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An Interview with C. E. Morgan

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LETTERS

A gift, dropping the atomic bomb, Trump

CHECK ENCLOSED

I'm now ninety-three years old. My father introduced me to *Commonweal* when I was in high school at Boston Latin School. I have been a constant reader of *Commonweal* since that time. (I missed it for about three and a half years during the Second World War.)

I wish I could offer more than $100, but that is the top of what you asked for, and that is what I can afford at this time.

JOHN J. CONNELLY
Wellesley, Mass.

WITH APOLOGIES

In response to E. J. Dionne Jr.'s column, "Obama & Hiroshima's Moral Lessons" (June 17, 2016): I was an unwitting beneficiary of President Truman's decision to use atomic weapons against the defenseless men, women, and children of Hiroshima and Nagasaki in the late summer of 1945. The president's decision very likely saved my life, as I was then in the Philippines with the 109th Combat Engineers Battalion scheduled to invade Kyushu in support of the 2nd Airborne. Even so I must object to the line of reasoning and the conclusions in Dionne's column.

It is salutary that we have a president, Mr. Obama, who is thoughtful and sensitive, and personally cognizant of a theologian such as Reinhold Niebuhr. But a Christian still should not justify either the moral or intellectual confusions found in Dionne's column.

I had an opportunity in September 1945 to view the human effects of the American carpet fire-bombing that had preceded Hiroshima. This was a terror campaign in the strictest sense of the words, waged against an almost defenseless human population. I saw it in the city of Sendai, but it also happened in virtually every major Japanese population center. I was a callow twenty-year old then but the growing sense of the horror that the United States then perpetrated remains with me at age ninety-one.

I should think that the Christian injunction against killing would be exactly applicable in that context. A Christian would rather die than kill someone else. At most, he or she might kill another human being to prevent murder or murderous harm to another human being. There is no religious sanction for the murder of innocents in the name of an always fallible and often quite culpable political construct such as the United States of America.

My present conviction is that an apology by President Obama would have been in order. For the American people a substantial period of repentance would be rather more proportionate.

BERNARD F. REILLY
Professor of History, Emeritus
Villanova University
Broomall, Pa.

NEXT TIME

Peter Steinfels ("The Semi-Fascist," June 17) is correct. Trump is a bullying, buffoonish "semi-fascist" who can't see the world except through his own ego. Yet, whether he wins or loses, Trumps's candidacy makes clear the frightening level of alienation, resentment, and irrationality that has taken root in large swathes of the country. If we have a murderous, large-scale terrorist attack, or there's another ruinous recession—or worst of all, both—the stage will be set for a candidate far craftier, purposeful, vicious, xenophobic, and power hungry than Trump. The candidate next time will no longer be "semi": he/she is the one to watch out for.

PETER QUINN
Hastings-on-Hudson, N. Y.

The next issue of
Commonweal
will be dated
August 12, 2016

How Long Shall the Wicked Exult?

Omar Mateen was a mass murderer, a vicious homophobe, a wife-beater, and a bigot with a long and troubled history of instability, resentment, and violence. Although he announced his allegiance to ISIS while gunning down forty-nine innocent people at a gay nightclub in Orlando, how much of a jihadist he was is far from clear. Was he inspired or "self-radicalized" by the cruelties of the so-called Islamic State, or did he attach himself to that feverish death cult in the hopes of magnifying his own notoriety as a murderer? Were his vile boasts and arrogance the products of religious extremism or mere delusional rants? Presumably more will be learned about Mateen's motives as investigators question his wife and comb through his phone, his Facebook account, his computer, and whatever other records he left behind. In the end, however, this sort of evil remains beyond comprehension.

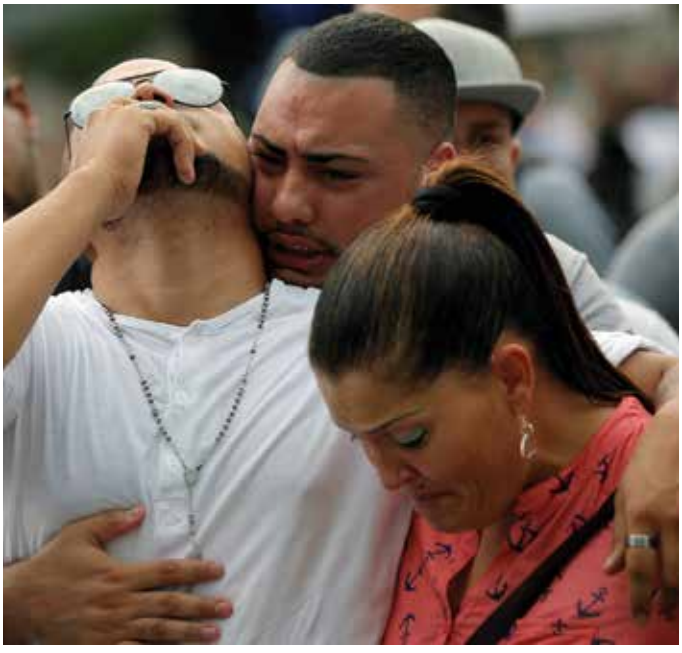
The survivors of the massacre—including more than fifty wounded people, the families and friends of the slain, and the nation as a whole—are mourning the dead, giving comfort to the afflicted, and trying to come to grips with the deadliest mass shooting in the country's history, one that purposefully targeted the LGBT community. As President Obama noted, what happened in Orlando was both terrorism *and* a hate crime. It is wrong to downplay or ignore the fact that Mateen's victims were murdered for being gay.

Fortunately, the response of the Orlando community, and indeed most of the nation, has been one of outrage and of concern for the victims, most poignantly manifested in the hundreds of people who lined up to give blood for the wounded. Donald Trump's fear-mongering and odious attempts to exploit the killings for political advantage have so far failed. Still, the brutality and magnitude of the crime can only leave us shaken. At times like this, when evil appears to prevail and the moral universe is turned upside down, people of faith look to Scripture to express our bewilderment and righteous anger. As the Psalmist cries out:

> Rise up, O judge of the earth;
> Give to the proud what they deserve!
> O Lord, how long shall the wicked,
> how long shall the wicked exult?
>
> They pour out their arrogant words;
> all the evildoers boast.
> They crush your people, O Lord,
> and afflict your heritage.
> They kill the widow and the stranger,
> they murder the orphan,
> and they say, "The Lord does not see;
> the God of Jacob does not perceive."

In the disorienting aftermath of events like Orlando, it often seems as though the God of Jacob does not perceive, and it is no impiety to say so. Even Christ asked if God had forsaken him. But that is not the end of the story as far as Christians are concerned. Expressing our fears, even our anger, over the killing of the innocent allows us to summon the hope and determination needed to persevere in the face of evil. "We come together in this time of sorrow, this time of darkness," Archbishop Blase Cupich wrote to Chicago's lesbian and gay community after Orlando. "Yet we walk in the light of solidarity and peace. We walk with the unshakable resolve to change our nation and our world for the better."

Amen. ■



CNS PHOTO / JIM YOUNG, REUTERS

Mourners grieve at a June 13 vigil for the victims of the mass shooting at the Pulse gay nightclub in Orlando.

Mollie Wilson O'Reilly

Honoring the Dishonorable

YALE'S CALHOUN COLLEGE NEEDS A NEW NAME

Last year, the president of Yale publicly opened a discussion about renaming one of the university's undergraduate "colleges," one that since its founding in the early 1930s has been called Calhoun College in honor of the prominent Yale alumnus and seventh vice president of the United states, the white supremacist John C. Calhoun.

My hope was that my alma mater would indeed choose a new name, acknowledging the insupportable tension between promoting equality and diversity on campus and asking students to join a community named for a man who dedicated his life to preserving slavery.

But what I expected was that Yale would keep the name out of fear of alienating alumni donors. Not that I thought they'd put it in those terms. For generations of students, the name of Calhoun College stood for something more than, and arguably independent of, the legacy of the man who inspired it. Therefore, Yale might have said, the name will remain, in recognition of those students who rallied under its banner and in spite of the ugly legacy of the college's namesake. That conclusion wouldn't have satisfied everyone, but it would have been coherent.

In April, Yale's president, Peter Salovey, announced that he had decided to let the name stand. But I was deeply disappointed with the explanation he offered. Keeping the name, he said, is "the proper path for an educational and research institution whose motto is 'light and truth.'" He elaborated in an (extremely gentle) interview with David Cole in the *New York Review of Books*: "To me, the principle that is most compelling is that we should attempt to confront our history in order both to learn from it and to change the future. We shouldn't obscure our history, or run from it."

So, as Salovey would have it, Yale, by *not* changing the name, is bravely confronting its history, while those who called on the university to examine Calhoun's legacy are unwittingly fighting to obscure it.

This is tendentious nonsense, and the appeal to principle adds insult to injury. Discontinuing the name would be an obvious way to demonstrate that Yale really had confronted and learned from its history. As for changing the future, publicly rechristening the college now called "Calhoun" would certainly qualify. The new name would be a monument to Yale's rejection of the implications of a decision made in its not-so-distant past.

Maintaining the status quo, on the other hand, requires dissembling about the implications of that unfortunate decision: "I would not call naming a residential college for Calhoun necessarily celebrating him," Salovey told Cole, "although it does memorialize him." Such disingenuousness makes it hard to trust in the integrity of Yale's further self-examination—Salovey has announced plans for a relevant art installation and an "interactive history project." How about giving Calhoun College a courtyard sculpture acknowledging racism *and* a new name? Why does Salovey talk as though it would be impossible to do both?

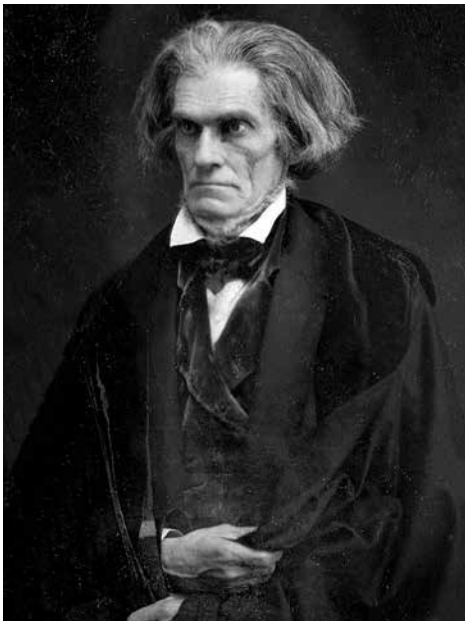


Photo of John C. Calhoun by Matthew Brady, 1849

Plenty of other colleges and institutions face similar challenges as their traditions clash with the ideals of the present day. And the past year has seen much alarm over student protests on campuses and the potentially suffocating effects of "P.C. culture." In light of that, Salovey seems to be drawing a line preemptively: Yale will not buckle under in this instance, for fear of what it could lead to. "Any 315-year-old institution in this country is going to discover aspects of its own history about which it is now not proud," he said. "I was very concerned that hiding them away, starting with Calhoun, would simply make it less likely that we would teach our own history." But this is a false framework—Yale has been asked to publicly reject John Calhoun's legacy, not hide it away. As for concerns that Calhoun may be the thin edge of the wedge, Salovey himself has noted that the case against him is anything but thin. Calhoun's connection to slavery and white supremacy was not peripheral, just an effect of the times, but absolutely central to his life of public service (and thus to the decision made to honor—or "memorialize"—him in the 1930s).

Still, what if an honest reevaluation of Yale's past does require more adjustments down the road? What makes confronting the past courageous is the possibility that it may compel us to change something in the present. Without allowing for that possibility, high-minded talk of changing the future is plainly nothing but talk. ■

Rita Ferrone

Saint Phoebe, Pray for Us

WILL THE CHURCH GET WOMEN DEACONS?

Deacon Phoebe from a first-century mosaic in Pompei

At this fall's Synod on the Family, Archbishop Paul-André Durocher of Quebec asked that the ordination of women as deacons be considered. The suggestion didn't seem to go anywhere. More recently, however, when a gathering of nine hundred heads of women's religious communities from around the world (the International Union of Superiors General) raised this question again in May, Pope Francis was interested. He said he would call together an official commission to clarify the question of the historical role of women deacons. I was pleasantly surprised.

It was not long, however, before doubts set in. Hadn't such a study already been done, with zero result? And the pope's idea of asking the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith (CDF) to inform him of the state of the question—wasn't that the kiss of death? After all, the head of the CDF, Cardinal Gerhard Müller, is well known for his opposition to women in the diaconate. Was this just a way to avoid a tough question—form a committee?

As it turns out, the International Theological Commission (ITC) has done two historical-theological studies of women in the diaconate. One, begun in 1992 and completed in 1997, never saw the light of day. The prefect of the CDF, then-Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger, refused to sign it, presumably because it took a positive view of ordaining women deacons. A second, much longer study, which Cardinal Müller helped to write, was published in 2002. It concluded that male and female deacons in history are not "purely and simply equivalent" (deaconesses were inferior) and the question of what to do today is a matter for discernment by church authority.

This latter study, although it leaves the question open, is clearly biased against the possibility of ordaining women to the diaconate. For example, the New Testament evidence is reviewed—including much about the Jerusalem "seven," who assisted the Apostles but are never called deacons—without a single mention of Phoebe the deacon in St. Paul's letter to the Romans. She turns up briefly, many pages later, under the subheading "Deaconesses," but is dismissed.

Poor Phoebe. The only person in the New Testament to have actually been called a deacon, and she is brushed aside on linguistic grounds: "Although the masculine form of *diakonos* is used here, it cannot therefore be concluded that the word is being used to designate the specific function of a 'deacon'; firstly because in this context *diakonos* still signifies servant in a very general sense, and secondly because the word 'servant' is not given a feminine suffix but preceded by a feminine article." Got that? For good measure, we are reminded at the end of the paragraph that in 1 Corinthians St. Paul also refers to the "*diakonoi*" of the devil.

Speaking of the devil, there is no acknowledgement in the study that misogyny may have played a role in the suppression of women's ministries. The notion that a renewal of the practice of women in diaconal ministry today might actually right a wrong, or quicken the Spirit, or enrich the ministry, seems never to have occurred to the study's authors, or if it did they didn't mention it. I find that sad. Reading the history requires more clear-sightedness, courage, and imagination than we have seen to date in Rome.

When you come right down to it, advocacy for the ordination of women deacons is a conservative position. On the one hand, it brings some of the charisms exercised by women in the church into a structured relationship with the bishop, and thus under his (presumably unifying) influence. On the other, it contributes to the good name and effective witness of the church as an institution by the orderly channeling of women's energies into its "regular" ministries rather than ad hoc and "irregular" ones.

Ironically, any gains that might be made by the recognition and routinization of the charisms of women through ordination are outweighed in the minds of some male clerics by the danger of "clericalizing women." These concerns are overblown. Clergy who obsess about the dangers of clericalism in women are projecting their own sins and selling short women's capacity for virtue.

If Pope Francis convenes a new commission, and perhaps even places a few women on it (none of the authors of the two preceding studies were female), will they come up with different results? They might. There has been new research on the subject of women deacons within Roman Catholicism by scholars such as Phyllis Zagano, Gary Macy, Bill Ditewig, and John Collins, and some of the historical sources on which the 2002 ITC study relies have been reevaluated. There is also conversation in Orthodox circles about the "rejuvenation" of the ministry of women deacons. Here one might mention the scholarly work of Kyriaki Karidoyanes FitzGerald, Saint Catherine's Vision (a pan-Orthodox theological fellowship), and the St. Phoebe Center for the History of the Deaconess.

Time will tell. In the meanwhile, perhaps we should ask Saint Phoebe to pray for us. Though she would later be despised for the lack of a feminine suffix, she did manage to do the work. ■

Gordon Marino

The Greatest

HOW MUHAMMAD ALI WON ME OVER

Let us now praise famous men. Muhammad Ali is often touted for his courage outside the ring, for being a champion of justice, even when it cost him his livelihood. But let us not forget his matchless mettle in the ring. It could, after all, be argued that there is a relationship between physical and moral courage, that Ali's ability to endure punishing fights bulked up his capacity to take blows of a different kind for justice.

Heavyweight championship boxing is nuclear war in a twenty-foot ring. When Ali was coming up as a young fighter, the cynical cigar-chomping boxing scribes were sure that one good lick from Sonny Liston would button the "Louisville Lip." Ironically—and much to the detriment of his long-term health—no one could absorb punches better than Ali. Take, for a prime example, the ferocious back-and-forth between Ali and his archrival Joe Frazier in their 1975 "Thrilla in Manila." It was an oven-like 107 degrees, and considerably hotter under the klieg lights when the fighters toed the line. The battle, which ended with an Ali victory after the fourteenth round, was mind-boggling—first because of the sheer superhuman grit of the combatants, but also because Ali and Frazier, by dint of their prowess and infinite resolve, managed to transform an event so brutal it almost made you feel guilty to watch into an exotic form of beauty.

For those of us who preach about the importance of commitment, Ali is an object lesson of someone who reached into the deepest parts of himself to achieve victory. In YouTube clips you can see the ledge that Ali pushed his body toward and over in his wars with Frazier, Norton, Foreman, and others.

