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A Review of Religion, Politics & Culture

SEPTEMBER 23, 2016

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LETTERS

The Hyde Amendment, Brexit, 'Amoris laetitia'

HYDE SHOULD GO

The editors of *Commonweal* are wrong ("Why Hyde Matters," September 9): supporting the Hyde Amendment is not politically responsible, nor is it moral. The Hyde Amendment is the epitome of injustice for low-income women and women of color; it affects their social, economic, and reproductive wellbeing. Catholics are called to follow our conscience and to serve those with the least in our communities. Likewise, a majority of Catholic voters believe that insurance should cover abortion care when a woman decides it's the right thing for her. Policies like Hyde punish women for being poor. There is nothing responsible or moral about that.

JON O'BRIEN,

President, Catholics for Choice
Washington, D.C.

on that as well. If the Euro ultimately will not float without a real international banking structure to regulate it, can the "British pound" survive without a British Empire?

Americans may be tempted to survey all this difficulty with quiet satisfaction, convinced that the global future of mankind is safe in our hands. Prosperity, after all, will satisfy the masses and can safely be substituted for autonomy. Even our own pampered elites will eventually be ennobled by their very riches. Alas, these are assumptions that "history" does not teach. Nor does religion—or literature—for that matter.

BERNARD F. REILLY

Emeritus Professor of History,
Villanova University
Villanova, Penn.

CONSIDER THE BRITS

Andrew Bacevich's article ("Sound & Fury," August 12) gives hope that the Brexit phenomenon may finally be addressed sensibly and honestly. But his invocation of the "Anglosphere," which progressively replaced the British Empire after 1918, scarcely notes that the British role in this "special relationship" has rapidly diminished. To return to it will scarcely be palatable to any real "Brit." Canada has opted for NAFTA, deserting the British Commonwealth in favor of aligning itself more with the American economic sphere. Australia and New Zealand are now protected by their defense agreements with the United States rather than with the British fleet.

Such evolving phenomena finally convinced Britain to endorse the EU—after attempting to create its own "Outer Seven." But all this only further contributed to the diminution of British power.

Until now at least there was the currency "empire" of the British pound sterling to console. But the Brexit vote casts doubt

DISAPPOINTED

Pope Francis in *Amoris laetitia* offers us a new way of understanding how authority, law, and conscience ought to work in Roman Catholic Christianity while insisting (with the authority of Aquinas behind him) that this understanding can be found in traditional Catholic moral theology. It was therefore disappointing that none of your five commentators made this central to their remarks ("A Balancing Act," May 20). What we got instead was their disappointment that the exhortation did not have what they had hoped for.

Most of the exhortation's other chapters have interesting and worthwhile pastoral advice about how relations in the family ought to work backed up by meditations on scriptural passages. But the use of scripture is often sentimental and unsophisticated; Paul's paean to love, after all, was not especially about marital love.

RANDOLPH TRUMBACH

Professor of History, Baruch College
New York, N. Y.



Georgetown's Sins & Ours

It was in John Paul II's 1993 encyclical *Veritatis splendor* that the church first spoke of slavery as an "intrinsic evil." In the New Testament, slavery is an accepted fact of life, and being a slave or slave owner was no barrier to becoming a Christian. The early church was easily reconciled to what was then a nearly universal practice. The slave was often thought of as just another spoil of war. Jesus nowhere speaks against slavery, and St. Paul commands slaves to be obedient to their masters. Although modern popes eventually condemned the slave trade, earlier popes had owned slaves themselves. Historically, the church taught that slavery might be regrettable but did not violate natural law. Slaves must be treated humanely, but it was not immoral for a Catholic to own another human being.

Eleven presidents—most notably George Washington, most notoriously Thomas Jefferson, and perhaps most surprisingly Ulysses S. Grant—owned slaves. So did most of the men who signed the Declaration of Independence. So did the eighteenth- and nineteenth-century Jesuits of the Maryland Province. Although historians have long documented this fact, it still comes as a shock to many. In fact, the Maryland Jesuits owned as many as a thousand slaves. In 1838, they sold 272 men, women, and children to plantation owners in Louisiana. A good portion of the proceeds from that sale was used to pay the debts of what is now Georgetown University, rescuing the school from insolvency.

