simon & Schuster, $30, 528 pp.

Crack science writers have long chronicled the myriad ways in which the quest for nuclear weapons transformed experimental physics. Richard Rhodes's much lauded *The Making of the Atomic Bomb* (1986) and its sequel *Dark Sun: The Making of the Hydrogen Bomb* (1995), along with more recent books like Jim Baggott's *The First War of Physics: The Secret History of the Atom Bomb 1939–1949* (2010), all trace the story of how demure academic endeavors like Ernest Rutherford's hand-built Cavendish Laboratory became a national-level industrial effort. And certainly physicist Ernest O. Lawrence's seminal role in that evolution is well documented.

Yet previous books have treated Lawrence's exploits only interstitially. Michael Hiltzik, a Pulitzer-winning *Los Angeles Times* journalist, now offers a remarkably lucid and witty book that centers on Lawrence's career as the prototype and exemplar of the partnership among the military, academia, and private industry that developed before, during, and after World War II—that is, "Big Science."

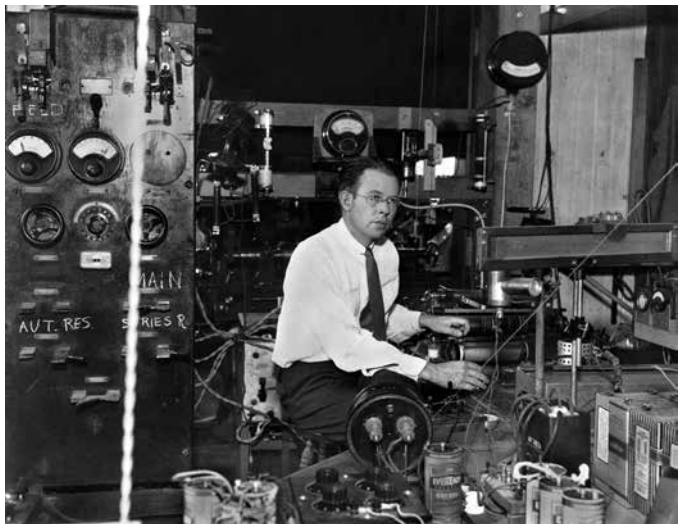
Denied promotion to associate professor at Yale, Lawrence left New Haven for the University of California at Berkeley in 1928. He invented the cyclotron—which uses a magnet to facilitate exploration of the atomic nucleus—in 1929. It was the catalytic experimental device of the nuclear age, and earned Lawrence the Nobel Prize for physics in 1939. Over the course of thirty years he refined the cyclotron and expanded the Radiation Lab—better known as the Rad Lab—that he established at Berkeley, turning the university into the physics powerhouse that it remains today and, with Caltech and Stanford colleagues, solidifying the West Coast's eminence in the American scientific community.

Lawrence was part of a continuum of historically extraordinary talent in physics. The most famous physicists of the era were theoreticians—Einstein, Bohr, Heisenberg, Fermi, later Oppenheimer and Teller—but enterprising experimentalists like Lawrence were needed to verify their equations. Possibly the most surprising aspect of his professional record was his propensity for error. Lawrence committed his first big one, nicely detailed by Hiltzik, in a series of prestigious public forums in 1933. He claimed that the Rad Lab had achieved a scientific breakthrough by liberating light neutrons from exploding deuterium nuclei (then known as deutons, now as deuterons). Older European "small scientists" and rival Americans proved that in fact contamination accounted for the purportedly groundbreaking results, requiring an embarrassing public climb-down. The blunder took "the new breed of strapping young experimentalists led by Ernest Lawrence" as well as the cyclotron down a peg.

Lawrence and the Rad Lab recovered thanks to his tactical candor and determination to move forward. Over the years, his mistakes and occasional impulsiveness were invariably offset by his unshakable confidence and vision, backed by his ability to perform magnificently at crucial times. When Lawrence's Big Science produced the bomb core for Little Boy, and later the Polaris ballistic missile for the Navy, nobody remembered "the deuton affair."