His Achilles-like courage duly noted, let me confess that as a teenager with boxing aspirations I hated Muhammad Ali. Playful as he was, he had a vicious streak, especially with other black fighters who somehow threatened his center-stage status. I heard him disrespect Joe Louis and watched him torture and humiliate a hobbled Floyd Patterson in their 1965 fight. But Ali saved his real devils for my hero, the noble Joe Frazier. Before their fights—and even though Frazier had lent him money during the lean years when Ali was deprived of his boxing license—Ali sadistically taunted "The Smoke," saying he was too ugly and stupid to be champion. In the buildup to their final encounter, he started calling Frazier "the Gorilla," and even toted around a toy gorilla to yank out and smack around at media events. It stung Frazier and his family to the bone, so much so that in the moments before their epic fray, Frazier, a devout Christian, literally prayed to be forgiven for the murderous intentions he harbored toward Ali.

To be fair, Ali grew as a person after he grew out of boxing. Again and again over the years, he personally and sincerely apologized to Frazier and his family. Sadly, Joe was never able to pull the stingers out, and it seems as though he took his resentment with him to the grave in 2011.

But there were other less substantive reasons that Ali was glass in the gut for me. With his almost feminine good looks, his flitting about the ring, and his incessant jibber-jabber, he was at odds with the code of strong-and-silent masculinity that I instinctively revered. And for all I know of my cultural unconscious, maybe his flamboyant expressions of black pride chafed against the soft underbelly of my "liberal" self. But again, I didn't like him back then. When Frazier knocked him on his rump in the final stanza of their first fight, I almost jumped through the ceiling with joy. Maybe it took Ali's being defanged by illness, but I finally began to grasp the radiant beauty of this comet of a human being.

There are people with egos that dwarf those of the merely driven and highly ambitious. Muhammad Ali was one of them. Angelo Dundee once confided, "Even when he started out you couldn't tell Muhammad what to do. Even then, he had too big of an ego. So if I wanted to give him some instruction, I would compliment him. If I wanted him to bend his knees more when he was jabbing, I would wait until the end of the workout, slap him on the back and say, 'I loved the way you bent your knees today.' Afterwards Muhammad would smile and say, 'You liked that huh?'"

Unlike any braggart I have ever known, Ali had a self-love that was transferrable. While he beat up his opponents and pick-pocketed their confidence, he miraculously helped millions see a fresh set of possibilities in their bathroom mirrors.

Evander Holyfield once told me, "In my neighborhood, when I was just a boy, everyone was always telling me, 'You ain't gonna be nothing.' Then one day I heard Ali on television boasting about how he was the greatest and telling people 'you can do anything.' I was amazed. How could he talk that way? But then I thought, if he can do it, I can do it. He changed my life."

There are a few rare people who see themselves as the sun and the moon, but who are still somehow able to get outside their own orbit and care about others. For all his bluster about being the greatest and most beautiful, Ali was no narcissist: he noticed the people around him.

When I travelled to Louisville for the opening of the Ali Center in 2005, I met one person after another whose life had been pushed in a new direction by a fortuitous encounter

Muhammad Ali in 1966

with Ali. One fellow in his fifties told me that many years earlier he had given Ali a cookie. The champ, who had a sweet tooth, thought it was delicious and helped get the man started in what would become a thriving business. Howard Bingham, who would become of one of Ali's lifelong friends, told me the tale of bumping into Ali in 1962 in Los Angeles. At the time, Bingham was a fledgling photographer. By giving him access, Ali catapulted him into a stellar career behind the lens. Over the course of the event, I heard many other testimonies from folks Ali had simply put his arms around at a difficult moment. Like a great cornerman, he gave them the fortitude to deal with the foe of a disease or a death in the family.

In his *Works of Love*, Søren Kierkegaard observes that we humans tend to identify need with weakness: the needier you are, the weaker you are. Then Kierkegaard reminds us that the need for God is the highest perfection. Likewise, we ungrateful bipeds heap praise upon the mighty men and women who overflow with strength and creativity; we are not as impressed with those possessed of an overabundance of love and need for others. That was Ali. He was blessed with a boundless affection for his fellow human beings. Even though he was arguably the most recognizable person on the planet, he always needed to immerse himself in crowds; he would wade into them, shaking hands, hugging and kissing babies like a presidential candidate, and bantering with fans. In our time, celebrities have become secular saints, but I don't know of anyone with the Hollywood halo whose boundaries with mere mortals were as tender and porous as Ali's. Sure, your Oscar-winning actor might donate a million dollars to a shelter for battered women, but he is not likely to invite you to take a ride in his RV, hang out with you all day, and stay in touch for years.

One of my favorite tales about Ali comes from the author Davis Miller, who as a young man was a fanatical Ali devotee. After his retirement, Ali agreed to meet with Miller at his farm in Michigan. Naturally, Miller was star-struck, but Ali, who was a first-rate magician, knew how to put the rabbit of nervousness back in the hat. Within an hour or so the two were hanging around like old pals, slap-boxing and going out to McDonald's together. But now and again, Miller would remember who he was with. At one point, he excused himself to use the bathroom. After he closed the door, Ali quietly padded over and held the door handle so that Miller couldn't get out—all the while knowing that Miller was too bedazzled by the champ to start yelling for help.

Ali's sense of humor was as deep as his boxing talent. Years ago, he was being interviewed by a cadre of renowned reporters who saw him as a minor deity but at the same time felt something bordering on pity about his Parkinson's. They sat down at a table for a bite to eat and Ali, in the middle of the conversation, pretended that he was slowly drifting off to sleep. There was an awkward couple of moments when the media pros scratched their heads and looked at each other as if to say "What do we do now?" Seconds later Ali, still seemingly asleep, started throwing punches. The reporters pulled back, embarrassed and trying to figure out how to respond. Then Ali seemed to slip back into a quiet sleep only to erupt with another flurry a few seconds later. No doubt Ali recognized that the guys with the notebooks saw him as punchy. About a minute later, he leapt up wide-eyed and with a beaming gotcha smile.

But what about all those dark years when Ali slowly closed up in the clam shell of Parkinson's? Looking back, Dundee, his cornerman for twenty-plus years sighed, "Even when he got afflicted by Parkinson's, I believed in my heart that he would beat it. That's the kind of faith he built up inside of you because he was such a remarkable human being." But Parkinson's was not something Ali or anyone else could rope-a-dope. Was it worth it? He was frequently asked whether he would do it all over again, knowing the illness those hurricane blows would eventually lead to. The answer was always the same: No regrets.

When I met the Great One at the opening of the Ali Center, he was already enveloped in the disease that would rob him of his divine wit and supernal gift of gab. That day there was a long line of adult fans waiting to have their photo taken with Ali as though he were Santa Claus. Sick and exhausted as he was, Ali wanted to accommodate everyone. At times, his once-beautiful countenance would contort and freeze in the grotesque shape of someone bolting up from a nightmare. It was a shot to the liver to see. For a moment, I could not help imagining that, for whatever bizarre inscrutable reason, the silver-tongued trickster—half-huckster, half-sage—was being played by the ultimate Trickster.

In his marvelous *The Tao of Ali*, Davis Miller recalled that when, near tears, he told Ali how sorry he was about his illness, Ali repeatedly assured him that this was just God's way of reminding Ali that he was just like everyone else.

Yes and no, God. Yes and no. ■

Gordon Marino *is a professor of philosophy at St. Olaf College, director of the college's Hong Kierkegaard Library, and editor of* The Quotable Kierkegaard *(Princeton University Press, 2014). He is also a professional boxing trainer. You can follow him on Twitter at @GordonMarino.*

DUTCH NATIONAL ARCHIVES

Piotr H. Kosicki

Poland Turns Right

A NEW GOVERNMENT, AN OLD NATIVISM

"We have a right to be afraid; we have a right to be scared." So began the twenty-seven-year-old Polish priest Jacek Międlar, speaking this past fall on Poland's Independence Day at a rally of self-described "young patriots." Railing against Muslims, Jews, and "leftists," Międlar insists that these groups all actively threaten Poland's Christian heritage. The answer? A new crusade for "Great Catholic Poland," with the cleric proposing "to fight for this heritage till every last drop of our blood is spilled."

Międlar is not a powerful figure in Poland, but he represents a nationalist revival for which being Catholic and Polish implies also being anti-European, anti-pluralist, and anti-liberal. For the better part of a decade, young extreme nationalists have been making ever-larger showings at Warsaw's annual Independence Day celebrations, scaring parents into keeping their children at home. But last October, in an election that has quickly proved to be a turning point in modern Polish history, the extreme right gained seats in the Polish parliament for the first time since before World War II.

In the 1980s, Poland captured the world's attention when waves of strikes produced an independent trade union, which united opposition to the Communist regime under the banner of "Solidarity." The first generation of non-Communist leaders whom Solidarity brought to power in 1989 promoted dialogue and reconciliation: between Catholics and Jews, Poles and Germans, former Communists and anti-Communists. John Paul II and the Catholic hierarchy played a major role in the transition to liberal democracy, and Poles hung on their pontiff's every word for social and political guidance. The pontiff who had launched his papacy with the watchword "Be not afraid!" went to Poland's Divine Mercy Sanctuary in 1997 and invoked 1 John 4:18: "There is no fear in love, but perfect love casts out fear."

Yet, already in the early 1990s, political parties emerging from under Solidarity's umbrella began to part ways with the union. As Poland built a capitalist economy and pursued membership in NATO and the European Union, successive governments accepted as inevitable that the transition would yield both winners and losers. Accession to the EU in 2004 brought a massive influx of capital that has disproportionately benefited western and central Poland. As has long been the case, there is a "Poland A" and a "Poland B"—divided politically, culturally, and socioeconomically—and the chasm between the two continues to deepen.

Five months after a relative unknown unseated the incumbent in the Polish presidential elections, his party—Law and Justice (PiS)—won a razor-thin majority in the new parliament. In the ensuing six months, PiS has used its hold on the executive and legislative branches to enact one law after another curbing civic freedoms. PiS has dramatically expanded the powers of the state security apparatus, imposed strict constraints on public media, and—after the Constitutional Tribunal, Poland's high court, attempted to check their efforts—rewritten the rules of how the tribunal functions. In so doing, the government has provoked a constitutional crisis that has brought hundreds of thousands of Poles into the streets in peaceful protest. The Polish government has also drawn a reprimand from the Council of Europe, while the European Commission, the EU's executive branch, has attempted to broker a compromise.

Jarosław Kaczyński: Polishing off Solidarity

PIOTR DRABIK

Meanwhile, the country's attention is focused on PiS's leader, Jarosław Kaczyński—a former prime minister whose twin brother, Polish president Lech Kaczyński, famously perished with ninety-five others in a plane crash in 2010. Kaczyński's signature achievement is a brand of populist politics predicated on the notion that the Polish Third Republic, inaugurated with the collapse of the Communist regime, has been a mafia-like cabal. He rose to power briefly a decade ago, promising to create a "Fourth Republic," to elevate the Catholic Church's position in public life, to reinstitute Communist-era welfare guarantees, and—most provocatively—to expose the alleged skeletons in the closets of the Third Republic's political and business elites.

Jarosław Kaczyński is undoubtedly one of Central and Eastern Europe's most successful politicians. Having learned

from PiS's previous turn at government, Kaczyński has borrowed the well-honed tactic of Communist-era leaders: appoint a puppet prime minister, then run the country out of party headquarters. His political vocabulary is likewise reminiscent of Communist agitprop, with easy soundbites to answer every set of critics. Told that Poland is now betraying its European commitments, Kaczyński declares, "Sovereignty!" Accused of promoting intolerance, he answers, "We have to defend ourselves." Told that PiS is dismantling the rule of law, he replies, "Ours is a *democratic* rule of law." (Translation: Since the Constitutional Tribunal is not democratically elected, it deserves no role in a system of checks and balances.) And Kaczyński's most famous epithet, for those protesting the government's attack on the Constitutional Tribunal—"Poles of the worst sort."

From an international perspective, this strategy might seem familiar. Russian president Vladimir Putin has been a global trailblazer for authoritarian populism, and others have eagerly followed his lead: Turkish president Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, Hungarian prime minister Viktor Orbán, and even America's own Donald Trump.

A country of 39 million, Poland is the region's largest and loudest voice in the EU. In almost twenty years of NATO membership, Poland has established itself as the bulwark of NATO's eastern flank, putting the country in the crosshairs of Russian-inspired conflicts in Georgia and Ukraine. Long before joining NATO, Poland became a dependable partner for American-led democracy promotion by the National Endowment for Democracy and George Soros's Open Society Foundations. (Kaczyński recently impugned Soros's work as "convenient for billionaires who have an easy time manipulating societies.")

As recently as early 2015, Poland's status as a beacon of liberal democracy seemed secure. This is why over the next month Poland will host two events of global importance: a NATO summit (July 8-9); and World Youth Day (July 25-31), led by Pope Francis. It would be hard to find a more symbolic pairing of events: NATO—a signature achievement of the older generations who shepherded Poland out of Communism; and World Youth Day, an event catering to generations that have no memory of the Communist era or its end.

It is Poles in their mid-thirties or younger whom the extreme nationalists seek to reach. The very age groups for which John Paul II founded World Youth Day are, in Poland, the farthest from building the "civilization of love" for which he called. To the children of "Poland B," the window of prosperity shut too quickly, especially after 2008's worldwide financial crisis. To young Poles angry about not finding upward mobility, refugees from the Middle East and Central Asia are "others" to be feared and kept out; mercy and love are not part of the conversation. It is difficult to imagine these Poles rejoicing at World Youth Day upon hearing Francis renew his call for Europe to embrace migrants.

The Polish bishops' conference has unfortunately contributed to this disconnect between Polish youth and their pontiff's message of solidarity and tolerance. The episcopate's deputy head, in one of his first acts as archbishop of Łódź, liquidated the archdiocese's flagship ecumenical initiative. In homilies, he has criticized lay Catholics who spread the teachings of Vatican II. And he has welcomed into Łódź's main cathedral nationalists carrying banners with messages like "Death to Enemies of the Fatherland."

Meanwhile, his former superior, Archbishop Józef Michalik, has all but openly endorsed PiS. Government critics who appeal to the EU are a "New Targowica"—a reference to eighteenth-century Polish aristocrats who supported Russia's liquidation of the independent Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth. The implication is that writing an email to Brussels is on a par with armed combat on behalf of Catherine the Great.

With bishops sending mixed messages, it is in the Committee for the Defense of Democracy (KOD) that multiple generations have found an outlet. Founded by a remarkable political outsider named Mateusz Kijowski—a long-haired IT specialist who prides himself on his motorcycle—KOD has combined extensive online networking with regular mass street protests. Rather than traditional political parties, it is KOD that organizes Poles in defense of the rule of law.

KOD is neither a party-in-the-making nor a single-issue movement. Its goal is ambitious: to protect and repair liberal democracy. As Kijowski puts it, "Right now, we must defend the foundations of the system, the very possibility of debating and discussing issues."

According to Kijowski, "Politics in Poland is so weak precisely because people don't get involved," because "they don't know how to communicate as a society." KOD is "building civil society" by organizing regular public gatherings, online media, a think-tank, and a national civic forum called "A space of freedom, i.e. the kind of Poland we want."

Of course, talk and rallies alone cannot build civil society. The greatest obstacle that KOD faces is the persistent divide between "Poland A" and "Poland B," which PiS is working so hard to reinforce. With the government promoting divisiveness and intolerance, teaching society to communicate and organize itself becomes all the more difficult—and essential.

In the meantime, World Youth Day offers a one-of-a-kind test of the willingness of Poland's younger generations to form bonds of solidarity with each other on terms other than illiberal or nationalist anger. These generations have the power to harness the civic ferment gripping Poland today. Given that so many Poles seem to have forgotten John Paul II's exhortation against fear, Francis's message of mercy and solidarity is precisely what Polish youth need to hear. The question is whether they will listen. ■

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The Art of Resistance

John Berger, Critic & Prophet

Eugene McCarraher

Writing in the aftermath of the fall of communism, John Berger, the world's preeminent Marxist (patience, dear readers) writer on art, faced the apparently decisive and irreversible victory of capitalism. Rather than concede defeat and join in the triumphal chorus heralding the end of history, Berger drew an unlikely lesson from the ostensible cessation of the old hostilities. In the conclusion of *Keeping a Rendezvous* (1991), he studied a photograph of people assembled in recently liberated Prague and discerned in their faces both elation and a dread that an even more primordial conflict was in the offing. The class struggle, he now suggested, partakes of a broader and deeper contest over ways of being in the world. "The soul and the operator have come out of hiding together."

For two centuries, Berger explained, the soul's longings had been perverted or marginalized in both capitalist and socialist societies, identified with or subordinated to the imperatives of material progress. Yet humanity "has great difficulty in living strictly within the confines of a materialist practice or philosophy. It dreams, like a dog in its basket, of hares in the open." Heir, for many, to the hope once contained in religion, Marxism had been the secular abode for the soul; but with the dialectic of "historical materialism" now discredited by history, "the spiritual," Berger observed, aimed "to reclaim its lost terrain," surging through fundamentalist and nationalist movements. At the same time, the poor were being "written off as trash" by the soul's implacable adversary, "the operator," the forces of pecuniary and technological utility united under the aegis of capital. For Berger, art remained not only a potent weapon against injustice but also an enclave for the qualities of the soul. In a powerful letter to the miners who unsuccessfully resisted Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher's attempt to close down mines in 1984, Berger wrote:

> I can't tell you what art does and how it does it, but I know that art has often judged the judges, pleaded revenge to the innocent and shown to the future what the past has suffered, so that it has never been forgotten. I know too that the powerful fear art, whatever its form, when it does this, and that amongst the people such art sometimes runs like a rumor or a legend because it makes sense of what life's brutalities cannot, a sense that unites us, for it is inseparable from a justice at last. Art, when it functions like this, becomes a meeting-place of the invisible, the irreducible, the enduring, guts and honor.