On September 1 Georgetown issued a report announcing steps it will take to atone for the institution's role in the nation's original sin and to seek reconciliation with the descendants of the slaves who were sold in 1838. Because the Jesuits were careful record keepers, and because many of the slaves remained practicing Catholics whose sacramental life can be traced in parish documents, it is possible for the university to contact heirs to this tragic history. Unlike many slaves, their ancestors were not anonymous. Descendants of the slaves will now be given the same preference in admissions decisions that the children of Georgetown alumni, faculty, and staff receive. (Georgetown has a need-blind admissions policy, so financial aid is available to all students.) In addition, two buildings on campus will be renamed, one in honor of a slave sold in 1838 and the other after an African-American religious sister who founded a school for black girls in 1827. A memorial to the slaves the

Jesuits sold will be built, and a center for the study of slavery established. Georgetown's law and medical schools will explore initiatives in the District of Columbia to address the legal and health needs of African Americans today.

All of this constitutes an impressive act of repentance. Perhaps even more could be done. Some critics of Georgetown's plan think that descendants should be directly compensated or, at the least, that a scholarship fund should be created for their children. What counts as just compensation for crimes that took place more than a century ago and who deserves to receive compensation are notoriously fraught questions. In the meantime, the university is being urged to include descendants in any future deliberations about how Georgetown can continue to come to terms with this legacy. As Maxine Crump, a descendant, and Richard J. Cellini, an alumnus and founder of the Georgetown Memory Project, have written, descendants "seek reconciliation and reunion, not reparations."

Nearly every institution in colonial and revolutionary America, in both the South and the North, was deeply implicated in slavery. Brown, Yale, and Harvard all acknowledge this thorny history, and the fact is that Catholic institutions were marginal players at best at this time of Protestant hegemony. Yet the steps Georgetown is taking now are bolder than any taken by these older non-Catholic universities. That is as it should be. Because Georgetown itself actually sold slaves rather than merely benefiting from the generosity of men involved in the slave trade, one can argue it bears greater responsibility than its Ivy League peers. As a Catholic university, Georgetown should embrace this sort of moral accountability. The Catholic Church, of course, makes claims for its moral authority that make its moral failings all the more humiliating. Certainly that accounts for much of the surprise and shock that greeted the revelations of Georgetown's culpability.

While Catholic institutions bear a special burden, they also have a unique opportunity for moral action. In acknowledging its failures in a forthright manner, Georgetown has renewed the fundamental Christian story of sin and redemption, one that often seems to have been banished from a world where the acknowledgment "mistakes were made" rarely entails much remorse, let alone any serious penance. ■

THROUGH EUROPEAN EYES

Rand Richards Cooper

On a recent trip to Germany, I got to watch U.S. politics, and Donald Trump, through European eyes. My German friends view Trump with two main sentiments: disbelief and alarm. That's not so different from most of my American friends, but Europeans experience an extra jolt of incredulity, especially those who've lived in the United States at some point in the past. They shake their heads, insisting that this can't be the country they knew. What happened?

I tried to reassure them by insisting that Trump is unlikely to be elected. "But the damage has already been done," one of them remarked. I disagree—the real damage would come if Trump actually gained the White House—but I understand what my friend meant: damage to the rituals and rules of American politics and damage to the American reputation, via what Trump's popularity says about who and where we are right now as a society.

Let me put forward a less alarming perspective on the significance of Trump, one that places him in the context of the shape-shifting nature of the American political party. In a European-style parliamentary system, where governments are formed via coalitions, parties can represent narrow slices of the electorate—as narrow as the Bavarian Peasants League or the National War Deserters Union, both represented in the chaotic German parliament of a century ago. That system allows for singleness of mind—or party purity—up front at the cost of tricky post-election maneuvering later on, as leaders struggle to build a government out of parties that often fundamentally disagree.

In a two-party system like ours, this challenge of building a coalition arises *within* the individual parties *before* any national election. Both of our two major parties are motley patchworks of groups that often have little in common. Consider the strange bedfellows united by the GOP over recent decades: highly secular Ayn Randians alongside fervent evangelicals; neoconservative foreign-policy hawks alongside isolationist America-Firsters; anti-tax libertarians and free-market idealists alongside disaffected working-class ex-Democrats. The Democratic Party has its own fault lines, reflecting the assorted interests of its constituent factions: labor (or what's left of it); African Americans and Latinos; socially liberal but economically centrist New Democrats; environmentalists; academics and the media; feminists; gay-rights advocates, and other groups focused on identity politics.