While Lawrence was an outstanding and original scientist early in his career, Hiltzik shows that it was his tireless will to enable others of comparable abilities that spawned Big Science and extended its moment. Certainly he needed his comprehensive knowledge of physics. But his unstinting South Dakota work ethic, merciless importuning of protégés (many of them, like Luis Alvarez and Glenn Seaborg, eventual Nobel laureates), bold promises to sponsors and funders, radiant confidence, and bureaucratic savvy were even more essential tools.

In many ways Lawrence also was a narrow technocrat who subordinated friendship—notably, with J. Robert Oppenheimer and the distinguished Rad Lab chemist Martin Kamen—and higher principle to professional expediency. Amplifying Lawrence's apolitical instincts throughout the book, Hiltzik is careful to record that the passionate and sophisticated ethical debate among scientists about using the atom bomb surfaced only after the Germans—the real raison d'être of the weapon—were defeated, months earlier than Oppenheimer's legendary "I am become death" lament following the first A-bomb



Ernest Lawrence sitting at the control table of the cyclotron, circa 1933

test in New Mexico. The author also stresses that Lawrence dropped his initial advocacy of a victimless demonstration to the Japanese and opted out of the ethical debate, acquiescing to the seductive but simplistic argument that compared the casualties from a ground invasion of Japan with those from atomic strikes.

Later Lawrence would oppose a nuclear test ban, purportedly on the grounds that more tests could produce less destructive H-bombs and "make nuclear weapons more moral." He was far from alone in subscribing to this perverse Strangelovean strain of Cold War logic, but it's hard not to infer that a key motivation was full employment for the Rad Lab, which specialized in bomb design—not the moral elevation of nuclear war. David Lilienthal, the resolutely dovish first chairman of the Atomic Energy Commission, contemptuously labeled Lawrence, among others, a "salesman type" of scientist "on the make"—as Hiltzik puts it, he was out "for government largesse and personal glory." The Rad Lab was formally named the Lawrence Radiation Laboratory shortly after his death in 1958, and later the Lawrence Livermore National Laboratory. During the nuclear alarm in the early 1980s, Lawrence's wife Molly expressed "shame and remorse" over his association with the laboratory, and campaigned in vain to have his name removed from it.

President Eisenhower was right to warn of the potentially outsized power of the military-industrial complex in his famous farewell address. The coziness between the Pentagon and private industry led to strategic distortions, economic inefficiencies, and arguably greater risk of annihilation throughout the Cold War. But it wasn't all bad. This collaboration remained an essential element of a strategy of deterrence that really did work, and yielded human triumphs like the space program and the moon landing. Thus, when Hiltzik asks whether Big Science is in its twilight, there is a hint of patriotic lament.

Hiltzik notes, for instance, that the mammoth Large Hadron Collider (LHC) in Geneva, a direct descendant of Lawrence's cyclotron, is not an American-led project. Congress killed the United States' even more powerful Superconducting Super Collider (SSC) in 1993; Hiltzik claims "the SSC camp lacked Lawrence's ability to hold a lay audience in thrall, and to hold the scientific community together." This is a real loss: the LHC has done great things in physics. In 2012 and 2013, it confirmed the existence of the elusive Higgs boson or "God particle"—the crucial component of the so-called Standard Model of subatomic physics. As chronicled in the 2014 documentary film *Particle Fever*, the LHC's success elicited a tear from Dr. Peter Higgs himself, a frail octogenarian who did not expect to live to see the experimental confirmation of his theoretical particle.