Characterized by the lack of a credible alternative to the glittering imperium of capital, the ensuing twenty-five years have been the Age of the Operator: neoliberal economics, a hustling ethos, the divinization of markets and technology, the hegemony of a consumer society given over to spectacle and fueled by debt. As Berger writes in his latest book, *Portraits* (Verso, $44.95, 544 pp.), "the future has been downsized," restricted to the mercenary parameters of finance capital and digital technocracy. Neoliberal capitalism fulfills the "strange prophecy" depicted in the hellish right-hand panel of Hieronymus Bosch's *Millennium Triptych*: "no glimpse of an elsewhere or an otherwise." The poor—and increasingly anyone outside the gilded circle of "the 1 percent"—are indeed "written off as trash," detritus of the quest for efficiency, human refuse piling up not only in Calcutta, Mumbai, or Mexico City, but also in Palo Alto and San Francisco, where the technocrats of Silicon Valley dispossess workers from their homes to build mansions scaled to their colossal self-regard.

The Operator remains in the saddle, riding humankind; but with anger and dissent on the rise—Syriza in Greece, Podemos in Spain, Bernie Sanders and Black Lives Matter here at home—the Soul may be gathering strength to embark on another, more enduring reclamation of terrain, and, if it does, John Berger will deserve our attention as one of its greatest contemporary prophets. Renowned and even beloved as both novelist and art critic, Berger has also become an unlikely moral and metaphysical sage. "You can't talk about aesthetics without talking about the principle of hope and the existence of evil," he declared in *The Sense of Sight* (1985). Not that his revolutionary spirit has withered; that

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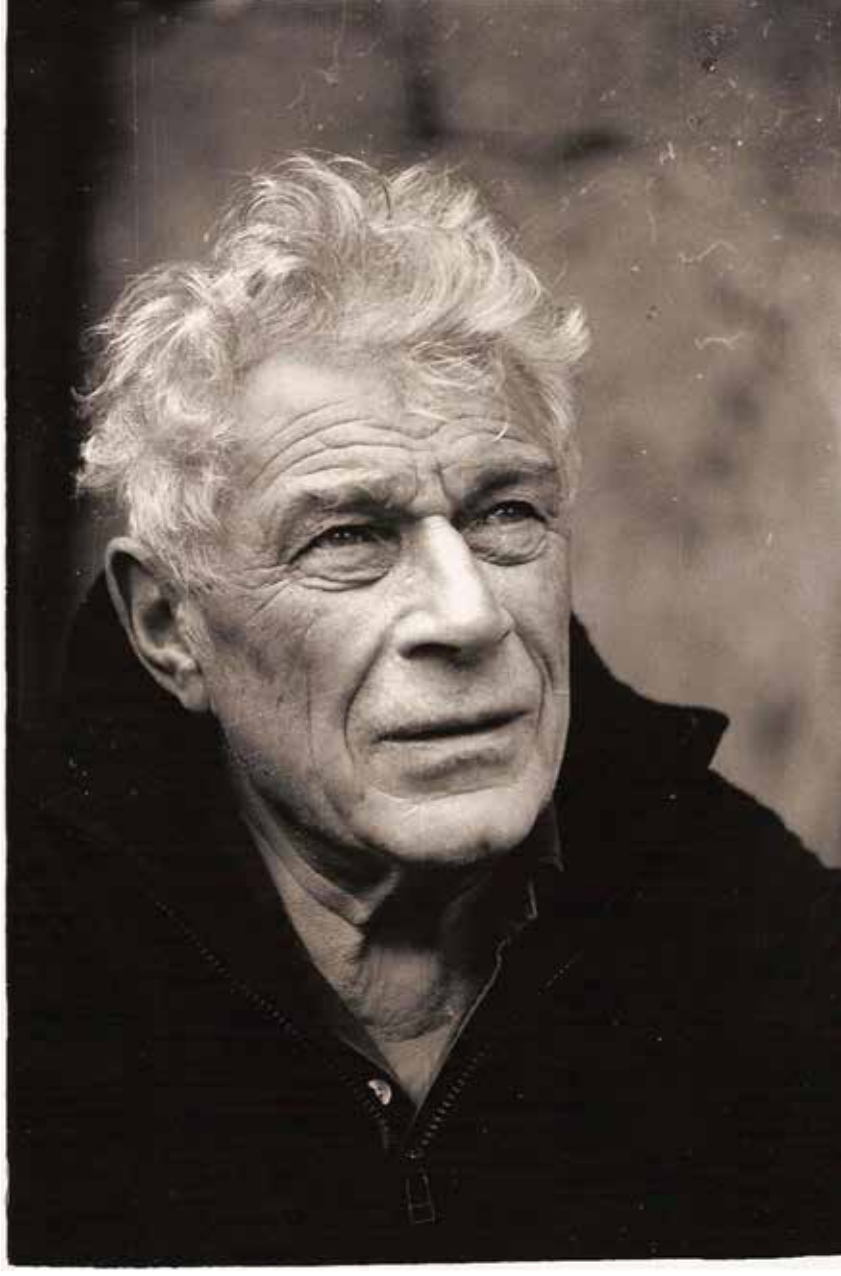
flame is lower but remains incandescent. But *Portraits*, a miscellany from his career as a writer, records the evolution of this "principle of hope"—a reference, no doubt, to Ernst Bloch, the closest thing to a theologian ever produced by the Marxist tradition. Like the other two panels of Bosch's triptych—*The Garden of Eden* and *The Garden of Earthly Delights*—*Portraits* offers "a torchlight in the dark," a glimpse of an elsewhere or an otherwise, a way of seeing the visible world that Berger might agree to call sacramental.



Portrait of John Berger by Jean Mohr

Berger was born in 1926 in London, the son of a middle-class Hungarian immigrant from Trieste and an English working-class suffragette. As a youth growing up in Oxford, he drew and painted for relief from his "monstrous and brutal" education at a local private school. He also read anarchist literature and ardently embraced the radical left; yet unlike most anarchists, Berger felt no visceral hostility to religion. As he told the *Guardian* in 2011, since his teenage years two convictions have "coexisted" within him: "a kind of materialism," as he put it, along with "a sense of the sacred, the religious if you like." This coexistence has never felt anomalous to him, even when "most other people thought it was." Indeed, the philosopher of whom Berger has been most fond is not Marx but Baruch Spinoza, whose monist ontology sought to overcome the Cartesian dualism of matter and spirit.

Conscripted at the age of eighteen, Berger spent World War II stationed in Belfast. After the war he enrolled in the Chelsea School of Art and exhibited in London galleries. While working as a teacher, he began writing reviews for the *New Statesman*, Britain's flagship left periodical. In the early years of the Cold War, Berger embraced Marxism (despite his aversion to Joseph Stalin). He even maintained that, until the Soviet Union gained nuclear parity with the United States, left writers and artists should support Moscow. In the late 1940s, Berger made a deliberate decision to set aside his painting and embark on a career as a writer.

Although the *New Statesman* published his essays for more than a decade (some of which he collected in 1960 as *Permanent Red*), Berger was its most beleaguered contributor. Adamantly pro-Soviet, he wrote for a magazine that opposed Stalinism. (In his controversial 1958 novel *A Painter of Our Time*, Berger hinted his support for the Soviet suppression of the Hungarian Revolution.) Where the *New Statesman* reflected the broad sympathy toward literary and artistic modernism characteristic of liberal and social-democratic intellectuals, Berger championed realism and called for art that would "help or encourage men to know and claim their social rights." His profoundly ambivalent view of abstract expressionism challenged its celebration by most Western intellectuals as a token of "free expression." Although he marveled at Jackson Pollock's formal skills, Berger argued that the drip paintings registered a collapse of "faith" in the visible world that heralded "the disintegration of our culture." Berger asked strikingly traditionalist questions for an enfant terrible of Marxist criticism. "How far can talent exempt an artist," he asked, who "does not think beyond or question the decadence of the cultural situation to which he belongs?"

With judgments and questions like these, Berger found himself "fighting for every sentence," not only against his editors and skeptical readers but also against curators, gallery owners, and art critics. (One less-than-enthusiastic review of Henry Moore earned him the everlasting enmity of Sir Herbert Read, then Britain's most respected critic.) Berger railed helplessly as the London cultural establishment—like that of New York—transformed modernism into an aesthetic for corporate suites and an emblem of Western individualism.

Weary of his travails among the London intelligentsia, Berger left England in 1962 and lived an itinerant but pro-

ductive life on the continent for the next fifteen years. He published studies of Picasso and cubism as well as several other volumes of essays on painting, sculpture, photography, and politics; chronicled, in collaboration with the photographer Jean Mohr, the life of a country doctor in *A Fortunate Man* (1967); wrote several screenplays, including *Jonah Who Will Be 25 in the Year 2000* (1976), a wise and sympathetic story about disappointed radicals; and authored three novels, including *G.* (1972), a political and erotic bildungsroman that won him the Booker Prize. Berger promptly caused an uproar when he donated half of his prize money to the British Black Panthers (the Booker fortune having been amassed, he pointed out, through the exploitation of Caribbean slaves) and used the other half to fund a project on the condition of migrant workers that became *A Seventh Man* (1975). Whatever one thinks of his politics, there can be no denying that Berger is a writer who acts on his convictions.

But Berger's most enduring achievement from this period was his landmark BBC television series *Ways of Seeing* (1972), notable if only because it disseminated a radical perspective to a mass audience. Published in book form in the same year, *Ways of Seeing* was a response to another television milestone, *Civilisation* (1969), hosted by Sir Kenneth Clark, doyen of the British art establishment. Loftily indifferent to social and political context, Clark's parade-of-masterpieces approach to the history of Western art epitomized the patrician didacticism that Berger loathed. Focusing on the processes of artistic production and reception, Berger argued not only that the mass reproduction of images had irrevocably transformed our relationship to the art of the past, but that much of that art was ideologically indistinguishable from contemporary advertising: both portraiture and adverts shored up existing property relations and sexual inequality by depicting them as natural, desirable, and inevitable. Over forty years later, in a culture even more saturated by spectacle and trivia than it was in the 1970s, *Ways of Seeing* remains instructive, especially Berger's incisive reflections on nudity, glamor, and publicity.

Soon after finishing *A Seventh Man*, Berger settled in the French Alpine village of Quincy, where he lives and works today. "Works" doesn't mean only writing and sketching; Berger has participated fully in the daily rounds of his neighbors, grazing cattle, mowing hay, growing peaches, attending weddings and funerals, spreading gossip, and reveling in festivity. It's a way of life marked for extinction by capitalist globalization, and despite his professed adherence to the progressive orthodoxy of Marxism—the peasantry, Marx once wrote, represented "the barbarism within civilization"—Berger resolved to preserve their virtues even if History intended to bury them. In the late 1970s he began to write *Into Their Labours*, a trilogy chronicling the arduous passage from mountain village to industrial metropolis: *Pig Earth* (1979), *Once in Europa* (1987), and *Lilac and Flag* (1990). The personal and historical realities of loss are blended in this passage from *Once in Europa*, as a traditional funeral hymn rises to an anthem and then descends to a lamentation: "'Amazing Grace' begins sad and gradually the sadness becomes a chorus and so is no longer sad but defiant. Later the music listens to itself and discovers that something has fallen silent. Irretrievably. He had left."

Berger's intimacy with peasant life slowly induced a metamorphosis in his thinking about art—one that underlined "the sacred, the religious if you like." Not that he's abandoned the aesthetic barricades. He espouses a way of seeing in which "there is no exemption from history," as he asserts in *Portraits*, no privileged immunity from the perceptual and political distortions of ideology. For instance, the pious peasants in Millet's *Angelus*, he observes, have provided a "pictorial label round the great clerical bottle of Bromide prescribed to quiet every social fever and irritation." Elsewhere he notes that the modern conception of painting as a "personal vision" undermined a stale and deceptive realism—"reality" being far richer and more unsettling than mere empiricist accounts—but also fostered a new form of obfuscation in which "the witness" is "more important than his testimony." (Think of the canard of the Tortured Artist from Van Gogh to Pollock to Jean-Michel Basquiat.) Yet Marxism is more than a "hermeneutic of suspicion" to Berger; it also constitutes (as it does for the Catholic literary critic Terry Eagleton) a noble and tragic humanism. Van Gogh's paintings and letters reveal, for Berger, that while labor is currently "an injustice" it is also "the essence of humanity."

Yet Marxism clearly inhibited Berger from asking certain kinds of questions, not only about art but also about "history." In a 1963 essay on Fernand Léger—the Marxist genre painter of industrial modernity—Berger praised his portrayal of "mechanization as a human epic, an unfolding adventure of which man is the hero." This is the classical Marxist narrative of progress through capitalist innovation, yet shorn of the ordeals of the peasants and proletarians that Berger would later fictionalize. It isn't reactionary nostalgia to point out that mechanization—now ballyhooed as "automation" and "disruption"—has been an adventure more for technical and financial elites than for the people it dispossesses and degrades. Indeed, with its promise of a justice secured by the abundance produced by mechanization, Marxism represents the highest stage of bourgeois ideology, a conviction that the worth of a civilization can be determined by its level of material affluence. For both capitalism and socialism alike, the longings of the Soul depended on the machinations of the Operator.

If Berger fails in *Portraits* to come fully to terms with the bromides of Marxism, he exhibits an impressive humility and even gratitude toward the art of the unprogressive past. He now seeks less to understand art in terms of its own class-ridden time—the approach of *Ways of Seeing*—and more to comprehend our own sorry situation through masterworks of art. Reflecting on Grünewald's Isenheim Altarpiece, he

relates that in the "period of revolutionary expectation" before 1968 he was "anxious to place it historically" as "evidence of the past's despair." Later, as a disillusioned *soixante-huitard*, he was "forced to place [him]self historically"; in "a period which has to be endured," he elaborates, Grünewald "miraculously" offers "a narrow pass across despair." (Recall his admonition to the miners that art can be "a rumor and a legend.") Berger sees premonitions of despair in the paintings of Rembrandt, Goya, and the British painter Francis Bacon. Growing old in an age of ascending capitalism, Rembrandt witnessed a time "not dissimilar" to our own, when "the human was no longer self-evident." Goya's nightmarish canvases convey "the consequences of Man's neglect" of reason: both oppressors and victims become "bestial." Bacon's unsettling oeuvre is "prophetic," a "revelation" that "the worst has already happened."

Against despair in the face of neoliberalism, Berger mobilizes what one might call the moral ontology of the peasant and the materialism of Spinoza. In his essays as well as in his novels, he lauds the invaluable virtues of village life: mutual aid, craftsmanship, a respect for the intractability of the material world, revelry in pleasure and forbearance in pain, a toughness that never turns into callousness or cruelty. Given the agonies of history, the peasant is Berger's model of humanity; in Velasquez's portrait of Aesop, for instance, Berger sees "ingenuity, cunning, a certain mockery, and a refusal to compromise," an obstinacy born of knowing "one has nothing to lose."

Berger has no illusions about the hardships, superstitions, and prejudices of the peasantry; he never celebrates the rigors of rural life in the fraudulent, nostalgic terms of an urban romantic. Rather, he defends the peasant sensibility as a daily encounter with the unknown and uncontrollable. Take his essay on the early twentieth-century peasant-artist Ferdinand Cheval and his "Palais Idéal." A motley and marvelous ensemble of architecture, sculpture, and text, the Palace was assembled over thirty-three years in Cheval's home village of Hauterives. The visceral physicality of the Palace suggests to Berger not a cloddish empiricism but rather a sophisticated ontology or way of being. To a peasant, he reflects, "the empirical is naïve"; because he lives and works within the unseen processes of nature, the visible signifies "the state of the invisible." Knowledge "surrounds" the unknown for the peasant "but will never eliminate it." Hence his inclination to "a religious interpretation of the world"—not the recondite orthodoxy constructed by theologians but an affirmation of everyday mystery.

This peasant ontology is Berger's "kind of materialism," but it's not quite the disenchanted materialism of Marxist metaphysics. It's one more redolent of Spinoza—to whom Berger recently devoted a volume of drawings, aperçus, and ruminations, *Bento's Sketchbook* (2011). (Spinoza, Berger would undoubtedly remind us, was an artisan as well as a philosopher—a lens-grinder who enabled sight.) Yet in *Portraits* he seems to venture further, writing in a piece on Holbein the Younger that the arts offer not catharsis but "revelation" or "redemption." Painters seek messages that emerge "from the back of the visible"; they respond to an "energy" that emanates from "behind the given set of appearances." Berger is no Platonist: he lauds Van Gogh's fondness for ordinary things without needing to "save" them "by way of an ideal which the things embody or serve." Revelation or "redemption" would seem to mean to Berger not a rescue or "elevation" of things but a recognition of what they are—a "capacity to love," as he calls it. And as he muses in a piece on the haunting, enigmatic work of Yvonne Barlow, this "hunger for more" behind the visible entails an almost ascetic discipline of "waiting." The artist—like the peasant or the revolutionary—is a virtuoso of patience.