Put differently, while our government is set up for centrism and compromise, our parties are structured to accommodate an unruly diversity. To borrow an appropriately American phrase, they are large, they contain multitudes. Yet the particular alliances within those parties change over time, and the tumultuous moments of realignment are often brought to a crux by a presidential election. Some presidential candidates—Nixon, Reagan, Bill Clinton—succeed

in expanding their party, bringing new groups in. Others shrink the party, either by intentionally purifying it or by failing to keep up with social and political trends and being overwhelmed. Think Goldwater for the Republicans and McGovern for the Democrats. Such candidates end up representing only *some* of the factions their party has carefully assembled. These candidates lose big, and their party shrinks, at least temporarily.

Trump appears to be one of the party-shrinkers. The core Trump brigade—mostly working- and lower-middle-class whites distrustful of elites and resentful at feeling left behind—has been there all along. But now other groups in the Republican crazy quilt have fallen away. One by one I can tick off the alienated Republicans among my friends, family, and acquaintances, each with his or her own reason for not voting for Trump. My evangelical cousin abhors Trump's personal amorality and obvious lack of faith. My economist friend loathes his brand of crony capitalism. My Reagan-worshiping father finds him unacceptably loud. My eighty-five year-old financial advisor is appalled at his every utterance.

These desertions are mirrored in the mass defections of establishment Republican commentators. If Trump is to win, he'll have to do so via the dramatic elevation of talk radio over print journalism: Hannity, O'Reilly, Limbaugh, and Savage prevailing against the *National Review*, and the *Wall Street Journal*, both of which oppose him. Some view this apotheosis of conservative radio as the culmination of a trend that began two decades ago, and see it as a historic sign of victory. But I doubt that Trump can afford the establishment defections; the likely truth is that he needs all Republicans in order to win.

The *New York Times's* Thomas Edsall offers a helpful perspective. Posing the question of whether Trump's "populist insurgency" is a "a threat or a corrective to mainstream Republican orthodoxy," Edsall expresses skepticism about Trump's ability to realign the party successfully. He quotes Harvard government professor Theda Skocpol, who dismisses as "a fantasy" the notion "that somehow the G.O.P. is going to start responding to the economic security worries of blue collar/lower middle class Republicans."

I'm still predicting that Trump's personality will extinguish the very fire it started, his special combination of ignorance, arrogance, and truculence repelling three current Republican voters for every two new ones it attracts. Still, Democrats should not feel complacent. Edsall writes that "in the long run, the significance of the Trump campaign may well prove to be the changes he has wrought in the Democratic Party." In Edsall's view, the anti-Trump Democrats are turning into "a cosmopolitan elite" that has "abdicated" to "hyper-globalization and market fundamentalism." They risk becoming what sociologist Robert Putnam calls a party of "liberal cosmopolitans...increasingly disconnected from working-class America." Which is not, in my opinion, a good way to go. ■

Rand Richards Cooper is contributing editor to Commonweal.

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Margaret O'Brien Steinfels

Stop Feeding the Fire

HOW TO END THE WAR IN SYRIA

Just a year ago on September 2, the body of Aylan Kurdi washed up on a beach in Turkey. With his family—mother, father, and brother—the three-year-old had left shore in an overloaded boat that capsized in the Aegean. A photograph of a Turkish policeman lifting the tiny body from the sand became iconic. Its simple pathos shook the world's indifference and galvanized political attention to the dangers faced by Syrian refugees leaving Turkey for Europe. In March 2016, after extended negotiation, the European Union and Turkey agreed to create a safe path for Syrian asylum seekers.

Now the agreement, reached with mixed purposes, is stuck between good intentions and feeble execution. Initially it staunched the flow of migrants from Turkey. But the EU's protracted implementation, followed by the attempted coup in Turkey and President Erdogan's accusations about foreign involvement in the coup threatens the development of a legal process. The agreement's collapse could not come at a worse time.

As if on cue, another iconic photo appeared in August; this one of a small boy, Omran Daqneesh, wounded in the siege of Aleppo. Aleppo, Syria's largest city, is divided between government and opposition forces. An air attack by Russia and the Assad government hit Omran's house. Yet, it could have been a child in the government sector hit by bombardment from opposition forces. This shadowy coalition of "moderates," jihadis, and allies of al-Qaeda shows no more constraint than the government; it just doesn't have airplanes. The siege can only increase the flow of Syrians to Turkey, which already houses almost 3 million, and threatens to revive the perilous Aegean journey.