A new Big Science project on the order of the LHC, says Hiltzik, would require "a consortium of nations." The "peace dividend" occasioned by the end of the Cold War effectively shrank the military-industrial complex at least until 9/11. According to Hiltzik, government-funded basic research took the biggest hit, and the economic collapse in the late naughts will comparably constrain U.S. military budgets for years. Yet sentimentality about Big Science may be misplaced. As Hiltzik's account makes clear, Big Science gained such enormous mid-century traction on account of two rare fortuities: a historic world war and the singularly audacious personality of Ernest Lawrence. Their equivalents may be required for Big Science to rise again. Global climate change—hardly a welcome phenomenon—may provide the technological and political challenge. This fine book ultimately poses two additional questions: Where are today's Lawrences, and do we really want them? ■

Jonathan Stevenson, *a New York–based writer, is the author of* Thinking Beyond the Unthinkable *(Viking, 2008).*

James Hannan

Spurred by Rage

You Think It Strange

A Memoir

Dan Burt

The Overlook Press, $21.95, 184 pp.

If the journey of acclaimed poet Dan Burt from the mean streets of South Philadelphia to the halls of Cambridge University and Yale Law School were simply an inspirational saga of grit and determination, it would be just another offering in the *Ragged Dick* genre. What makes this slim volume such a fascinating read is not so much the tale as the telling, at once poetical and fiercely unsentimental; a telling that is animated by a deep-seated anger crackling just beneath the narrative; a telling that is signaled in the book's title, a misremembered line from W. B. Yeats's "Spur":

> You think it horrible that lust and rage
> Should dance attention upon my old age;
> They were not such a plague when I was young
> What else have I to spur me into song?

Burt's father, the son of Russian Jews who fled the WWI-era pogroms, came of age during the Great Depression. An amateur boxer, he had a volcanic temper and was quick to use his fists on anyone who crossed him, including young Dan. Burt's mother was the scion of the Jewish crime family that ran the rackets from a bar in the heart of Philadelphia's Tenderloin. A "tough woman," she represents a "void" in his early childhood experiences, and to this day he maintains that he had no love for her.

At age twelve, Burt began working in his father's butcher shop. Four years later, he was spending thirty hours a week in the shop during the school year and twice that in the summers. The shop was located in the Pennsauken (New Jersey) Merchandise Mart, "a one-story, flat-roofed yellow cinderblock coffin, floating in an open sea of asphalt where a thousand cars could park." Vendors of every description sold their wares from stalls crowding the narrow aisles. Just walking through the building, as my wife and I did as young newlyweds, was an assault on the senses. It's difficult to imagine working there all those hours, weeks, and years in less-than-sanitary conditions—and routinely cheating your working-class customers at your father's behest.

The sea off Barnegat Light and Long Beach Island in New Jersey provided a refuge from the crushing tedium. For Burt, "Barnegat Light, the Inlet and the sea were Philadelphia…and Pennsauken's contrapositives." The charter boat captains he came to know were his "father's antitype. I wanted their world to be mine, and to be one of them." He got his wish, in a way, when his father started a charter fishing business of his own and took his son on as first mate. The experience

DANBURTPOETRY.COM

Dan Burt

was transformative for both men. The author's account of these times is the most richly detailed and lyrical part of the book.

Burt attended an inner-city elementary school and, despite numerous suspensions and an undistinguished academic record, managed to pass Central High's entrance exam. Central was an all-boys magnet school that attracted students from the tonier sections of the city. He was suspended his first day for fighting with a student who had mocked him for his apparent lack of sophistication; it would not be his last scuffle or suspension. He struggled academically for the first two years, but fared better after that thanks to the interest of an English teacher "who opened the borders of [his] mind."

That teacher also encouraged Burt's college aspirations. After scoring well on the SATs, he chose La Salle, which was local and relatively inexpensive. It was also Catholic, and his knowledge of Catholics came mostly "from gangs and neighborhood fights."

Burt's knowledge of culture, which he naively associated with college life, was similarly limited. To him, culture meant classical music. So, the summer before he entered La Salle, he changed his radio-listening habits from WIBG, Philadelphia's home of rock and roll, to WFLN, the all-classical station. He seldom paid strict attention to the "usual unintelligible but cultured noise" that WFLN aired. That was to change one particularly steamy afternoon while he was driving his father's truck to pick up meat from the Callowhill packing houses. For some reason, the opening phrase of Beethoven's *Piano Sonata No. 14* (the "Moonlight Sonata") made an overwhelming impression on him. He knew nothing of the piece, but as it played "the Mart receded from one piano keystroke to the next, swept away on a purifying tide of notes."