These notions echo Berger's intuition in *The Sense of Sight* (1985) that "what lies outside visibility are only the 'traces' of what has been or will become visible." Is it too much to call this an eschatology of the visible, an allegory of the sacramental? (Berger remarks that Cézanne's work "changed eschatologically" as he enlarged his sense of corporeality, his conception of what constituted a "material" object.) Fussbudgets of orthodoxy will recoil from dubbing Berger's materialism "sacramental"; but what then should we make of his defense of Simone Weil, whose insight that love of neighbor is "analogous to genius" he endorses by invoking "a power which cannot be measured by the limits of the natural order"? Berger has called this power "God," and he's right that the metaphysical potency of art can be far more evocative of divinity than many soporific rituals and dissertations.

This "religious" conception of art aligns in some ways with Berger's youthful anarchism. Anarchism has always had the peasant, the artisan, and the artist at its core, people less alienated from control of production than the industrial working class. But it's also been a revolutionary tradition that insists on the possibility of paradise now, living in the present as one will live in the future—realized eschatology, in theological terms, the future in the present tense. Or as Berger suggests in his essay on Nicholas de Stael's paintings of war-ravaged Europe, "lying low can be an act of resistance, discovering what is still friendly in the surrounding desolation and cherishing it." "A person with soul and imagination and memory," he continues, can navigate the ruins, accepting the wreckage as irreversible while inventing a new passage to the light out of the debris.

With neoliberalism weakened but still violent and beguiling, the genius of neighborly love now requires all the soul and imagination and memory that we can protect from the clutches of the Operator. A chastened surveyor of the soul's material terrain, John Berger remains one of our most reliable guides through the traces of what lies just beyond the borders of the visible. For we need the way of seeing not of the entrepreneur, the banker, or the programmer, but of the peasant, the artist, and the revolutionary. ■

'I Want Soul'

An Interview with C. E. Morgan

Anthony Domestico

In 2009, C. E. Morgan published *All the Living*, a lonesome, lovely debut novel set on a Kentucky tobacco farm. Morgan knew the landscape well: she grew up just over the border in southern Ohio and attended Berea College, a tuition-free liberal-arts college in Madison County, Kentucky.

Morgan wrote the first draft of *All the Living* in a mere fourteen days, the period between semesters at Harvard Divinity School, where she was studying religion and literature at the time. Despite its sudden birth, the book has a chiseled feel. The prose has clarity and heft, strengths derived from Morgan's Biblical cadences and from her sensitivity to the Kentucky landscape. There are remarkable sentences on almost every page: "The white bunched blossoms had breasted out of their buds overnight"; a trailer "jagged out like an aluminum finger from a limestone wall topped by firs, bone out of bone"; "it was as though someone had come along with a plane and sheared off all the extra that once cushioned him. He was like something corded, every movement curtailed." Recognition immediately followed publication. Morgan won a Whiting Award and a Lannan Literary Fellowship. In 2010, she was selected as a "5 Under 35" by the National Book Foundation. In February, she received one of Yale University's three Windham-Campbell Prizes in Fiction, and with it a $150,000 award.

Now Morgan's second novel, *The Sport of Kings*, has been published. In many ways, it is a departure from *All the Living*. It moves across time (from the slavery era of the antebellum South up to the present, when mass incarceration obtains); across class (from the urban poor of Cincinnati to the old rural money of Kentucky); and across styles (some sections are written in a Faulknerian frenzy, others in a Lawrentian heat, still others in a dialogue-heavy, hardened realist mode). The novel centers on the Forges, an old Kentucky family of planters with dynastic ambitions. Under Henry, the current patriarch, the family business has shifted to horses: he and his daughter Henrietta are consumed with breeding a Derby winner. The idea of breeding, of course, comes freighted with all kinds of ugliness, and Morgan uses the Forge family history to explore race, class, biology, sex, and fate in one of the best works of fiction I've read in a long time. I interviewed Morgan via e-mail.

ANTHONY DOMESTICO: You've said that you went to Harvard Divinity School because of "a preoccupation with what moral beauty looks like." How do you understand the phrase "moral beauty," and where do you find it? And what role did the morally beautiful play in writing *The Sport of Kings*, which is filled with so many kinds of moral ugliness—racism, most prominently?

C. E. MORGAN: I think of moral beauty as what is the good and the just—terms perhaps best defined by their opposite: evil. Evil is the willingness to do damage to the other; its maximal expression is murder, but it includes a great deal of subtle and not-so-subtle injuries as it advances to that extreme. Evil acts reduce the other to an object, a being to its component parts, and obliterate subjectivity. Evil's breeding ground is a lack of empathy. So I locate moral beauty in an other-regarding ethic. Or perhaps it's better to say it's not *located* anywhere, because it's not a static entity. It's love, and love is not a feeling but an action.

Ultimately, I don't know if love is an organizing principle we choose or if it's innate. I'm not sure the distinction matters to me much anymore; I just care about how we can reduce unnecessary suffering. I think that means learning to love in both the micro and the macro; engaging in ethical action at the level of intimacy and friendship, but also at the vocational level through our chosen work in the world, our right livelihood. In practical terms for me, that means I try to live in close attunement to my husband, trying every day to practice compassion and deep listening, taking his suffering and joys as my own. It means never turning away. But I don't believe love is real love if it remains cloistered within the confines of an intimate relationship; it should transcend the private sphere. As an artist that means training an eye on the suffering in the world, then acting on behalf of others. Bearing witness is one of the most excru-

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C. E. Morgan

ciating aspects of working in a long form, especially when a book takes nine years. Sitting with suffering—others' and one's own—is the challenge of a lifetime. But this is our practice.

AD: At one point, the Reverend, a black preacher who lives in Cincinnati, declares that we know about "the perfect things, like justice," not through abundance but through lack: "Lack's the most real thing there is! My wife is dead, but she's real, and don't you know I feel the lack!" *All the Living* also was interested in various kinds of "lack," from economic lack to familial lack to romantic lack to religious lack. Could you say more about the theological and literary importance of lack for you? What texts, either literary or religious, have you found helpful in thinking about it?

CEM: I have not needed to go to a text to discover or ruminate on lack; I've experienced it in my own life. Anyone who lives with poor health or chronic pain, or who has endured poverty—real poverty—knows what it is to live with lack and a resulting fear so incessant that it becomes thoroughly normalized, invisible in its ubiquity. If you're lucky enough to have that fear begin to ease, which it has for me only in the past year, it's an odd experience. A stranglehold eases off your entire body, one you never fully realized was there. And that brings grief—very unexpectedly—for what was never had, what you were utterly ignorant of. So you are sad for what joys you discover you lacked.

But I'm not content with a merely negative understanding of "lack." "Lack" is a school if we allow it to be, if we can allow it to engender something more than fear. I often think there are three primary responses to suffering—rage, intoxication, or growth. We either want revenge for our pain, or we numb ourselves with the endless array of intoxicants available to us, from drugs to overwork, or we grow in empathy. Emptiness can transform into spaciousness; lack can become an agent of social action. But I think many of us struggle to remain on that third path without backsliding into the other two. I do.

AD: *The Sport of Kings* opens with a quotation about the Tree of Life and "its ever branching and beautiful ramifications" from Darwin's *On the Origin of Species*. Late in the novel, a character claims that every horse is the "product of evolutionary failure." At other points, we hear about dominant and recessive genes, alleles, and epistases. Why so much evolutionary theory? How did the thinking of Darwin and his heirs prove imaginatively fruitful for you in writing this book?

CEM: These are excellent questions, but I'm not going to answer them directly, because I try not to unpack textual detail. Though *The Sport of Kings* is far from perfect, I do feel that it's complete, which means that all the details of the book—the various philosophical strands, the detectable trail of influence, the structure, the many aesthetic shifts—were meaningfully selected. Every aspect of the novel is—or should be—an arrow pointed towards its ultimate meaning, or a multiplicity of possible meanings. I do want the reader to ponder the implications of evolutionary theory on this particular narrative and what it might refer to outside the narrative, but I value the readers' autonomy, their right to both read and misread.

AD: How has Kentucky—its landscape, its history, its art—shaped you?

CEM: Berea College was and is tremendously important to me. I didn't have the resources to go to college, didn't know how to make it happen, so I worked a lot of jobs before college. Berea was founded as an abolitionist school to educate poor blacks and whites in Kentucky before the Civil War, and it still provides a free education to its students. It's an institution committed to racial justice, free education, plain living, community, the dignity of labor. It stands for something.

But deep influence occurs when you're young, so Ohio was really the foundational influence—the farm of my grandparents, my German teachers who survived the war, the streets of Northside, where I grew up and where the third section of the book is set. Southern Ohio is an important spot in the history of human rights in this country, a hotbed of abolitionism, a mecca, a failed mecca. I stared at the Ohio River every day as a child, a thing that for me is

GUY MENDES

SARAH'S SONG

(Genesis 18:1–15)

Promised sand afoot
sun-scuffed and shining behind us,
My song exalts the promise—
I trail horizons

while the stars also
pace their names, keep their promised
and traveling places—

I stake the tent for home and
more travel, I sing
blessings, the journey ninety years from home,
one lifetime from anywhere—

How fulfill an aging future? Our hearts
on homewatch always,
our new names, our pilgrim prayers unselved—

homepromise ever
beginning, and just in time angels tracked
our hearts this evening for new
homesong, their visit

gracious but casual,
conversational, our words
well met, and our food—

No more pots of boiled lightning
for covenant under God-promised stars—
Now my travelsong
welcomes the word of God home
to the flesh of story—

Now the homing stars
can turn to time at the pace
of laughter, knowing.

—Judy Little

Judy Little is the author of Comedy and the Woman Writer *(University of Nebraska Press). Her poems have appeared in* Vallum, Beloit Poetry Journal, Prairie Schooner, America, *and the* Anglican Theological Review.

almost more symbol than river. The formation of personality is inextricable from place. It strikes me as an interesting example of dependent co-arising; land shapes the organism, which then reshapes—literally and figuratively—the land. This because of this; not that because not that. Nothing is separate, least of all the literary mind.

AD: In the introduction to their book *The Racial Imaginary*, Claudia Rankine and Beth Loffreda ask some hard questions: "Are we saying Asian writers can't write Latino characters? That white writers can't write black characters?… We're saying we'd like to change the terms of that conversation.... So, not: can I write from another's point of view? But instead: *to ask why and what for*, not just if and how. What is the charisma of what I feel estranged from, and *why might I wish to enter and inhabit it?*" [my emphasis]. In *The Sport of Kings*, you write about America's racial history from both the white perspective and the black perspective. So, to put a hard question to you: Why write about race and what for? And, more particularly, why enter and inhabit race from both black and white perspectives?

CEM: I'm not surprised at this question, because notions of permissible vs. non-permissible speech regarding race pervade academia, but frankly I'm frustrated that this question still gets so much traction. The idea that writing about characters of another race requires a passage through a critical gauntlet, which involves apology and self-examination of an almost punitive nature, as though the act of writing race was somehow morally suspect, is a dangerous one. This approach appears culturally sensitive, but often it reveals a failure of nerve. I cannot imagine a mature artist approaching her work in such a hesitant fashion, and I believe the demand that we ought to reveals a species of fascism within the left—an embrace of political correctness with its required silences, which has left people afraid to offend or take a stand. The injunction to justify race-writing, while ostensibly considerate of marginalized groups, actually stifles transracial imagination and is inextricable from those codes of silence and repression, now normalized, which have contributed to the rise of the racist right in our country. When you leave good people afraid to speak on behalf of justice, however awkwardly or insensitively, those unafraid to speak will rise to power.

I was taught as a young person that the far political right and the far political left aren't located on a spectrum but on a circle, where they inevitably meet in their extremity. This question always reminds me of that graphic because its central irony is that it tacitly asserts a fundamental difference, an ineradicable, ontological estrangement, between the races. It establishes race as such a special category of difference that the writer needs to approach it apologetically, even deferentially, without the real agency, power, and passion that define mature artistry. That approach is servile, cowardly, anti-artistic. It's also anti-novelistic, because the project of

the novel is founded on the inhabitation and depiction of the Other. And the Other is everywhere and every thing, including the so-called self.

I will also say this: I have both experienced and witnessed a great deal of suffering in my life, and that has informed my art. I'm here today, because I'm a fighter. I didn't survive my life to ask permission to write my books.

AD: You're a fantastic describer of animals, from the newborn calf of *All the Living*, with its "lath-thin ribs" and "nose pushing up and up as if it were pressing against a great and horrible weight," to the fiercely beautiful horses of The *Sport of Kings*. What is your own personal experience with animals? What distinctive challenges and gifts do animals offer to the novelist who would describe them?

CEM: I think the primary gift of the animal is offered to writer and non-writer alike; they teach us about love, or attunement, which is love in action. A lot of people have closer relationships with animals than they do with other humans, because real intimacy requires both parties to consistently lean in, and animals are so good at this. They remain consistently, amazingly attuned to us, even when we fail them, and so we stay present, because we sense we're safe. Then real intimacy spirals up (dependent co-arising, again), the two species becoming more and more communicative, more like one another. If we can learn to apply that consistency of presence to human relationships, we can experience that same intimacy, but humans struggle to remain attuned to one another—they want to turn away because of fear, or ambition, or boredom, or some lure of the ego. It's difficult. It requires radical vulnerability, radical risk.

AD: Midway through *The Sport of Kings*, after an incredible couple of pages on the arrival of spring ("She's brilliance without intellect, mother without love, a lover with two differently colored eyes: comfort and disaster"), you pull back: "Or is all this too purple, too florid? Is more too much—the world and the words?" Is this a question you asked yourself when writing *The Sport of Kings*? Did you ever find yourself having to rein in the maximalist impulse—more plot lines, more time periods, more stylistic registers? To me, this whole section of the novel read like a debate between the kataphatic and apophatic impulses.

CEM: No, the question is thoroughly ironic—a stab at our culture's limiting preference for lean prose. It's not so much that maximalism requires restraint, but that every single aspect of a text requires very careful choices and rigorous evaluation. Style is employed—or deployed—for a reason. It's purposeful. Form and aesthetics are part of meaning-making. Ideally, a writer would have mastery over a wide variety of rhetorical gestures and tonalities, our lexicon and punctuation system, our grammar, and all the riches of a liberal and literary education. Everyone has weak spots (mine is grammar), but the crafting of a text relies upon the writer's ability to manipulate all these elements to elicit a variety of specific effects in the reader. It sounds mechanistic and often is in the later editing stage; but training all your life for technical facility means that the initial drafting stage doesn't require so much logical, sequential thought—it can be wild, ecstatic. The mother tongue is in you; it's in your mouth at the ready. You are free.

Ultimately, I want a peak experience in reading, and that is sometimes difficult to find in contemporary fiction. I'm not interested in books that are just clever and well executed; polish doesn't impress me, and I don't care about a merely capable sentence. Life is short; I want a confrontation with high art. I want soul.

AD: You recently won a Windham-Campbell Prize. Who would you like to see recognized in such a way? And who are some of the living writers you most admire?

CEM: For the Windham-Campbell, I would recommend Louise Erdrich, who has amassed a remarkable body of work. When people talk about our very best writers, her name should be mentioned more often.

In the past, I've admired Annie Dillard, Cormac McCarthy, Toni Morrison, David McCullough, Marilynne Robinson, Lewis Hyde, Jon Krakauer, Cynthia Ozick, Patti Smith, Cornel West, many Buddhist writers, many poets, and some writers who are only recently dead, like David Foster Wallace and Kent Haruf. On my bedside table, you'll find mostly poetry, books on self-healing and medicine, contemplative literature. Ultimately, I want a peak experience in reading, and that is sometimes difficult to find in contemporary fiction. I'm not interested in books that are just clever and well executed; polish doesn't impress me, and I don't care about a merely capable sentence. Life is short; I want a confrontation with high art. I want soul. Great literature rattles the mind and makes the body sing. It's an unmistakable, electric feeling, and too rare. That is what I want. ■

Patients before Profits

Rachel Kiddell-Monroe Takes On Big Pharma

Fran Quigley

Two physicians with Doctors without Borders examine an HIV/AIDS patient at the Centre Hospitalier de Kabinda (CHK) in Kinshasa, Democratic Republic of the Congo.

DOCTORS WITHOUT BORDERS / MARIO TRAVAINI

The Altiero Spinelli building of the European Parliament in downtown Brussels exudes modernity. Its steel-and-glass structure houses high-ceilinged hearing rooms with perfect lighting, blonde wood, and state-of-the-art audio and video technology. These spaces seem to embody technocratic competence and calm deliberation, but on a chilly afternoon last December, one of these hearing rooms was the setting for a scathing denunciation of the global system for developing and distributing medicine.

In recent years, this system has come in for an increasing amount of criticism, much of it from the United States. In the past year alone, patients and politicians in this country have been outraged by the young pharmaceutical CEO Martin Shkreli, who arbitrarily raised the cost of a toxoplasmosis drug by over 5,000 percent overnight. Meanwhile, state Medicaid programs and the U.S. Veterans Administration strain to afford the $1,000-per-pill price of a critical Hepatitis C drug, developed with government funding but now under patent by a private corporation. The cost of manufacturing these pills? About a dollar each. In August 2015, 118 cancer physicians co-authored an article in the prestigious *Mayo Clinic Proceedings* condemning a system that has pushed the average cancer patient's drug costs to over $100,000 per year, leading about 20 percent of patients not to fill their prescriptions. "What we're fighting is the greed," the article's lead author told the *Wall Street Journal*.