And yet, there are calls for more—

more fighters, more weapons, more interventions. Political candidates and pundits in the United States promote no-fly zones, safe havens, etc., but overlook the difficulty of implementing such efforts—American forces on the ground and in the air. These and other imagined remedies are a false promise of security for Syrian civilians besieged by both the government and the motley collection of opposition forces.



Five-year-old Omran Daqneesh sits inside an ambulance after he was rescued following an airstrike in Aleppo, August 17.

Syria's civil war has become a proxy war in which the United States and Russia play a game of cat and mouse. At this late date, Secretary of State John Kerry and Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov know the conditions needed for lowering the level of violence. Anti-Assad proponents, including President Obama and Hillary Clinton, should accept a deal whereby Assad would not leave office immediately, while Russia should require that he leave by a date specified. The United States, Turkey, Saudi Arabia, and the Gulf Nations should stop facilitating, funding, and

arming their favored forces while Russia and Iran should leverage their support of the government into a cease-fire with safety guarantees for Syrian opposition fighters. Everyone else—Tunisians, Chechens, Turkmen, Iranians, Lebanese—should go home. Cajoling the varied allies and imposing a cease-fire means an end to funding, arming, and fighting on behalf of any and all sides.

As Barack Obama prepares to leave office, why not defer the United States' many disagreements with Vladimir Putin and settle this one. The two leaders should agree to cease-fire conditions in a public setting. Clinton should pledge to uphold and implement them if elected. If the United States and Russia arrive on the same page about a cease-fire and with a potential interim Syrian administration in the wings, the UN could ratify the agreement. The United States and Russia, along with Turkey, could then join in their long-promised effort to remove the ISIS fighters from their dwindling strongholds in Syria.

Syria will remain unsettled and in some places civil war—among Syrians—may linger. The country will appear to be what in a sense it has often been: a confederation of armed camps—Kurds, Alawites, Druze, Christians, Sunnis. Nonetheless, retaining the borders and structures of a sovereign state will reassure Syria's neighbors and allow its citizens to return home. No doubt this will take a long time and multiple resources, which the erstwhile participants in the proxy war—the United States, Russia, the EU, Iran, Saudi Arabia, and the Gulf states—should generously offer.

The resolution of the war in Syria is not more war. It is no more war. Enough iconic pictures: End the killing and bombing of small boys (and girls) by grown men. ■

David O'Brien

What Andrew Bacevich Gets Right—and Wrong

Andrew Bacevich's books and commentaries have sustained my shrinking hope that we Americans might someday have a serious discussion about national and global security. Still, I was uneasy with his recent comments on Brexit ("Sound & Fury," August 12), a disturbing event for all those interested in the cause of peace and international cooperation. It is altogether right for Bacevich to insist that not all UK critics of the European Union are "idiots" and that democracy surely requires consideration of concerns put forward by many groups of citizens. Populism, cultural and economic as well as political, deserves respect, especially from "elites" who claim to speak for and with the people they govern. Truly democratic professional work and scholarship is too rare, however. Here in the United States, for example, those of us who are Democrats might consider the fact that, as one thoughtful friend put it, "the people

who support the white working class have been voting for Bernie Sanders, but the white working class has been voting for Donald Trump."

One response to our populist moment, as Bacevich suggests, is to recognize the serious shortcomings of what he calls an "elite" worldview that treasures personal autonomy (with limited responsibility), civil discourse (which can be inattentive to the importance of power), economic globalization (blamed for eroding local jobs, cultures, and institutions), and acceptance of political paralysis (which proceeds heedless of its social costs). Rather than complain, he says we should listen with respect to the anxieties of those ordinary people who voted to withdraw from the EU—and, closer to home, to those backing Donald Trump.

This all is fair enough, but Bacevich's assessment leaves out a few essential considerations. Whatever the limitations



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of the EU today, the original inspiration for European integration was peace: to end the murderous European civil war of 1914–1945. We need to be reminded of this as nationalist passions reappear in Europe. The social democrats and Christian democrats who created transnational European institutions were elites, to be sure, but they were remarkably attentive to the needs of working people, and they all but eliminated deep poverty in EU member countries. But for a few decades—at least since 1980—those democratic achievements have been under attack, as labor unions and socialist movements declined and new cosmopolitan elites favoring neoliberal policies gained influence. Given the shrinking of labor unions and the abandonment of elite support for democratic social and economic policies—that is, the weakening of support for such policies from intellectuals, professionals, churches, and voluntary organizations—many ordinary citizens feel left out. Brexit and the spread of renewed populist nationalism can hardly be surprising.