If Beethoven inspired Burt's love of culture, it was a college English teacher, Bob Smith, who inspired him to write and who filled in his "literary and cultural gaps." As Burt approached his senior year at La Salle, Smith, along with others on the English faculty, encouraged him to apply to graduate school. He demurred. He wanted to be a lawyer, mostly because he was "afraid…of the Depression-era poverty that [his] father and the butcher shop drip-fed into [his] blood." And, by this time, he was married to his seventeen year-old girlfriend who had lost the baby she was carrying shortly after their hastily arranged nuptials.

Yet Burt was intrigued when an Englishman on a year's teaching-exchange program at La Salle asked him if he had ever thought of applying to Cambridge or Oxford. The teacher suggested that Burt send a writing sample along with an application to "Senior Tutor, Balliol College, Oxford, and Trinity and St John's Colleges, Cambridge." Burt dutifully sent off the materials.

Shortly after that Burt and Smith drove to Chicago for a meeting of the Modern Language Association. Somewhere on the Ohio Turnpike, Burt dozed off behind the wheel, and his car careened off the snowy road and into a ditch. The accident left him paralyzed from the neck down and his passenger with permanent brain damage. A painful nonsurgical procedure and months of rehab restored Burt's mobility.

When Burt finally returned to his wife and their rented apartment in a seedy section of Philadelphia's Germantown neighborhood, he learned that he had been accepted for graduate work at the University of Cambridge. He had, it seemed, finally achieved escape velocity.

And there the story ends, save for a brief afterword in which Burt, now a British citizen living in London, explains how he developed his memoir from a series of poems and short prose pieces that he had published over the years. Those writings were his attempt to come to terms with the "people, places, and incidents" that "frame the house of childhood," a house that "we dwell in... forever."

One would expect to come away from such a reckoning inspired and uplifted. This reviewer came away numb and exhausted—and richer for the experience. I sensed no joy on the author's part. His recollections are keenly observed, but to my ear, his poetic voice is subdued by his life-long efforts to suppress a temper that was forged during a childhood filled with "suspicion, aggression, violence in home, at school, [and] in the streets." There is no release or relief in his story, just a stark and pervading sense of emotional sclerosis.

And that is what gives the book its distinctive voice and its power to draw the reader into the author's universe—a universe well worth exploring. ■

James Hannan *is* Commonweal*'s business manager.*

Valerie Sayers

Imagining John Lennon

Beatlebone

Kevin Barry
Doubleday, $24.95, 299 pp.

Kevin Barry—Irish novelist, playwright, screenwriter—is bawdy, funny, and bleak, equally capable of gorgeous lyricizing and profane philosophizing. His books include two collections of stories, as tight as tales of madmen, drunkards, and sloggers could be, and two novels, also beautifully controlled but full of writerly hijinks. He is completely of this moment, in both literary and pop-cultural terms. His first novel, *The City of Bohane*, is a classic tale of feudal loyalty, betrayal, and intrigue disguised as a futuristic satire (and low comedy) of rival gangs in the West of Ireland. In an author's note, he cheerfully admits he is as dependent on graphic novels and TV shows for inspiration as he is on his literary touchstones.

Barry's new novel *Beatlebone* is far more compact, with a smaller cast of characters and tighter span of time. But it is no less ambitious, as modernist (indeed, as Joycean) in its formal experimentation as it is postmodernist in its acute self-consciousness and shifting centers of narrative gravity. Best to think of it as panmodern, ranging across a century's worth of literary and popular references. A meditation on place, grief, and longing, the novel features John Lennon (yes, the Beatle) as its protagonist and (sometime) hero. Lennon has bought an island in Clew Bay, as he actually did in 1967, off the coast of County Mayo, Ireland. Over the course of this novel, set in 1978, he makes a comic, halting pilgrimage to his floating piece of sod.