The panelists gathered in the European Parliament building were just as unhappy. An editor at a French drug-industry publication lamented, "If the current pharmaceutical innovation model is our patient, our patient is very sick." She noted the lack of transparency when it comes to how much it costs drug companies to develop new medicines. That criticism was quickly echoed by a Spanish physician who has served on the board of the World Health Organization. He cited the example of the drug to treat Hepatitis C, priced at anywhere from $500 to $84,000, depending on the country where it is sold. "The real reason for high costs is that governments give the companies monopolies through patents," he says. "And then the companies charge whatever the market can bear."

As the discussion proceeded, the complaints piled up. A representative for the German health-insurance system pointed out the substantial government investment in medicine development—about 30 percent of the overall cost, and an even higher percentage for the most valuable medicines. But that public investment is not reflected in the high prices governments pay for these same medicines. Governments were thus accused of playing the role of incompetent venture capitalists: pouring big investments into drug research and development, and then paying far above the costs of production for the final product. A foundation executive on the panel called it "socialized risk, privatized profit."

A second panel was called up, and Rachel Kiddell-Monroe took her seat facing the audience. Casually dressed,

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her long blonde hair pulled back in a ponytail, Kiddell-Monroe remained silent as her fellow panelists made their points. Finally the moderator asked her a question about drug development. Smiling, she promised to return to the question—"but first let me backtrack," she said. "With all due respect to the members of the previous panel, I have to disagree with the core of what has been said. I think the system is actually very successful." She paused a moment for effect, and then continued. "Look, it's time we realized that this current system is very well-designed to do exactly what it does: create maximum profits for pharmaceutical companies. And it has been incredibly resilient to every challenge we make to it. The day we realize all that is the day we end twenty years of fighting for small changes."

Kiddell-Monroe cited the example of the Trans-Pacific Partnership trade agreement, which will expand the reach of medicine patents in a pact covering 40 percent of the world economy. The TPP is intended to serve as a template for future trade agreements. "It's time for civil society to stop focusing on mopping up the mess," said Kiddell-Monroe. "Let's just say the current system has nothing to do with the needs of patients, and move on to create something new."

Kiddell-Monroe grew up in London, but her mother is French and each summer the family would visit her maternal grandparents in Chateau-la-Valliere in central France. Kiddell-Monroe's grandfather, Romain Pimbert, had been a member of the French Resistance during World War II and participated in dangerous missions to shepherd Allied pilots back to England. When Pimbert told his granddaughter stories about his wartime experiences, there was always a moral: the duty to fight injustice wherever one found it. The lessons took. By age eleven, Kiddell-Monroe had started a school Amnesty International chapter; she got a group of her classmates to write earnest letters to dictators, demanding the release of political prisoners. Eventually, she studied law at Southampton University, hoping for a career in human rights but ending up at a corporate law firm.

One year while she was at the law firm, Kiddell-Monroe spent her vacation backpacking in Indonesia. There she was invited to visit an island called Siberut, where logging companies were successfully lobbying to have the indigenous Mentawai people forcibly removed from their ancestral homes. A Mentawai man in one village tugged on Kiddell-Monroe's sleeve and said something to her in his language. The interpreter explained that the man was the village leader. "You have to help us," he had said. "We are going to die."

Upon her return to London, Kiddell-Monroe started an organization called S.O.S. Siberut. She raised money and partnered with Indonesian activists in England and Indonesia. Frustrated by the limitations of working from afar, she obtained a leave from her law firm and returned to Indonesia, where she soon became involved in the East Timorese independence movement. She escorted native people into the cities to confront government leaders. She hid political dissidents in her basement. She saw children in remote villages who were dying from common illnesses like chicken pox because they lacked access to basic treatment. She told her law firm in London that she would not be coming back.

After a few years of working in Indonesia, Kiddell-Monroe found her way to the international humanitarian organization Médecins Sans Frontières—Doctors Without Borders—where she served in several administrative positions in Africa and Latin America. In the mid-1990s, she visited an African hospital that Médecins Sans Frontières had been asked to take over. She was shown the pediatric ward, the surgery rooms, the internal medicine section. But she noticed that her guides kept passing by a large area behind closed doors. Only after Kiddell-Monroe insisted did her guides grudgingly show her into the room. Inside lay dozens of emaciated, vacant-eyed patients, all lying nearly motionless. They were all presumed to have HIV/AIDS and were on the brink of death. "There is nothing you can do for these people," she was told. Kiddell-Monroe just nodded. She was confident that things would change once Médecins Sans Frontières was in charge. But they didn't. "Do you know how much it costs to treat just one patient with HIV/AIDS?" she was asked when she called her bosses. The answer was $11,000 a year, for the rest of a patient's life. At the time, Médecins Sans Frontières typically served in a transitional role, moving from one crisis to the next. Even if it could somehow afford to begin HIV treatment, what would happen to HIV-positive patients once the organization left? "So we basically just had to do what we could to make their deaths comfortable," Kiddell-Monroe says.

The image of that hospital ward stayed with her, as did the sight of children dying from other treatable diseases. Where she worked, such sights were common. If the drug development process is a pipeline, the impoverished patients treated by Médecins Sans Frontières are at the dry end of it, where only a few drops trickle out. Our profit-based pharmaceutical system has produced a wide variety of medicines for erectile dysfunction, acne, and other maladies of special concern to first-world consumers. But for many of the world's most deadly diseases, the system is a dismal failure. In the past fifty years, only one drug has been developed for tuberculosis, which kills half a million people every year. "The R&D incentive is virtually nonexistent," World Health Organization director-general Margaret Chan admitted in 2014. "A profit-driven industry does not invest in products for markets that cannot pay."

In the current research system, pharmaceutical companies devote a lot of resources to "me-too" drugs, which are developed in order to grab a share of the lucrative market for blockbuster medicines. Over 70 percent of medicines brought to market in the past two decades provide no new therapeutic benefit but instead compete with products that are already available. Meanwhile, many of the most impor-

tant drugs that have been developed recently aren't reaching some of the people who need them most: 10 million people die annually for lack of access to medicine. "My experience in the field was that people were not able to afford the medicines they needed, if the medicines had been developed at all," Kiddell-Monroe says. After more than a decade on the front lines of global health, Kiddell-Monroe did not see the situation getting any better—with the exception of one disease and one set of medicines. That single exception was enough to give her hope.

By the late 1990s, medicine had been developed that would work for the people who lay dying of AIDS in African hospitals. New antiretroviral drugs were so potent that they triggered what was known as the Lazarus Effect, allowing AIDS patients who had been near death to lead long and active lives. At the turn of the century, antiretrovirals had already been widely prescribed and used in the United States and Europe for several years. But the drugs were under patent, and their high cost meant that only one in a thousand Africans infected with HIV was receiving treatment. The patents were protected by a recently signed international trade deal, the Agreement on Trade-Related Aspects of Intellectual Property Rights, known as TRIPS. Under TRIPS, nations had committed to a minimum of twenty years of patent protection for medicines, as well as to provisions that enable corporations to fight off generic competition for even longer periods.

More than 2 million Africans were dying from AIDS every year, but the cost barrier for patented drugs caused even global-health advocates to be fatalistic. "It's so politically incorrect to say so, but we may have to sit by and just see these millions of people die," one unnamed global-health official told the *Washington Post* in early 2001. The pandemic raged with such abandon that in 2000 more South Africans died in their thirties and forties than in their sixties and seventies.

In some of the countries hit hardest, activists began to fight back. In response to public pressure, Brazil's government created a national program of antiretroviral treatment, which relied on domestic manufacture of generic medicines that were patented elsewhere. South African activists, emboldened by the example of aggressive HIV/AIDS advocacy by groups like ACT UP, flouted the TRIPS agreement by illegally importing generic antiretroviral medicine and pushed their government to follow Brazil's example. When the South African government took steps to do so, the drug companies struck back with lawsuits, and the U.S. government threatened trade sanctions against both Brazil and South Africa. But an international coalition of activists ramped up the pressure, holding protest marches, fighting the corporations in court, and heckling drug-company executives and politicians.

One of the most unlikely activists in that coalition was a twenty-six-year-old Yale Law School student named Amy Kapczynski. At a meeting of women AIDS activists in South Africa, Kapczynski was startled by the realization that, whereas the biggest challenge for the HIV-positive women from the United States and Europe was coping with drug side effects, the HIV-positive women from South African would likely be dead in a few years. So, when she began her studies at Yale, Kapczynski also began a campaign with Médecins Sans Frontières. They demanded that the drug d4T—first developed at a Yale lab and branded for HIV treatment as Zerit by the patent-holder Bristol-Myers Squibb—be made available for low-cost generic production in South Africa.

At first, officials from Yale, which received $40 million a year for the medicine under its licensing deal with Bristol-Myers Squibb, said their hands were tied. But Kapczynski and fellow students circulated petitions, reached out to the media, and gained the support of faculty—including the drug's inventor, Dr. William Prusoff, who told the *New York Times*, "People shouldn't die for economic reasons, because they can't afford the drug." Soon thereafter Bristol Myers-Squibb announced it would no longer enforce the d4T patent in South Africa.

This was the first time a major pharmaceutical company had willingly relinquished its patent rights. It heralded a cascade of similar decisions by other drug companies, leading to a drop of over 90 percent in the price of HIV drugs in just one year. Front-line antiretrovirals that once cost $1,000 a month now cost as little as $99 a year. Today, 16 million people are on the medicine.

The Yale case quickly became the basis for a new strategy. Most important new medicines and nearly all vaccine and biotechnology breakthroughs can trace their lineage back to university laboratories. Unlike pharmaceutical corporations, universities are accountable to the kind of people (students, faculty, taxpayers) who may demand that their institutions respect a broad set of values and not just seek to maximize profit. The model of advocacy invented at Yale quickly spread to other campuses and inspired a new organization: Universities Allied for Essential Medicines. Under the UAEM banner, students secured commitments from major universities like Harvard and Brown to ensure that the drugs developed in their labs were made available to the world's poor. UAEM also worked closely with Médecins Sans Frontières, which launched an access-to-medicines program after it won the Nobel Peace Prize in 1999. Soon after this program was created, Kiddell-Monroe left her field work, moved to Canada, and devoted herself full time to the cause of making urgently needed medicine affordable throughout the world.

As president of UAEM, Kiddell-Monroe was an immediate hit with students in the movement. When Sandeep Kishore first met Kiddell-Monroe, he was an MD/PhD student at Cornell and the leader of the university's UAEM chapter. "Many student leaders reach a stage where they are getting a little jaded: they have learned about all the horrible things going

on in the world, and they get overwhelmed. They start to question if they can really make a difference," Kishore says. "But Rachel has a way of articulating the path to justice so clearly, and with such passion, that she infects you with her point of view. It is her gift."

Kiddell-Monroe won't allow younger activists to imagine that success will be easy. After the successes of the HIV/AIDS–treatment campaign at the turn of the century, the access-to-medicine struggle has too often been relegated to the sub-paragraphs of international trade agreements. The Holy See and various Catholic organizations, including the Maryknolls and NETWORK, are among many faith-based advocates who have expressed concern about the effects that trade agreements like the Trans-Pacific Partnership will have on access to medicines. But arguments over complicated trade-agreement terms and obscure interpretations of intellectual-property law have not been easily translated into grass-roots activism. "The problem we have is that there are only about eight people in the world who understand what we are talking about," one leading activist confesses.

Rachel Kiddell-Monroe with patients at an MSF clinic in Africa

Kiddell-Monroe admires the existing advocacy groups, such as Knowledge Ecology International, Public Citizen, and even her own Médecins Sans Frontières. (She is no longer on staff at MSF, but serves as an elected member of the organization's board of directors.) "These are wonderful people who work morning to night every day of the week on the cause, but they are so focused on the constant, immediate challenges to medicine access that they struggle to be proactive," Kiddell-Monroe says. "We need to expand this movement beyond the geeky access-to-medicines folks—and, of course, I consider myself among that group!"

The students she works with agree on the need to expand the movement. Manuel Martin, a British medical student who is one of the European coordinators of UAEM, is a member of a group Kiddell-Monroe convened called "The Blue Sky Project." The aim is to imagine an entirely new approach that breaks through the constraints of patents and international trade agreements. "Sometimes, a little naïveté can help. We students see the issue as black and white: people are denied the fundamental right to health because medicines are unaffordable," Martin says. "So maybe we can challenge the status quo in a way that people working on the issue for a long time may struggle to do. Rachel encourages that from us. She says we are not to think outside the box—we are to assume there is no box at all."

Kiddell-Monroe has been doing her own "blue sky" thinking. Last year, at the invitation of the Open Society Foundation, she and others were invited to submit their views on the economics of pharmaceutical innovation. Kiddell-Monroe seized on that opportunity to write a piece that described access-to-medicine activists as dancing the "Pharma Foxtrot." It is a dance, she wrote, where the steps lead to the conclusion that medicines are a market commodity like DVDs or cars. Kiddell-Monroe proposed instead a "Citizen's Samba," based on the notion of medicine as a public good and open access to information as the norm. In such a system, profit would be "relegated to a modest by-product of the activity rather than a deliberate goal."

This approach is not new; in fact, it was the norm until recently. The Agreement on Trade-Related Aspects of Intellectual Property Rights was only finalized in 1994. It was the product of corporate lobbying and strong-arm pressure by the United States, where half the world's top pharmaceutical companies are based. Before TRIPS, most nations either did not allow patents for medicines or placed strict limits on them. To many, the very idea of treating life-saving medicines as a market commodity is simply immoral. Jonas Salk famously refused to pursue a patent for the polio vaccine, saying the patent belonged to the people. "Would you patent the sun?" he once asked an interviewer.

Kiddell-Monroe's default manner is genial, but at one point during the discussion at the European Parliament, she appeared to lose her patience. Shortly after she called for a different approach to medicine access, the discussion turned back to the details of intellectual-property policies. Someone used the term "value" to refer to the market price of a drug. Kiddell-Monroe jumped in. "You are talking about the drug's value. Let's talk about the value of human beings, shall we?" She was leaning close to her microphone now, her voice rising for the first time. "Consider the Ebola crisis. It is not like we did not have a vaccine. We had a vaccine. It was sitting on a shelf in Canada. No one developed it because there was no profit in it. We lost eleven thousand people in West Africa. That is the reality of this system."

Our profit-based system for developing medicine devotes just 10 percent of its resources to illnesses that account for 90

DOCTORS WITHOUT BORDERS

percent of the global disease burden. That imbalance became horribly visible in the Ebola tragedy: promising vaccines and treatments languished in preclinical development, while drugs to treat male pattern baldness were being rushed to market. As soon as it seemed the disease might spread from West Africa to wealthier countries, Ebola began to capture global attention and the lack of an effective treatment was suddenly seen as an urgent problem. As public-health advocate Greg Gonsalves put it, once Ebola "cleared customs," it struck fear in the hearts of Americans.

Now the broader access-to-medicines crisis has cleared customs, too. When U.S. cancer physicians are moved to issue a call to action, as they did in their *Mayo Clinic Proceedings* article, it means that the problem has crossed the border not just from poor countries to wealthy ones, but also from infectious diseases to noncommunicable ones. Malaria or even HIV may now seem to many Americans like exotic maladies that happen to other people in faraway places. Women dying of breast cancer because they can't afford treatment is a tragedy that hits closer to home.

Activists hope that we are now approaching a tipping point, as the public in rich countries becomes more familiar with the cruelties imposed by the current system. In November, UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon created a body called the High-Level Panel on Access to Medicines. The UN is notorious for convening ambitious-sounding committees that do no more than issue dense, ineffectual reports. But this panel includes several outspoken critics of the current profit-based system, including Stephen Lewis, the former Canadian ambassador to the UN and the UN's special envoy for HIV/AIDS in Africa. Lewis, a friend of Kiddell-Monroe's, is quick to point out that he has seen a lot of similar bodies come to nothing. But he thinks this time may be different. "Access to medicines has become one of humankind's greatest crises, perhaps right behind climate change," he says. "This has become a problem for the developed world alongside the developing world, and I think that means great changes are coming."

In April 1994, Kiddell-Monroe—then just twenty-nine years old—was serving as head of mission for MSF in Goma, Zaire, now the Democratic Republic of Congo, on the northwestern border of Rwanda. Over the next three months, eight hundred thousand Rwandans were killed, including scores of Kiddell-Monroe's MSF colleagues who were trapped inside the country. The river flowing into Goma became choked with headless, machete-butchered corpses. A few bodies in better shape belonged to victims who had paid their killers one dollar to be shot with a bullet. Kiddell-Monroe and other witnesses struggled to attract the international community's attention to the ongoing slaughter. "It seemed the world was looking the other way, and there were just a few of us who were there saying, 'You've got to look at this, you've got to see what's going on.'"

Today she finds herself searching for a way to focus the world's attention on another kind of human-rights crisis—one that kills as many people every month as were killed in the entire Rwandan genocide. She says there needs to be less talk about the intricacies of intellectual-property law and more talk about social justice and common decency. "If I try to explain to my neighbor or my kids what I work on, and I talk about patent law or trade agreements, their eyes roll up in their heads," she says. "We need to be able to describe a system that reflects our basic values, and say we are working to make that a reality."