The best advice for *Commonweal* readers moved by Bacevich's analysis is to rethink what democratic commitments require of educated and economically secure people. Too often "public intellectuals" simply argue in elite academic and cultural marketplaces, preferring to whisper in the ears of the powerful—rich people, successful politicians, and leaders of well-financed and well-organized consti-

ties—rather than take action themselves to support the ideals and programs they believe in. If displaced and marginalized workers in the United Kingdom or the U.S. Rust Belt have few constructive political options, it may be that elites who think they should have such options, and have witnessed the decline of labor unions and community organizations that once helped provide such options, have generally done nothing to create and sustain them.

In recent years some American elites started groups like the Democratic Leadership Council to move the Democratic Party to "the center," which meant away from workers and the poor. Other elites organized effectively to resurrect free-market economics and provide cultural support for corporate interests; some of them eventually took over the Republican Party. Still other elites, including many of us who read *Commonweal*, took note of all this and worried about it, but did not do much to build alternative organizations to support our ideas and open up political possibilities. At a recent Boston College symposium on public intellectuals, for example, there was much celebration of critical scholarly work but little attention to what might be done to renew public life, which seems to be drifting further and further from the democratic ideals that informed the work of the impressive array of speakers. Hardly mentioned were small islands of democratic engagement, like the Union of Concerned Scientists or Physicians for Social Responsibility, organizations that bear witness to another way of thinking about elite responsibilities. Among those of us who would like to be on a truly democratic left, it seems that all we can do amid our many worries is wait and wring our hands.

So Bacevich is right to challenge condescending commentaries on Brexit voters, and right again to urge closer attention to the experiences of those damaged by the current global political economy. But no one should be satisfied with one more critical broad-brush assault on elitism. Bacevich's admirers are for the most part among those elites, and democratic economic and political renewal (to say nothing of the causes of peace and security) will need elite initiation and support. Despite the surge in support for Bernie Sanders—similar, in some ways, to the 2008 enthusiasm for then-Senator Obama—there is not going to be a miraculous democratic "revolution" that sympathetic professionals can guide and eventually lead. The common good and the public interest, like peace and social justice, will become politically possible when women and men act to make them so. Andrew Bacevich consistently exposes the deceptions on which so much current public policy rests. Opening up real, concrete alternatives remains the challenge, and it will require respect for ordinary people, as he suggests, but also for elites and would-be elites—like most of us arguing about what has gone wrong. ■

David O'Brien is professor emeritus of History and Catholic Studies at College of the Holy Cross and a long-time contributor to *Commonweal*.

Richard W. Garnett

Neither of the Above

A CONSERVATIVE'S DILEMMA

Lin-Manuel Miranda's *Hamilton* is a phenomenon. And it deserves to be. It is engaging, moving, and compelling. It is also, for a constitutional-law teacher, more than a little bit humbling: I have been trying for years to get law students fired up about the Ur-type significance of the arguments within George Washington's cabinet about the National Bank. But Miranda's Hamilton-Jefferson rap battle on the topic comes along, and now my teenagers are debating the reach of the Necessary and Proper Clause.

Early on in the production, the three Schuyler Sisters—basking in Enlightenment-comes-to-1770s-New-York enthusiasm—exult, “Look around, look around at how lucky we are to be alive right now!” “History is happening,” they marvel, and they “just happen to be in the greatest city in the world!”

It is, of course, always a blessing to be alive, but “right now” feels less “lucky” than depressing and dangerous. This is true in no small part because of the characters from that “greatest city” (or its suburbs) who have been served up as the two major parties’ candidates for president. That they have been does not reflect well on our time, on our political process, or on us.

Most Americans, for good reasons, distrust and dislike both of these candidates. Both have been fixtures on the national scene for decades and still—or rather, therefore—their cumulative “unfavorables” are greater than in any modern presidential contest. Many regard the fact that one candidate is not the other as the best, and maybe the only, argument in favor of the one.