Lennon is in search of refuge and connection to his own Irish forbears; he is also in search of a place where he can Scream, with a capital S. (For readers who may not have been around for the '60s and '70s, Barry fills in a brief history of Lennon's relationship to Arthur Janov's primal-scream therapy, and the surrounding slew of countercultural attempts to move past the psychological constraints of familial trauma.) Lennon's loss of his mother Julia when he was seventeen, as well as her decision to have her older sister raise him for most of his childhood, help account for the unabashed longing in his 1968 song "Julia," which invokes an "oceanchild" with "seashell eyes."

In *Beatlebone*, John himself is something of an oceanchild: "alive on the silver" of a fish's skin, he spends the night in a watery cave where he engages in snappy dialogue with a seal. These are not the only hallucinatory moments in a novel that embraces specters. In the novel's opening pages, John has "come over a bit strange and dippy again—the hatches to the underworld are opening" as he feels the pull to his "seabeaten" island in "the place of the old blood." His driver and fixer, a frustrating, constantly disappearing and reappearing charmer named Cornelius O'Grady, dresses John in his dead father's clothes so that they can go drinking. At the Highwood, John meets a doctor who explains the difference between the Irish and the rest of civilization: "The continental," he says, "will enjoy a glass of wine with his supper and then very happily go home for the evening. But the Irishman is familiar always with the concept of the lip.... The Irishman will have a glass of wine with his supper and it will be lovely but then he will say"—and here I must cut off a very funny line, unprintable in these pages. The doctor concludes, in shall we say vivid language, with a stereotypical vision that could not be more apt: the Irishman, unable to stop at one lovely glass of wine, is "gone," as John—exotic with his repeated forays into drugs and exotic belief systems—has been so often gone. Why he thinks his little island of Dorinish will save him is the mystery this novel meditates upon.

The writing in *Beatlebone* is ecstatically inventive; it won the 2015 Goldsmiths Prize for "creative daring" by a British or Irish novelist. It is composed in nine distinctive parts (the number nine, as Beatles fans will remember, is an important sign for John; but Barry fans will know that he, too, has a fascination with the number nine, alongside a knowledge that searching for numerical patterns is "symptomatic of at least a mild disintegration"). Indeed, the most remarkable section of the novel occurs two-thirds of the way through when the narrator

STEFAN LEJON

interrupts John's point of view, which has been presented in a shifting series of lyrical, farcical, dreamy, and satiric set pieces, scripts, and internal monologues. Suddenly *Beatlebone*'s narrator speaks in the first person (is he Kevin Barry? "Kevin Barry"? A narrative conceit to remind readers of the literary seepage between fiction and nonfiction?). It hardly matters. The chapter is written in a "mature, honed prose, as clear as glass: this from a man who has never knowingly underfed an adjective." That self-mocking tone is emblematic of the ease with which Barry has slipped from one narrative mode to another throughout. Now the invocation of the narrator's own childhood loss of his mother provides a strong ironic divide between the novel's sentimental possibilities and the more demanding requirements of its author's artistic intelligence.

Barry's portrait of John Lennon is ultimately both sympathetic and clear-eyed. Like any Lennon fan (like me), Barry is under the delusion that he knows John Lennon—but unlike the rest of us, Barry has immersed himself in John's moment-to-moment existence. He speaks with Lennon's tongue (the narrator's section details listening to hours of interviews to catch his cadences). I believe in this Lennon, even as I wish for more of a sense of John's movement from psychological torment to political awareness. Lennon the peace activist and feminist are acknowledged, but it's really the Lennon who can't let go of childhood longing who controls *Beatlebone*. He gets to his island: he reclaims his roots, sort of, and maybe even a sense of the sacred. Kevin Barry's narrative abandon has done "Julia" and Julia full justice, even if it has set John Lennon screaming once again. *Beatlebone* is a strange, wondrous trip. ■

Valerie Sayers, *professor of English at Notre Dame, is the author of six novels including* The Powers.