There are already plenty of ideas about what such a system might look like. UAEM has counted eighty-one different proposals to motivate innovation and distribute drugs outside the for-profit system. Some plans would involve a buyout of existing patents. Others would offer prizes to reward drug research, like the Longitude Prize for antibiotics. The not-for-profit Drugs for Neglected Diseases Initiative has already developed several new drugs for a fraction of the cost that private corporations claim is necessary. Kiddell-Monroe and UAEM have been at the center of a push to build on these alternative approaches by adopting a sweeping global-research-and-development agreement. The proposal calls for all governments to make a contribution to drug research proportional to their national income. An international coalition of physicians, scientists, and economists have signed on to a public letter—"Make Medicines for People, Not Profit"—demanding that the World Health Organization move the agreement forward.

Proponents of a global-research-and-development agreement say it would achieve significant savings by eliminating the inefficiencies of the for-profit system, which absorbs both large profits and equally imposing marketing costs. The economist Dean Baker, one of the signers of "Make Medicines for People, Not Profit," describes the current system as "an unambiguously terrible way to support research." Governments are already paying massive amounts of money for medicine—first by supporting the research required to develop new drugs and then by purchasing the drugs from pharmaceutical companies. The goal would be to cut out some of the middle-men and marketing. "I do not believe there is a lack of money to make drugs available for all the world," Kiddell-Monroe says. "I think it is only a question of how we choose to distribute the resources we already have."

In Rwanda, Kiddell-Monroe could only stand by and witness the carnage from across a border. In the medicines struggle, she is in the thick of the action, and she expects a better outcome. "I've been privileged to talk with people all over the world, and I think there is a common morality that cuts across nationalities and religions and ethnic groups," she says. The problem in Rwanda, she insists, wasn't that the international community did not agree about what was right. The problem was that people of good will turned away so they would not have to confront the injustice. "We know that it is wrong to let people suffer and die needlessly," she says. "We just need to be willing to look at it—and then act." ■

Company

A Story

Valerie Sayers

When Lily calls to say I should come talk some sense into Diego before he ends up destroying himself, I remind her that I've made a point of avoiding that sweet cheater for years and years now. He seems to have managed just fine.

"Fine? He's been on hunger strike since this last surgery."

What surgery?

She rolls it out as if it's old news: last week, after all those years of diabetes, they amputated again. I don't know about any diabetes, much less years of it. I don't know about any amputation. Vertigo swoops me up. Lily says that the surgeon is waiting to see whether the right foot will have to go too, so I stop listening entirely. While the world somersaults, I catch sight of a skinny leg hacked off mid-thigh: I see ribbons of bloody flesh and hear Diego—flâneur, lover of women, cock-a-doodler—howl.

✶

Once upon a middle-aged time, reader, Diego O'Dowd and I lived together in an artists' co-op I'd founded back in the days when artists in downtown Manhattan bought decrepit lofts, unsafe at any price, with money they begged from respectable relatives. By the time Diego moved in, I was forty and Diego fifty, our marginal existences long established: my proper Southern mother had almost resigned herself to my unmarried, childless state, though I'm pretty sure she never resigned herself to Diego. We painted at opposite ends of the same studio where we slept, breathing in the toxic fumes of our art, and consoled each other about our rescinded charge cards, our adjunct teaching gigs, our dwindling shows. We ranted together about the torture regime Diego once fled. I even made a little film about his uninsured adventures in emergency rooms. We danced tangos, Diego counting time to keep me in step: ONEtwoThreefour.

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

At two or three or four in the morning, he returned triumphant from a night of bar-hopping and stood at the refrigerator door considering the sparse pickings. In the light of our antique icebox, his belly hung loose and easy, his skin darkening with the wine he'd downed and the moles that sprouted like mushrooms as he aged before my eyes. His appetite was insatiable.

And so was mine. Why did his flaccid arms and skinny legs make me so tender? Why did I crave his touch? Other artists had moved on—to video, to text, to performance—but Diego, who wasn't faithful to much, was faithful to paint. His colors were sublime. His subjects were women: nudes who morphed into fruits and vegetables, surreal mangos and artichokes in neon colors of such pure intensity that I prickled in their presence.

He bragged, he bellowed. He fretted about his grown daughter in Buenos Aires, but did he go to see her? No, he put a scratchy LP on the turntable, came to stand over our bed in the small hours of the morning, and held his hand out:

"Just one, Maisie, and then we sleep like angels."

I'd been sleeping like an angel till he woke me. I rose to dance.

When my little film about a swaggering artist sans medical insurance made it into Sundance, Diego fevered up with jealousy: Your exotic Latin lover with empty pockets, he sneered. But maybe you'll make a dime off me. When my little film won Best Documentary, he burned hotter still.

But all that was long, long ago: another lifetime. Now I'm a retired Best-Documentary professor living in paradise. I have bought myself a marsh-side house in a Southern hometown I once fled the way Diego once fled Argentina. I've made my peace with Due East: Spanish moss festoons the live oaks outside my windows, porpoises swoop in my tidal creek. The light is as surreal and sublime as Diego's colors ever were, and for the first time in my life, I have all the time I need for paint, that old honest pal. I'm perfectly content, past the need for company I didn't invite, certainly past the need for tangos with pot-bellied cheating men. I held onto my loft, so I get to the city when I need to, but lately this place, this light, this stretch of time are all I need.

Only now Lily—Lily, of all people—has summoned me. I'm in a sufficient state of shock to run the numbers. If I'm drawing Social Security, that makes Diego seventy-six. Seventy-six? Unfathomable. In his seventies, on one leg, Diego's probably even behaving.

I indulge in an ugly sense of obligation, an overcooked, stewing-in-its-own-juices, Rivera-and-Kahlo, Picasso-and-his-many-mistresses, resentful-woman bitterfest before I get round to sitting at the computer and googling Rock Bottom Air. It has always struck me as a perverse name for a travel site, and the prices don't look all that rock-bottom to me.

✶

I slip in while Diego's drooling and snorting. When he realizes someone's entered his dreams, he blinks and blinks again, cartoonlike. His hair's still thick for an old man's hair: it's gone past gray to a zincy white, and in his new emaciated state, flesh loops down his jaws. At the sight of me, he lets loose a brief delighted smile before he remembers where he is, what's happened, what might happen still. The other shoe, so to speak. The surgeon, Lily tells me, took his toes, then his foot, then his calf: this, it turns out, was the third surgery, the third mortification. Now, when he has nobody, I'm the lone volunteer, or maybe the lone draftee, to stand by this hospital bed. I contemplate the unlikeliness of Diego's securing a bed in the first place: if he's even bothered to signed up for Medicare, I'll know I've witnessed a miracle. He clamps his eyes shut.

"I ask for no visitors." Diego's English is perfect—he reads political theory in five languages—but he lives in the present tense. It's a Zen thing. He rings a buzzer he probably rings thirty times a day.

No nurse appears. I retreat to the visitor's chair and Diego, struggling his hips into a bearable position, retreats to dark silence. He's asked for no visitors to cover the absence of visitors. I think I can see, under the thin sheet, where they took the leg: just below the knee. I see his missing calf, too, its sparse hairs white as the hairs on his head, springing absurdly from a shin like a palmetto's trunk. I see his thick yellowing toenails, too much effort to hack through all these years. Now a surgeon's gone and hacked the whole thing. I want that leg. I want to paint it. What's the matter with me? Haven't I exploited him enough? That leg's no symbol, God knows, no metaphor. Its absence is as loud as the sad buzz of the fluorescent lights.

The nurse finally arrives, lumped into pastel scrubs, every inch of her lethargized by Diego's summons. "What's up, Diego?"

He won't even open his eyes: "Tell this lady to leave or I'll call my lawyer."

This lady. As if I'm some do-gooder who comes to harass him, to remind him that he needs to lose some weight, cut back on the drinking, stop picking up every downtown babe too nearsighted to see how old he is. He can't call a lawyer unless I pay the bill. What can I do? The nurse shrugs back: What can she do?

✶

It's the same question I asked Lily when I walked in on Diego with a graduate student supposedly writing her dissertation on contemporary Argentine artists, though Diego hadn't had a solo show in years and the graduate student appeared to be an underage porn star. She was lying beneath him, naked on our rug—my rug—pierced everywhere with safety pins. He'd never been so flagrant before. He'd never been cruel.

After I kicked him out, I couldn't bear the city. I took my "Best Documentary" prize to a visiting distinguished-artist gig back home in South Carolina and proceeded through the stages of grief. I'd thought once that Diego and I would

grow old together, that he would rub my arthritic shoulders. I knew how to live on my own—I'd lived on my own for a long time before him—but we laughed at the same jokes and railed at the same injustices. I liked his company.

Years passed, though, as years do, and after I parlayed my visiting gig into a permanent appointment in paradise, I managed to forget about Diego O'Dowd for days on end. Sometimes, drifting off to sleep, I pictured him humming Eladia Blázquez, rolling his hips lasciviously. I pictured him getting to work, whooping and going at it in a frenzy, in love with the brush in his hand.

And you, Lily used to lecture me, are in love with the ultimate macho-man. Lily (you may have heard of her, reader, the performing artist Lily Pons) is my oldest friend in New York, the one who founded the co-op with me. Lily gave up on men entirely at the age of seventeen, and the entire time I lived with Diego she despised him. But after I left she softened: she let him in to my place to pick up a brush he'd left behind, shared a drink with him when he brought back the key. Evidently he left a lot of somethings behind: over the years, Lily reported multiple sightings, reported that he'd sold a few big canvases, that now she railed with him about torture as practiced by his new country. Maybe she's even been letting Diego crash in my loft when I'm not there. The idea's strangely consoling, and gives me something real to offer Diego: he can stay in my place as long as he needs, rent-free, no subterfuge necessary, so that Lily can look in on him. When I leave the hospital, I knock on her door to let her know the plan.

She laughs sarcastically. Diego, she says, gets on her nerves. She is certainly not going to look in on him. "But you will," she says. "If I know you, you'll wait on him hand and foot." It's not the best expression, under the circumstances.

✶

When I go back the next day, Diego's rage pitches higher. He hisses: "Go back to North Carolina."

I haven't corrected any New Yorker who inquired about North Carolina in years, but I correct this one. "You know perfectly well which Carolina."

"Go back there."

"I want to see the leg."

His lips twist. "*Coño.*"

"I want to paint it."

I see the struggle of every vein in his neck. If there's one thing a painter understands, it's why another painter wants to paint some forbidden body part. He kicks the sheet off with his limbo leg. "Take your look, bitch."

In all our years together, Diego never called me such a thing, not in English. I get close, leaning low over the hospital bed to look at the stump, but there's nothing to see, nothing but strips of futuristic bandage leaking goo. I see anyway. I see where they sawed the bone an inch below the knee, where they left flaps of skin to cover gristle. The skin around his stump is wrapped neatly as a Christmas present, but the scar underneath will raise itself in one long angry welt, a fat line like a whiplash. Once they take those bandages off, the staples will shine. The flesh colors will be the muddy colors students use when they're starting out, though I see a pure light-infused green in there, a glint of old copper in Diego's scar. I move my hand to touch it—I'm not even aware of making the gesture, but Diego is. "Don't."

I don't.

This time, he doesn't bother to ring the buzzer or tell me, again, to get out. His eyes fill with such splattering pools of contempt that I pull the sheet up before he can stop me and leave him to his mourning. Have I mentioned that Diego cries easily, profusely? Have I mentioned that he once accused me of exploiting him?

The nurse tells me where to find the social worker, who explains that they're nowhere close to fitting him with any artificial limb, much less the titanium leg-of-the-future I've been fantasizing. Yes, Medicare will pay for a rehab facility for thirty days, and yes, he'll practice more on the crutches he didn't master the last time. Inconceivable, that you could overcome someone's despair in thirty days. The social worker—lumpy as the nurse but closer in age to me, closer in skin tone to Diego—looks as if she agrees about despair. Some woman like this must have done the Medicare paperwork for him.

"When he goes home," she says, "you'll have to—" I interrupt to offer my confession: I'm not Diego's wife. I don't live in New York anymore.

"Does he have somebody to look out for him?" We squirm together. She averts her gaze daintily to inquire whether I might be able to stay, just a few weeks, just to visit him in rehab and settle him back home, just till he can maybe get himself to the store for a quart of milk.

If I know Diego, a quart of Scotch is more like it.

✶

The good former-lover swallows gall and stays. The good girl reclaims a loft allowing her this proximity to Diego who has no one. The good ex marvels at her prosperity, summoning the spaces she needs, rolling in retirement dough.

The night I spring Diego from rehab and bring him home to my place, I make chicken soup. For years, I watched Diego, insouciant in his chicken-butchering, make cazuela: I recall the hacked chicken, a bunch of carrots, an onion, corn, potatoes. I tart it all up with cilantro and chile. Too late I realize that I've made a Mexican, not an Argentine, cazuela and suspect that Diego won't appreciate a broad Latin bow.

Diego appreciates nothing, including the passive-aggressive home aide I realize I'm performing. So I slip out to buy a bottle of strictly-forbidden, wildly-overpriced Malbec and bribe him: if he sips my misbegotten cazuela, he can have a half-glass of wine. I realize perfectly well that I'm treating him like a five-year-old, that I'm using the lowest and possibly least effective blows in the Handbook of Mortal Gender Wars, but I won't watch him waste away. I water

the wine and fool him: another miracle. Diego hasn't tasted wine in so long, it's moon-juice to him.

After he finishes two ounces of wine disguised as four, he opens his mouth as if to speak, but instead sips half a bowl of soup with a full measure of resentment. When he sets down his spoon he allows me to test his blood, surely calculating that this might buy him another half-glass of wine. It buys him the insulin shot he's been letting me inject for mysterious reasons. What could those reasons be, other than wanting after all to live? He howls:

"That soup is glue. You're the worst cook I know."

✶

We drive each other crazy. We didn't, in the old days; or maybe when I drove him crazy then, Diego went and found himself a graduate student. I can't take him anymore, his unwashed smear of hair, his brown teeth. I can't take the city either: not the wind off the Hudson, not my moneyed neighbors, not the new glass-and-steel glitz of dear old dirty TriBeCa.

When the co-op's ancient boiler goes down and we've been two days without heat, I persuade him to board a plane, to stay awhile in the warmth of Due East. Reckless, I promise sun, and he snorts. In the old days, South Carolina was a concept that made him shiver: nobody with brown skin, he said, was safe down there. But that word sun gets to him. What he says now is: "Good a place as any to die."

Which is, after all, not so different from what every geezer in New York says, packing for winter in Florida. From what I said, heading south after Diego broke my heart. From what prompted me, newly respectable and newly retired, to buy a house on a tidal creek.

✶

Some previous owner of my Due East house—probably an artist, the agent said accusingly—knocked out walls to make a big central room with an old-fashioned kitchen at one end. The space resembles a New York loft—my New York loft, as it happens—but this light's otherworldy. An endless bank of windows looks out on a shallow yard where, at water's edge, two live oaks poke through either end of a deck, gnarly limbs extended. The light slithers through a latticework of leaves and moss; sawgrass springs from the marsh beyond; the creek stretches out serene. To enter this house is to enter a peaceable kingdom, but Diego and I, exhausted, enter biting our tongues. Finally Diego says: "You pay big bucks for the water."

On either side of the house are a sprawling bedroom and bath, each wing with a lockable door. When I first saw the place, I pictured a recalcitrant teenager in one wing, or maybe an exiled errant spouse. The people who lived here could live together without living together, retreat always possible. How prescient of me to buy a house with two wings: retreat may keep me from murdering Diego. Within an hour, he's lying on the couch and complaining about the way my watercolor easel blocks his view.

"Go lie in the hammock."

"I can't get in the hammock much less out."

"How do you know if you won't try."

"You sound like my first wife."

First wife? I only know about one. I don't even ask.

✶

Perhaps this return home is where you're rooting for a getting-better-every-day story, a love-conquers-all story, an older-wiser-lovers story. You can forget all that. Diego's catatonic twenty-three hours a day, and for the remaining hour alternates between rage and sarcasm. No, he won't see a shrink, a Southern shrink. No he doesn't care if he dies, he wants to die.

"What's the matter with you, Maisie, you don't see that?"

I drop sketchpads on low tables, buy a new tube of titanium yellow. Diego makes no moves in their direction. He makes as few moves as possible. Too much effort to fetch a knife or a razor blade; his plan is to disintegrate into dust and float away. Most nights, he doesn't make it back to the angry-teenager wing, but falls asleep on the couch, the T.V. blaring chase scenes into my dreams. He shrinks before my very eyes. I remember my time alone with sad nostalgia: a time when there was no one to resent, no one to punish.

You're not the one who's lost your entire identity, my mother lectures from the grave. Tell him to shape up, Lily barks from New York. Duh, the doctor says, and refers me to a social worker. I'm getting like Diego: I fold the name of the social worker and put it in my pocket, and a week later the name shreds in the wash like the dignity Diego's been shredding since I met him.

✶

Lily calls to say the boiler's fixed and it's warm enough now to come back if we want. Diego hasn't said a word about going back—maybe, like me, he has dreams about a one-legged man tumbling down the subway stairs. He lets me drive him to the beach, to sit under a palmetto and listen to the ocean, but points out that our tree is rotting from the inside out, swarming with monstrous bugs. A buzzard circles, as if to echo his ominous tone. The doctor says if he can hang on for another six months and keep those numbers stable, they can start thinking about a prosthetic. I watch Diego cringe.

He tries the hammock, but he was right: he can't get in, much less out. From the kitchen counter I watch him crawl to the picnic table to hoist himself up. I wait the requisite hours to look for the folding chairs, to persuade him to sit on the deck with me, but I don't know whether it's his pride or mine I'm salvaging.