The contest is highlighting and worsening deep social divisions. Troublingly large percentages of each candidate's strong supporters claim to know few, if any, of the other candidate's. According to the Pew Research Center, only about a third of voters say they have “confidence in the public's political wisdom.” For many, the prospect of one (or the other) of these candidates winning is not merely disappointing but horrifying, an “existential” or even “extinction-level threat” to our constitutional order.

American Catholics are used to it being the case that few candidates for national office and neither major political party's platform support fully or reflect well the policy implications of the Gospel and the Catholic Church's social teachings. As we respond to the call to faithful citizenship, we are resigned to regarding candidates, parties, platforms, and administrations as vehicles for promoting the common good and human flourishing in—this side of Heaven—an imperfect and incomplete way. Governor Mike Pence, the Republicans' vice-presidential nominee, has said that he is



a “Christian first, a conservative second, and a Republican third” and even those inclined to use different labels should agree that this ordering reflects the right approach to political affiliation and activity.

I am, I suppose, a “conservative” in the Anglo-American tradition (which means, I understand, that I am a “liberal”). Burke, Tocqueville, and Oakeshott ring more true to me than Rousseau, Mill, and Dewey. Traditions, forms, and the “little platoons” of civil society matter. I prefer Rehnquist's judicial opinions to Brennan's. My views were shaped, for better or worse, by Solzhenitsyn, C. S. Lewis, and Pope John Paul II. I thought (and think) that Reagan was right about the Soviet Union, Christopher Lasch was right about the New Left, and Henry Hyde was right about abortion. I voted for Mitt Romney in 2012 and wish that I could again this year.

Clearly, then, Donald Trump does not speak for me. Contrary to what he said at the Republican convention, he is emphatically not “my voice.”

Now, my sense is that, for those American Catholics whose policy views and preferences are on the left-liberal side of the American political spectrum, this election does not, at the end of the day, present an unusually difficult choice (although many concede that the options are disappointing). For many of us on the right-conservative side, though, it does. The party that has, for decades, claimed to be the “party of ideas,” insisted that “character matters,” and been an imperfect but reasonably effective vehicle for political conservatism has nominated a person of ostentatiously bad character who is uninterested in ideas and seems hell-bent on discrediting conservatism.

I am confident that Hillary Clinton will be elected the forty-fifth president of the United States. This is not because, in President Obama's words, “there has never been a man or a woman...more qualified than Hillary Clinton to serve as president of the United States of America.” No

one believes that. Nor is it because her careers in private law practice, government, and political campaigning are marked by notable achievements or successes. It is not because of the usual left-leaning biases of leading commentators and journalists. Notwithstanding the many reasons she probably would have lost to a typical Republican candidate, she will win because Donald Trump reminds people daily that he is strikingly unprepared, comprehensively unsuited, and dangerously unfit to be president and commander in chief.

I am sorry, though, that Clinton, and not a typical Republican, will be the next president. This is, in part, for the unremarkable reason that I think mainstream “conservative” policies are, in our second-best world, usually the better ones. However, it is also because I believe she is morally unworthy of the office. To be sure, other presidents have been, and her opponent is, too. Still, the evidence of the past four decades compels the judgment that she is unusually and offensively dishonest, unethical, and entitled. This is, I realize, a sobering conclusion, but it is not partisan, sexist, or “false equivalence” to report it.

There is insufficient space, and there should be no need, to set out the particulars. Just because some of the many scandals are “old news” does not mean they are not scandals. To borrow Daniel Patrick Moynihan’s phrase, it “defines deviancy down” to claim that she is just a garden-variety politician who sometimes hedges, fibs, and exaggerates.

What, then, to do? I believe that Catholics ought to show love of neighbor and solidarity with the vulnerable through—among other things—informed, prudent, faithful participation in political affairs. We are not, however, morally required to vote, let alone to vote in every electoral contest or for one of the candidates listed on a ballot. That a few million partisans settled on these two unadmirable candidates does not obligate me to choose between them or to (symbolically) “stop” either with my vote.

To be clear: in politics, not only should the perfect not be the enemy of the good, the bad may be preferred to the worse. I am not convinced that non-voting is a necessary form of protest against the two parties’ failures and internal contradictions. Again, I’m resigned to those. I do not contend that a vote for one of these candidates would violate my conscience or make me culpably complicit in his or her bad acts. My position is more like *Bartleby the Scrivener*’s than Thomas More’s: “I would prefer not to” vote for either of these nominees.