The Gospel according to Del Monte

Charles Murphy

Much was written last fall on the occasion of the fiftieth anniversary of the close of the Second Vatican Council. It is often noted that it takes a generation or more for the teachings of an ecumenical council to be absorbed and implemented, especially a reforming council like Vatican II. A unique window into the creative energies and soaring hopes unleashed by the council were vividly in evidence in a recent exhibit mounted by Harvard University's Fogg Museum, *Corita Kent and the Language of Pop*. The exhibit is now on display through May 8 at the San Antonio Museum of Art.

Catholics of a certain age remember Sister Corita Kent and her controversial work well. I became acquainted with her in the early days of my priesthood. It was in 1967, at the height of the Vietnam War, and I had been invited to attend a protest event called "An Evening with God." This multimedia extravaganza featured Sister Corita as well as the Harvard theologian Harvey Cox (author of *The Secular City*), the Jesuit activist Fr. Daniel Berrigan, SJ, and the singer Judy Collins. For Catholics emerging from the "ghetto," the remarkable changes ushered in by the Second Vatican Council combined with the turmoil of the civil-rights and anti-war movements were turning much of our world upside down. Those were heady days, and Kent's life and art exemplified the times.

A member of the religious congregation of the Immaculate Heart of Mary, Kent was art professor at the congregation's college in Los Angeles at the time. Her avant-garde work captured the ferment and tensions occasioned by the council as well as the dramatic changes taking place in the larger culture. Pop Art can be traced to Marcel Duchamps, who turned "found objects"—most notoriously a urinal—into what they insisted was art. Kent, along with Andy Warhol, Jasper Johns, Josef Albers, Roy Lichtenstein, and Frank Stella, figured prominently in the burgeoning movement in the 1960s, and all are represented in the *Corita Kent and the Language of Pop* exhibit. However, Kent's ambitions were explicitly religious. Through the medium of the screen print, she provocatively turned the slogans of the advertising industry, especially regarding food, into a whole new religious language.

In 1962, Kent had visited the first exhibit in Los Angeles of Andy Warhol's *Campbell's Soup Cans* paintings. She thought that a similar embrace of the vernacular of the marketplace could be used to express religious sentiments. A seminal piece of Kent's art, for example, is her screen print *the juiciest tomato of all* (1964). The reference is to an advertisement for Del Monte's canned tomatoes, but Kent turned the phrase into a reference to the Blessed Virgin Mary. Likewise, she showed how Wonder Bread, an enormously popular brand at the time, could become a new expression of the meaning of the Eucharist. Kent and her students transformed contemporary advertising slogans such as "Come alive!" "Power up!" "Handle With Care," into Gospel exhortations. As she explained her evangelical goals in *Footnotes and Headlines: A Play-Pray Book*, "all the words we need are in the ads, they can be endlessly resorted and reassembled. It is a huge grace, it is a way of confronting mystery."

The current exhibit's images, as the show's title suggests, are combined with Kent's handwritten texts citing passages from theology, philosophy, and literature as well as the famous advertising slogans. Her writing explores the deep yearnings of the human heart that popular culture endlessly evokes but ultimately cannot satisfy.

In 1968, Kent left religious life in the wake of the confrontation between Los Angeles Cardinal James McIntyre and the Immaculate Heart sisters over the order's efforts at reform and renewal. She spent the rest of her life in Boston, where she died in 1986. Kent is perhaps best known to the general public for how she turned a large cylindrical gas storage tank located south of the city along Route 93 into a work of art. As she explained, the huge swatches of the colors of the rainbow running down the sides of the tank were an allusion to the creation account in the Book of Genesis. "To me, a rainbow represents hope, uplifting, spring….It is a joyous expression, joining heaven and earth together." ■

"Boston Gas Tank (Rainbow Tank)," 1971, by Corita Kent

PHOTO COURTESY OF THE HARVARD ART MUSEUM

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