"The water rises," he growls, and because the tide's going out, I know he means our planet, not our marsh. We sit together, lost in our exile, at the edge of the dying world. Pileated woodpeckers have sprung up in every tree, their mad percussion the closest we will get to a twilight tango. The first streak of sunset, Nehi orange, struts across our horizon.

I'm not sure Diego sees the sun setting, or the cormorants or the egrets or the Carolina wrens who have built a city in the pines that separate my property from the absentee landlord's next door. I wonder what that landlord thinks when he comes to check on his place after a Dreamvacation.com renter drives off. I wonder what the dream vacationer thinks: that we are an old married couple, I reckon, that I have stuck by my wounded vagabond of a man. Little does he know: I wouldn't say that desire still hounds me night and day, but I wouldn't say either that I'm out of its claws.

Diego, I believe, has escaped desire on one leg, and I don't think he will ever look back.

✶

In the morning, he's crumpled on the couch as usual but I notice that he troubled to take his trousers off before he drifted—that's a new development. I creep closer to see if he's awake, to take my first long look at the stump since the hospital. I was right: that surgeon wrapped it neatly as a Christmas present. It's no stranger than an old man's foot.

I have my chance. Maybe it isn't my right—maybe I should ask—but I can't stop myself. That stump is as beautiful to me as Diego's body ever was. I bend to kiss it, and Diego, deep in the sleep of despair or release or resignation, doesn't so much as stir. You tell me: Does this last transgression signal that I'm still exploiting him?

Diego farts his answer, the way Diego would, and beyond him the marsh stirs to life: the algae bloom, the sawgrass struggles to breathe, the oysters squeeze themselves in disbelief. I know perfectly well what will happen if he stays. The time to paint I've so jealously amassed will be wrenched away as I fetch pills and prepare injections and hide wine. I'll witness every second of his decline. I'll watch despair, the unforgivable sin, take the form of flesh—and I'm not entirely certain whose flesh will succumb first.

Resentment sends my heart clattering, but in the marsh, the birds consult each other about the weather—an afternoon storm, maybe?—and decide to go about their business, which is not the dying planet but their prospects for breakfast. What can I do? I go about my business too. I spoon the coffee.

The room fills with light, with the yeasty smell of Diego, the sound of coffee dripping: ONEtwoThreefour. I perch on a stool at the edge of the world and let my eyes rest on the horizon. I don't have much time, and I have all the time in the world. ■

Rand Richards Cooper

Thriftless Ambition

'WEINER'

During presidential campaigns I'm often struck by how hard and how well candidates labor to claim our loyalties—and get our votes—by seeming like one of us. But inevitably there comes a moment when the thought of what life must be like on the campaign trail demolishes that carefully cultivated illusion of similarity. The calamity of public attention; the ceaseless need to perform; the mind-numbing repetitions and the trials of patience; the obliteration of privacy and family life; the boundless pressures and sheer physical rigors of every single day: contemplating all that, I *know* they are not like me. Who in God's name would want to run for high office? Why do they put up with it? Ambition, of course. But what really is ambition? What kind of force is it, where does it come from, and how does it shape the people it afflicts?

I wish *Weiner* had set out to answer these questions. But it has narrower aims. The documentary is co-directed by Josh Kriegman, former chief of staff to Anthony Weiner—who, as everyone in America knows, resigned his seat as congressman from New York after it was revealed he had sexted lewd photos of himself to various young women. Parlaying his association with his old boss into unlimited access, Kriegman (along with Elyse Steinberg) sets out to film Weiner's unlikely political comeback, as he sought to put the disgrace behind him with a run for mayor of New York in 2013.

The filmmakers couldn't know that revelations of further sexting adventures would soon surface, derailing the campaign from its surprise early front-running status and necessitating a desperate, weeks-long effort at damage control. Disaster for the candidate proves to be a dream for the filmmakers; the pot of gold that lands in Kriegman's lap reminds one of Andrew Jarecki's 2003 masterpiece *Capturing the Friedmans*, where a quirky study of a professional clown morphed, via serendipitous disclosures, into a searing revelation of family dysfunction and sexual abuse.

Given the nature of his sexual peccadilloes, Weiner's name is a punch line of seemingly inexhaustible mirth, and the filmmakers themselves cannot resist indulging in the joke—one can practically hear the chuckling as a soberly printed epigraph at the outset quotes Marshall McLuhan's remark that "The name of a man is a numbing blow from which he never recovers." And while the film's approach is straightforwardly reportorial, elements of black comedy persist. One scene in a campaign car has Weiner rambling manically about his campaign as he gluttonously shoves down a burger and fries. Another captures the maneuvers of his team as they execute "Operation Pineapple," hustling the candidate through a McDonald's to the back-door entrance of an adjacent building where he is to give his concession speech—all in order to avoid a confrontation with the wannabe porn star, Sydney Leathers, who was one of Weiner's digital dalliances, and is sleazily seeking to capitalize on her notoriety by confronting him live before the cameras.

Weiner dissatisfies on a number of points, and scores brilliantly on one. The "fly on the wall" approach is steadfastly passive; no one is interviewed, there is no commentary, we get nothing of the candidate's life outside politics. It's not an approach geared to delivering insight either into Weiner's past, his need to transgress, the inner workings of his marriage, or any of a number of topics one might reasonably expect a documentary to address.

What it is geared to delivering is a detailed pathology report on a political campaign, and career, that dies right before our eyes. Sinking ship, train wreck, choose your metaphor: *Weiner* depicts, in lurid detail, the minute-by-minute undoing of a political campaign under extreme duress. And here it is compulsively watchable, in a reality-TV way, serving up one guilty pleasure after another as we watch press and pundits piling on, with comedians Stephen Colbert, Jon Stewart et al. seizing the lurid and hilarious aspects of Weiner's disgrace (for instance, his online nickname, Carlos Danger) to amp up the mockery. One of many difficult scenes shows Weiner attempting to mollify his team, as his campaign manager and communications director convey their furious sense of betrayal.

MOTTO PICTURES / SUNDANCE SELECTS

The film is also a study in spousal endurance and loyalty. Weiner's wife, Huma Abedin, is a close advisor to Hillary Clinton, and her plight in certain ways echoes Hillary's own twenty years ago, during her husband's very public infidelities. If you expect in Abedin to meet a spouse toughened by hardball politics at the Hillary level, you'll be surprised and moved by the woman who emerges. Apparently modest, even shy, and almost opaque with loyalty, she seems at once doggedly determined to support Weiner, but also embarrassed, hurt, and appalled. Several times, and pitiably, she shoots the camera a pained and nervous grin, as if to say, I can't believe this is happening—and I *really* can't believe we're letting you film it.

As for insights into Weiner himself, they are few. We get glimpses of a bulldog-like advocacy of passionate political views, and a boisterous, conflict-seeking, no-holds-barred political style. There are glimmers of what might have made him a winning politician, and it's even possible, in a limited way, to like the man—or, at least, to believe him when he says at one point that he has spent his whole life fighting against bullies. But mostly what we see is a man who just can't help himself. Whether he is lambasting Republicans on the House floor for quashing a bill for 9/11 first-responders, or haranguing a voter in a kosher deli for daring to judge him, it's the same incorrigible abrasiveness; and eventually his pugnacity seems less like a commitment to pushing his firmly held views than a symptom of his personality problem.

One fascinating and disturbing sequence captures Weiner's tempestuous interview with MSNBC talking head Lawrence O'Donnell, an interview that begins with O'Donnell asking, bluntly, "What's wrong with you?" In proceeding to spar caustically with him, Weiner breaks just about every rule for how a candidate in his precarious situation should behave. Yet he blasts away anyway. Back at home that night, he watches the interview on TV. Huma watches over his shoulder for a moment, and her expression says it all; she's stricken with shame and disbelief.

Is it bad? Weiner asks.

"It's bad," she says. "It's really bad." Shaking her head, she tells him to turn it off, and leaves the room.

Weiner nods, yet continues to watch—and as he does, a little smile crosses his face. Even amid the smoking ruins of his campaign, he's relishing watching himself, reveling in his own combativeness. The contrast between Weiner, rapt with self-love, and the pained embarrassment of his wife could hardly be more trenchant.

Interspersed amid such sequences are excerpts of Weiner being interviewed months later by the filmmakers, after the dust has settled. Asked to account for his reckless actions, he makes some desultory remarks about preferring superficial crowd relations to substantial personal ones. "Politicians probably are wired in some way that needs attention," he says. "It is hard to have normal relations." Such detachment borders on self-estrangement; whatever minimal self-understanding Weiner has achieved comes not from looking within, but rather from channeling the views of others looking at him from outside. It is disconcerting to hear a person speculating this way about his own behavior and motivations. Is he talking about himself or some stranger?

"Why did you let us film all this?" the filmmakers ask at one point. Fumbling for an answer, Weiner expresses the wan hope that the documentary might shed light on the whole of him as a person, his accomplishments along with his faults. The true answer—crystal clear to us—is that he seeks attention, any kind of attention, in the helplessly implacable way that a child seeks sugar.

"Thriftless ambition, that wilt ravin up / Thine own life's means!" Shakespeare wrote. "Farewell the tranquil mind! Farewell content!" Alternating between comedy, spectacle, tragedy, and farce, Weiner portrays a Narcissus so in love with his reflection in the pool of public life, even his own undoing captivates him. ■

Paul Lakeland

The Last Page

The Violet Hour
Great Writers at the End
Katie Roiphe
The Dial Press, $28, 320 pp.

It is a truism of fiction writing that the author should write from experience, about what he or she knows. How, then, can someone write about death? Of course, accomplished novelists manage to do so all the time, and one can guess at the experiences they draw on. Many a novelist has been seriously ill, after all, and some have sat at the deathbed of loved ones; on such occasions, thoughts about one's own mortality can never be very far away. But all of this is thinking about death, not experiencing it. As Sigmund Freud famously said, we simply cannot imagine our own death. How do novelists proceed from exploring death on the page to approaching it in their own lives?

Katie Roiphe's new book takes up the question of how six writers especially well versed in death and dying dealt with their own impending deaths. As such, *The Violet Hour* is a study of intellectual and moral consistency under stress. To what degree did Susan Sontag stay faithful, in her struggle with cancer, to her commitment to illness as a metaphor? How did Freud's speculations about the "death wish" play out in his own final passage? Was John Updike able to hold together the matter-of-factness about death displayed in his writing in the face of his own impending death—and maintain the burning zeal to keep writing to the very end? Where did Dylan Thomas's neurotic obsession with imagined illness, and decades of destructive alcoholism, leave him in confronting his demise? What about the children's author Maurice Sendak, in whose classic stories death was never far away and who on his deathbed remarked that, while he did not believe in any kind of beyond, "if nothing is where my brother and sister are, then that is where I want to be"? And Roiphe helps us get to know the great American novelist James Salter, the only one of her subjects she was able to interview. He emerges as a man aware of death but not fixated on it.

These essays serve up careful accounts of the different ways these six writers inspected mortality and later confronted it. Probably none of us would choose to emulate Sontag's stout denial, or Freud's careful staging of his own death. Certainly we would not wish to drink ourselves to death, as Dylan Thomas managed to do. Far more life-affirming is the courage of Updike and Sendak in their last months, and of James Salter as he looks ahead at a conclusion that, at eighty-nine, cannot be long delayed. Roiphe's well-researched essays incorporate interviews with people who knew her subjects intimately, and the longer ones can seem interminable; most readers will find little of interest in Sontag's declining weeks, for instance, unless it be the strangely egocentric reflections of her son, the writer David Rieff, a self-torturing enabler of his mother's refusal to recognize that death is at hand. The essay on Sendak also meanders, though it includes an interesting set of reflections on how death is woven into his stories. The essay on Freud seems the most successful, perhaps because the role of death in the author's writings is so extensive, and the relationship of those writings to his own approach to death so complex. (The one serious inaccuracy in the book is its implication that Freud lived his final days in World War II London with bombs falling all around him; in fact, he died months before a single enemy shell hit the capital city.) The most moving moment might be Roiphe's account of the dying Updike lying over his typewriter, summoning the strength to write his final poems. And the most tasteless is surely the story of Dylan Thomas leaving his long-suffering partner in a pub and going upstairs to deny death and affirm life by having sex with another woman.


He did not go gentle: Dylan Thomas

The Violet Hour is not simply a set of six essays about great writers, however. It is also a highly personal work that interweaves its author's reflections on these writers with her own history of severe illness. Roiphe's intrusion into the story is problematic. Is this principally a researched work of literary journalism, or a memoir? The author's serious illnesses in early life may help her get close to death in the lives on which she is focused. Yet her

obsession with death is less compelling to us than it is to her, and that's a problem. After all, every one of us is the hero of our own story, yet this is a book about people who, frankly, are more important and more interesting than ourselves—or the author. Roiphe comes closest to succeeding in the difficult task of connecting her subjects' stories to her own in the final chapter, on James Salter. Her conversations with Salter reveal him to be the sage that admirers of his wise and poignant novels would expect to see. But even here, the bulky presence of Roiphe's reflections on her own phobias may leave a reader with the sense that Salter agreed to an interview about death and old age, only to find himself doing therapy for a woman obsessed with the death of her father many years before.

The Violet Hour has its strengths. There is much to engage and inspire the reader in the parade of friends, spouses, and partners who gave a great deal to these dying writers. Sendak in particular seems to have attracted intense affection, but even the fiercely prickly Sontag had her devoted friends to the very end. If the book does not entirely succeed, perhaps it is because Roiphe is looking for too much healing, trying too hard to uncover something we can carry away from her subjects' lives to use in our own. But death is such an intensely individual event that the deaths of others don't easily provide a blueprint for us, and in the end perhaps cannot be emulated, only observed. The most poignant feature of the book is the six photographs, each of which shows the writer's empty study or workspace, reminding us of something universal about death: that it comes to all of us as an interruption. Each writer's study, like his or her life—and our own—exhibits work in progress, now left eternally unfinished. ■

Paul Lakeland *is the Aloysius P. Kelley, SJ, Professor of Catholic Studies at Fairfield University. His latest book,* The Wounded Angel: Fiction and the Religious Imagination, *will be published next year by Liturgical Press.*

Daniel K. Finn

Spreading the Wealth

Inequality
What Can Be Done?
Anthony B. Atkinson
Harvard University Press, $29.95, 400 pp.

In April 2015, Dan Price, the founder and CEO of a credit-card processing company, announced that he was raising the minimum salary at his firm to $70,000 a year, raising the incomes of more than half of his 120 employees. Price paid for it by reducing his own salary-plus-profits to $70,000 a year. What led him to do this? Price said that of all the social problems a business leader could do something about, inequality "seemed like a more worthy issue to go after." Price's announcement met with jubilation on the part of his employees, but not everyone was so pleased. Rush Limbaugh called it "pure, unadulterated socialism, which has never worked." A business-school professor commented, "The sad thing is that Mr. Price probably thinks happy workers are productive workers. However, there's just no evidence that this is true."

Inequality has recently become a hot topic in the United States, so hot that two years ago Thomas Piketty's technical, six-hundred-page *Capital in the Twenty-First Century* appeared on the *New York Times* bestseller list. Piketty's central insight—now printed on T-shirts and bumper stickers—is that "r > g." Translation: In the long run, the rate of return to capital is greater than the rate of economic growth; as a result, the proportion of total income and wealth that goes to the owners of capital will rise over time, while the proportion that goes to labor will decline. Unless we do something about it, economic inequality will gradually increase. The bulk of Piketty's book is dedicated to proving this claim, but he does discuss a few possible solutions to the problem. His main policy proposal is a worldwide tax on wealth.

Anthony Atkinson's *Inequality: What Can Be Done?* takes up where Piketty's book leaves off. He largely ignores the long-term argument about the future of capitalism, demonstrates in detail how inequality has already risen in recent decades, and devotes most of his book to telling readers who already wish to reduce inequality the best ways to do so. The father of modern British inequality studies, Atkinson is Piketty's mentor and a generation older. He writes that his intended audience is "the general reader with an interest in economics and politics," and non-experts will always find his meaning clear. But since most of Atkinson's discussion is about *British* history and policy, and since there's a lot of detail, only the most wonkish of general readers in the United States are likely to get through this book.

The first hundred pages review the facts of inequality in recent decades and explain the various complexities that make inequality so difficult to discuss. (One of these complexities is the definition of income: Do we mean before-tax or after-tax income? Does it include capital gains? Food stamps?) The most widely recognized measure of economic inequality is the Gini coefficient, which is technically a measure of statistical dispersion—a way of summarizing the concentration of income. It is a number between zero and one, where zero means everyone has the same income, and one means that one person owns all the income. If we translate this number into a percentage, the United States and the United Kingdom are the most unequal industrialized nations, at about 36 percent (using after-tax incomes). Germany and France are in the middle at about 28 percent, while Sweden and Norway are the least unequal at about 23 percent. There has been a significant rise in inequality in the past forty years, which is what interests Atkinson most. In the 1970s, the Gini coefficient in both the United States and the United Kingdom was about 25 percent, just a bit higher than it is in Sweden and Norway today.

Since these percentages are abstractions, Atkinson adds the more concrete observation that to bring the United Kingdom back down to the level of income inequality it had when the Beatles were singing only by means of higher income taxes, you would need about a 50 percent increase in total income tax revenue. This would not only be impossible politically; it would also deaden the economy by reducing incentives. Thus, Atkinson argues that we can't reduce inequality by fiscal policy alone. We must also change how incomes are generated.