Although Trump is a dangerously unfit and morally objectionable candidate, I am clear-eyed, I think, about the law-and-policy consequences of Clinton’s election and administration. Many of these will be, from my perspective, bad. The Democrats’ platform this year has moved to the left and, in particular, that party’s stated position on abortion rights and funding is deeply unjust. More important than a party’s platform, however, are an administration’s

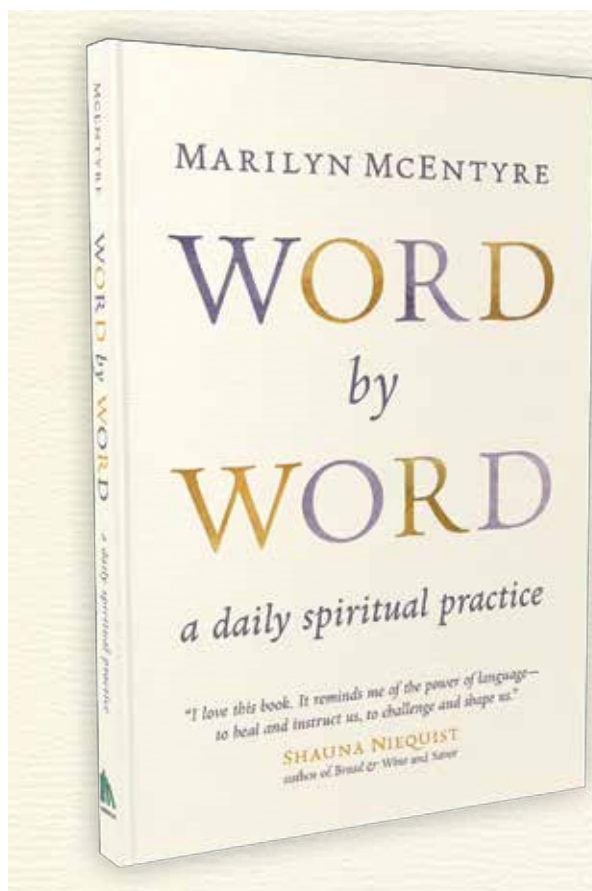
personnel. A Clinton administration will be carefully staffed with well-credentialed, competent, ideologically motivated people. They will interpret regulations, enforce rules, exercise discretion, and control funds in a wide range of consequential departments and agencies. In the modern administrative state, and particularly after President Obama’s embrace of an expansive view of executive power and regulatory authority, this is where the action is.

And so, whether or not the Democrats control Congress, committed but largely unaccountable activists, lawyers, and think-tankers will aggressively and creatively use a variety of tools, including litigation, accreditation, licensing, contracting conditions, funding-eligibility determinations, and “Dear Colleague” letters, to pursue their goals. I expect they will do what they can—which is a lot—to undermine or overturn reasonable limits on abortion, remove barriers to and increase support for embryo-destructive research and physician-assisted suicide, hamstringing school-choice and education-reform efforts, narrow the sphere of religious freedom, and continue divisive “culture wars” campaigns.

Also unfortunate, in my view, will be the effect of a third consecutive Democratic administration on the federal courts. About a third of federal judges are Obama appointees and the next administration will replace hundreds who were selected by Reagan and the first President Bush. Both the Supreme Court and the courts of appeals will move significantly to the left, and the effects of this shift will not be limited to, say, a more permissive stance regarding gun control and campaign-finance regulation. There is every reason to think that a 6-3 “liberal” Court could backtrack on letting parochial schools participate in voucher programs, on allowing states to ban euthanasia, and on permitting limits on late-term abortions. The Court’s role in civil society and in our country’s moral and policy arguments, which is already unhealthily outsized, would increase.

After November, when the circus packs up, I hope three points will be remembered and considered: First, although Donald Trump’s dog-whistling, nastiness, and vulgarity have been on full display for months, no one should imagine that incivility and uncharity exist only on one political side. We can also find smugness, meanness, and even hate at progressive rallies, on MSNBC, and in politically monochrome faculty lounges. If one continues to snarkily condescend to or to attack as “bigots” those with different political views and concerns, or to embrace and impose an increasingly grim and censorious mix of identity politics and political correctness, one has failed to learn from this season.