Atkinson devotes most of the book to describing in some detail fourteen ways to reduce economic inequality. The first two proposals aim to alter the balance of power that currently exists in the economy, which is "weighted against consumers and workers." First, because technological innovation is deeply shaped by the goals of those who fund the research behind it, Atkinson calls for a shift in the focus of government-funded research to encourage innovation that "increases the employability of workers and emphasizes the human dimension of service provision." Second, other elements of public policy should "aim at a proper balance of power among stakeholders." This includes antitrust policy that attends not only to increasing competition but to distributional effects also, a legal framework friendlier to labor unions, and the establishment of a Social and Economic Council, modeled on the one established in Germany after World War II and including both unions and employers' organizations.

Atkinson's third proposal calls on government to take various steps to reduce unemployment. For those who can't find jobs in the private sector, Atkinson believes there should be a guarantee of public employment in service-sector

jobs: childcare, preschool education, schools, youth services, health service, care for the elderly, Meals on Wheels, library services, and police-support activities. The fourth proposal calls for a "national pay policy" that would make sure the minimum wage was a living wage and establish a code of practice for pay above that minimum.

Atkinson wants to increase not just the *income* of ordinary citizens, but also their *wealth*. Toward this end, he proposes a national savings-bonds program to guarantee a positive real rate of interest on savings—with a maximum limit so that this advantage is not captured by the wealthy. He also endorses an idea that goes all the way back to Thomas Paine: on reaching the age of adulthood, every citizen would receive from the government a sizable "capital endowment" (with some limits on its use). Atkinson does not offer a specific number, but cites two recent proposals, one for £10,000 in the United Kingdom, another for $80,000 here. And to help pay for all this, Atkinson urges that each national government create a public-investment authority that would operate a sovereign-wealth fund consisting of investments in both businesses and real estate.

Atkinson's final eight proposals turn to more traditional methods for altering the distribution of income. He recommends a more progressive personal-income tax, with a top marginal rate of 65 percent and a significant reduction in "tax expenditures" (the various ways governments encourage certain activities by reducing or eliminating the taxes they entail). He proposes a version of the U.S. Earned Income Tax Credit—payments to low-wage workers to supplement their income. Rather than taxing those who give an inheritance, Atkinson would have the government tax those who receive one: citizens would report inheritances and other gifts over a certain dollar amount as part of their annual income-tax filing, and these gifts would be added up over a lifetime, with higher lifetime receipts being taxed at higher rates. Such a tax, aimed at the living recipient of an inheritance, could not easily be described (and opposed) as a "death tax." Atkinson would also like to see "a renewal of social insurance, raising the level of benefits and extending their coverage." The central issue here is unemployment insurance, which has receded in the United States over the past quarter century. In 1985, 35 percent of unemployed Americans received benefits; twenty years later only 19 percent did. In Germany, by contrast, more than 75 percent of the unemployed receive benefits.

President Barack Obama participates in a discussion about poverty during the Catholic-Evangelical Leadership Summit on Overcoming Poverty at Georgetown University, May 2015.

Atkinson is generally opposed to means-testing, which limits government subsidies to those in financial need. For example, he proposes a substantial per-child benefit to be paid annually and taxed as income so as to help the poor more than the rich, but he wants every family to receive the benefit regardless of income. Atkinson offers two major reasons for his opposition to means-testing. The first is that it functions as a disincentive to work. If you're receiving some sort of means-tested assistance and begin to work and earn more, your income goes up by the amount earned but down by the loss in benefits. In effect, the poor face a very high marginal tax rate as their incomes rise, at times as high as 70 percent. Say you're a part-time worker receiving government assistance and you're considering taking up your boss's offer to work one more day a week at $10 per hour. Your gross income would go up by $80, but the 70 percent tax rate—a combination of ordinary income and payroll taxes plus the loss of government subsidies—would mean that you would end up taking home only another $24 for the additional day of work, which is not much of an incentive. This creates a kind of poverty trap. Atkinson's second argument against means-testing is that many who are entitled to benefits do not collect them, but would if those benefits went to all citizens. To give one example, the Earned Income Tax Credit distributes an average of $2,400 to each of 28 million low-wage U.S. citizens each year, but nearly six million others who qualify for the credits do not receive them. A third argument, not mentioned by Atkinson, is that benefit programs are less politically vulnerable when all citizens receive the benefit. Social Security and Medicare, which benefit everyone of a certain age, are far safer than Medicaid, which benefits only the poor.

Atkinson's final proposal addresses global inequality. He wants wealthy nations to increase their target for development assistance to poor countries from

the current level—seven-tenths of 1 percent of GDP—to 1 percent. Although Norway and Sweden already meet the higher goal, most nations fall short of the lower goal. The United States contributes more than any other nation in absolute terms, but this dollar amount represents the lowest percentage of GDP among industrialized nations—less than two-tenths of 1 percent.

The last section of *Inequality* addresses the question "Can it be done?" Atkinson begins by asking whether his proposals would reduce economic growth ("the size of the cake"). He concludes that it might or might not. (His argument here would have been strengthened by reference to the work of American economic historian Peter Lindert, whose research, ranging over many countries and decades, has demonstrated that social-welfare spending has not of itself reduced economic growth.) Atkinson then asks whether globalization prevents steps to reduce inequality within particular countries. He points out that in a prior period of advancing globalization before World War I, industrializing nations took great steps toward Social Security legislation. And, he argues, many of the globalizing pressures on domestic economies are not simply elements of nature but are produced by international trade agreements.

This leaves one more question: Can we afford it? Atkinson drills down into the figures to show that, in the United Kingdom at least, the answer is yes—and at a much lower price tag than one might guess.

Inequality a real accomplishment. It represents the first comprehensive, realistic, and detailed proposal for countering growing economic inequality—and it's done not by some energetic graduate student but by a seasoned economist who's been working on these issues for more than forty years.

Still, Atkinson's approach has significant limitations: in choosing to write about how to reduce inequality *if that's what you want to do*, the author largely ignores political issues that would have to be addressed before his program could be implemented. Not everyone believes that inequality is a problem. (Whenever one politician mentions inequality, another can be counted on to cry, "class warfare!") And some who do regard inequality as a problem believe the problem can be solved only by revolution, not reform. Readers on the far left will dismiss Atkinson's book for not condemning the whole global capitalist system, for trying to solve a deeply structural problem by changes at the surface. Readers on the right will judge it to be simply a "big government" solution that will violate the rights of the prosperous, reduce economic growth, and distort economic incentives for nearly everyone. Particularly in the United States, there are more of the latter than the former these days, the success of Sanders notwithstanding. And so one must confront the question of whether it might be wiser to address economic injustice by focusing on poverty rather than inequality. After all, *everyone* believes that poverty is a problem.

In the long history of religious thought on economic life, almost nothing was said about inequality from the time of the Hebrew prophets to the modern era. There was always an intense concern about justice, but the focus of that concern was on need: God had given the world to humanity so that the needs of all would be met. The fathers of the church were adamant in their insistence that the wealthy share what they had with the poor, but they did not appeal to the concept of equality. As long as the needs of all were met, there was no presumption that it would be wrong for the wealthy to have more than everyone else. This began to change as the church, along with secular political theorists and social scientists, began to appreciate the importance of participation as a morally critical dimension of human flourishing. Since the nineteenth century, Catholic social teaching has discouraged extremes of economic inequality, which disenfranchise the poor in so many ways. Inequality, it turns out, is about more than who has the most stuff.

Still, given the political situation in the United States today, it makes more sense to focus on poverty, even if one's goal is also to reduce inequality. This very conviction led to the Catholic-Evangelical Summit on Overcoming Poverty held in May 2015 at Georgetown University. The event was organized by the religious leaders behind the Circle of Protection, which had campaigned to protect federal programs for the poor from the cuts of the Congressional "sequester." The organizers focused not only on what Catholics and Evangelicals can agree on when it comes to poverty—which is a lot—but more narrowly on policies and programs that have some hope of implementation in the current political climate. Participants discussed various ways to get poverty, particularly child poverty, onto the agenda of presidential candidates. But even politicians who care about poverty have in recent years been advised by their political strategists not to mention the topic. Even if everyone believes poverty is a problem, not everyone regards the problem as a high priority—partly because low-income citizens are less likely to vote. During campaign season, candidates of both parties tend to focus instead on the middle class. And even when they lament that the middle class is disappearing, they sometimes talk about it as if it included everyone who isn't either a millionaire or homeless. The poor too often go unmentioned. This is why Christians concerned about economic justice must do whatever they can to make poverty an issue before and after elections. One of the Evangelical leaders at the summit in May described a discussion in the White House that eventually persuaded Barack Obama to sign on to the Circle of Protection. A Catholic bishop reminded the president that the Bible does not say, "Whatever you do to the middle class you do unto me." ■

Daniel K. Finn *teaches economics and theology at the College of St. Benedict and St. John's University. His most recent book is* Distant Markets, Distant Harms: Economic Complicity and Christian Ethics *(Oxford, 2014).*

Edward T. Wheeler

Wounded in Action

The Illuminations

Andrew O'Hagan
Farrar, Straus & Giroux, $26, 304 pp.

True personality floats beneath surface consciousness, obscured by the fog of dementia—or the fog of war—and to meet what one truly is can either affirm or destroy. This theme works its way ever so deftly through the parallel developments of two characters in Andrew O'Hagan's latest novel *The Illuminations*, serving both as an analysis of mental experience and as a structuring principle of the narrative. O'Hagan studies twinned souls and fates separated by two generations and considerable family discord. Anne Quirk resides in a nursing home on the Scottish coast, west of Glasgow, while Luke Campbell, her grandson, soldiers for a Scottish regiment in Afghanistan. Their self-recognitions, both respectively and jointly, shape the climax of the novel's plot; hence the title, *The Illuminations*, the name of the grand lighting-up of the English seaside resort of Blackpool.

O'Hagan is a writer of many voices. In prior novels he has impersonated Marilyn Monroe's dog (in *The Life and Opinions of Maf the Dog, and of his Friend Marilyn Monroe*), and a pederast priest in *Be Near Me*, a work that renders the complexities of the priest's career without exonerating or condemning him. The third-person narrations in *The Illuminations* offer us a poignant view of the failing Anne, who is portrayed through fragmented speech and in carefully observed gestures and facial movements. O'Hagan takes on our fear of the blank of demented senescence. In Anne we see what a visitor to any loved one in a nursing home witnesses—the pieces of a former whole, the furtive self-glimpses of a mind confused by its own reflection. There is dignity in that faltering consciousness. O'Hagan offers a conditional hope mediated by the memory of a life lived before.

His male protagonist is a soldier, an officer committed to his men if not to his mission. Luke Campbell's fractured self comes alive in marvelously sustained dialogue, the "slagging" vulgarity that constitutes the verbal shield under which his squad operates amid the ambushes, the haze of marijuana, and the deceits of the Afghan war—and again after the return home, in his fractious exchanges with uncomprehending civilians. The novel alternates its scenes between Lochranza Court, Anne's nursing home, and a mountain road in Afghanistan where Luke and his men are in convoy on an ostensibly humanitarian mission. The venture ends in massacre and disgrace, including the ignominious fall of Luke's mentor, Major Scullion, and Luke's own disillusionment.

What bobs to the surface in the interplay of the novel's two main characters is Anne's earlier life as a pioneering woman photographer and Luke's childhood tutelage at her side. From the get-go he appreciated color—"light on fire"—and with Anne's encouragement he developed a poet's view of life, one that addressed "the world not as it was, but as it might be"; his choice of soldiering reflects allegiance to the legacy of his father, killed in action in Northern Ireland decades before. As the plot brings the two characters together, Luke unearths his grandmother's trove of photographs and a revelation of what broke her happiness and estranged her from her daughter Alice, Luke's mother. Gradually Luke begins to see as Anne saw, the past reclaimed in the uniqueness of her photographic skill. This reclamation is complicated by what he learns of his Grandfather Harry's weakness and infidelity.

Eventually Luke helps Anne salvage a few final days of recollection amid familiar surroundings, with the help of Sheila, a gregarious Blackpool landlady who has guarded Anne's possessions—and secrets—for decades. Through Sheila's account of Anne's life thirty years before, Luke finds reaffirmation of what he himself had known as a younger man: the need to live "a life proportionate to his nature."

FARRAR, STRAUS & GIROUX

Andrew O'Hagan

There is no sentimentality in the recognition of genius left unfulfilled through betrayal and tragedy. Anne might win posthumous fame—her photography is to be exhibited—but she is incapable of living on her own. As a further casualty, Luke's mother, Alice, has lived estranged from the very kinship she sees between her mother and her son. The concluding scene has Luke watching Anne on the seaside in Blackpool, laughing with Sheila, but at the mercy of the playful winds even as she reaches for the sun.

The Illuminations derives narrative tension from a remarkable contrast between scenes of domestic routine in the nursing home—the Memory Club meetings that provide both a stimulus for Anne's remembrances and a useful device for exposition—and the battle scenes in Afghanistan. The darker extension of the conflict is the suicide of Major Scullion, whose career moves from idealism to despair, a path Luke chooses not to follow. O'Hagan broaches another theme here, the saving love of literature, poetry in particular, shared by Luke and his mentor, Scullion. The major's wounds cause him to rally his physical resources; he saves himself from death by singing an old ballad. But all the poetic power of literary tradition cannot shield him from the desolation of failure.

O'Hagan's rendering of the feel of a nursing home and that of a tawdry club where Luke surrenders to music, sex, and drugs offers a powerful contrast. O'Hagan gets exactly right the feel of Luke rejoined with his demobilized men in tentative drunken intimacy. He also conveys Luke's complex train of thought as he turns the delicate leaves of Anne's long-hidden letters and finds the woman who shaped him. Underlying all of Luke's worries is his fundamental concern for the men he commanded, the nineteen-year-olds who put their fates into his hands, and to whom, in the end, he has little to say. Only in his rediscovery of himself in the person and the artwork of his now-dependent grandmother can he find a life that has "proportion to his gifts."

O'Hagan is a remarkable storyteller, one who can't write a bad sentence. In *The Illuminations*, he uses his gifts to get beneath the surface of two lives estranged from their own past. ■

Edward T. Wheeler, *a frequent contributor, writes from Quaker Hill, Connecticut.*

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Why Keep Waiting?

Nathan Paxton

On the edge of Harvard Square, there is an Anglican monastery. The brothers go to church, five times a day. In between "offices," they cultivate as much silence as they can. That doesn't mean they always come across as holy. I once heard a brother mutter to himself, "All right, what's next?… Probably more church. It's always more church."

Ten minutes before office, the monastery bell rings. Monks, dressed all in black, trickle in. The chapel sits on a busy parkway along the Charles River, but inside—perhaps due to the thick granite stones of the chapel walls—it seems quieter than possible in a city, just the movement of air or a footstep on the stone floor. One monk lights candles and prepares the simple wood and cloth lectern. No one speaks: the monks who have finished preparing books and music sit quietly in assigned places, legs uncrossed, hands on thighs, eyes closed; and the visitors settle in with their prayer binders.

I am not good at waiting. There's no clock, and I don't wear a watch. Eventually, I will learn how many monks there are, where they sit, what tasks have to be done before starting, and signs that the office is about to start. Sometimes I close my eyes so I can't mark time.

The brothers begin to chant.

"Oh, God, make speed to save us," one intones.

"Oh, Lord, make haste to help us," the others respond.

The monks sing back and forth, versicle and response, one side and then the other.

> Answer me when I call, O God, defender of my cause.
> You set me free when I am hard pressed,
> Have mercy on me and hear my prayer.

Whoever it is these men believe in and talk to several times a day, their prayers are simultaneously pissed-off and supplicating. In my depths, I'm pretty pissed off and constantly waiting to feel "better." I want to ask someone to make my depression end.

> For in death no one remembers you;
> and who will give thanks to you in the grave?
> I grow weary because of my groaning;
> …My eyes are wasted with grief
> and worn away because of all my enemies. (Psalm 6)

I feel dead already—unremembered, tired, grieving. If life is just waiting and then the end, why keep waiting? The psalm does not answer that question.

Many prayers and readings are about waiting, whether for God, oneself, other people, or the order of the world. We all have to do much waiting, short and long. Waiting in silence isn't like waiting in time. Waiting in time occurs when we fill, spend, pass, or try to move through some period as quickly as possible. It has no character of its own, only what we bring to it.

For me, depression feels like the time Vladimir and Estragon pass in *Waiting for Godot*: eternal and unchanging, full of anger and despair. So much of my experience of depression has been about waiting to feel better, since it seems there is no way to will wellness. Waiting while depressed is like being anywhere but the present, pulled toward the past and future by regret and anxiety. This is a waiting of loneliness and isolation.

Silent waiting tries to do something different—to get off the careening rides of our lives, to stop everyday voices. Waiting in monastic silence is waiting with others; the silence isn't about you, and it's more bearable. Waiting in that chapel pushed me into the now. Past and future seemed irrelevant, even out of order.

The brothers finish chanting. They process slowly across the chapel, double-file. They stop to bow before the altar, turn right, and exit. One returns to snuff out the candles. Some of the guests are staying at the monastery, and they follow to eat dinner. I pick up my bag and make my way back through the gate and into a world that isn't waiting—least of all for me. For a few minutes, I haven't been waiting to feel better or for anything else. I've just been waiting. ■

Nathan A. Paxton *is a professorial lecturer at the American University School of International Service.*

RECONSIDERATIONS V

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