Next, and related: Trump’s defeat should not result in the dismissal of all the developments that explain his rise. Some will enjoy the affirmation and self-congratulation that come with blaming Trump’s nomination on the same nostalgia, nativism, and nationalism that, they think, Republicans have exploited for years. And there is no denying the troubling



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role that anger, prejudice, and racism played in his win. Still, this explanation falls well short.

Large numbers of people on both sides voted this year for candidates who are well outside the parties' historical mainstreams. On both sides, there is, as David Brooks recently observed, “anomie, cynicism, pessimism, and resentment.” All of us—“conservatives” and “liberals” alike—need to engage the developments that Charles Murray describes in *Coming Apart*, that Robert Putnam documents in *Our Kids*, that Yuval Levin reviews in *The Fractured Republic*, and that J. D. Vance vividly portrays in *Hillbilly Elegy*. The gap and incomprehension between those whom Peggy Noonan calls the “protected” and the “unprotected” is increasing, as is the distance between Murray’s upscale “Belmont” and working-class “Fishtown,” and between the comfortable and credentialed meritocrats and those in “flyover country” whom the blogger “Anne Amnesia” has heart-wrenchingly described as “the Unnecessariat.”

Finally, the election of Hillary Clinton and the empowerment of a third consecutive Democratic administration should not be understood as a mandate for a significant leftward shift in law and policy. Her election is not an endorsement or validation of President Obama’s record and policies, whether having to do with Iran and immigration or public-school bathrooms and contraception-coverage mandates. It is better to regard it as the product of defen-

sive nose-holding, prompted by Trump’s glaring unacceptability, and to act accordingly. Not only should moderate voters strongly consider voting for divided government, but center-right governors and legislators, in Congress and in the states, should unapologetically and diligently do what they can to lawfully “check and balance” attempts by the new administration or Democrats in Congress to overreach.

One of the innovative features of the Constitution that Alexander Hamilton feverishly and forcefully defended against its critics is the way political authority is structured, divided, checked, and limited. The potential for obstruction and delay in government is a feature, not a bug, of the plan. In particular, as his collaborator and rival James Madison put it, the Constitution was designed to provide a “double security” to freedom by separating the national government’s power among the executive, legislative, and judicial branches and by distinguishing between the powers of the national and state governments. Thanks to this arrangement, and notwithstanding this disappointing presidential contest, there is no shortage of important opportunities for faithful citizenship through voting and for protecting educational opportunity, the right to life, and religious freedom. They are just further down the ballot. ■

Richard Garnett is the Paul J. Schierl / Fort Howard Corporation Professor of Law at the University of Notre Dame.

Gary Gutting

Sex Is Not ‘Fun’

IT'S MORE THAN THAT

For a long time, the problem was pregnancy, which set sharp limits to the idea of sex as unalloyed pleasure. But then came what John Updike labeled the “post-pill paradise” and, as Philip Larkin noted, sometime around 1963, “sexual intercourse began.” But the paradise—if it ever existed—is now long gone, and sex is once again a center of anxiety and accusation.

To our credit, the unwed mother is no longer the primary figure of sexual shame (and, for better or worse, even most Catholics have rejected the traditional teaching that sex outside of marriage is always immoral). The onus has crossed the gender-line, and the primary object of condemnation is the (male) rapist. Rapes, moreover, are now recognized as not just the acts of violent criminals lurking in dark alleys or breaking into homes. Rapists are more likely to be bosses, coworkers, friends, lovers, or husbands. And the category of sexual harassment now includes everything from rape narrowly defined to almost any form of unwanted sexual attention.

In this new sexual ethics, consent is the central category, if not the only category. Rape and other forms of sexual harassment mean that a victim has not consented. But consent can be difficult to pin down. Is an explicit agreement required at each successive stage of sexual activity? Is there such a thing as a coy or flirtatious “no”? What degree of intoxication makes consent impossible? Can sex with employers, teachers, and other authority figures ever be truly

consensual? The joyous freedom of the sexual revolution drowns in a sea of anxious legalisms.

Simple solutions beckon, some better than others: “men just need to understand that ‘no’ means no”; “if women don’t want to be hit on, they shouldn’t dress like prostitutes.” But our sexuality is seldom simple. “I love you but we shouldn’t” might mean either “No” or “Kiss me and we’ll see.” Clothes that say, “I’m sexy” shouldn’t be taken to mean “I want to have sex with *you*.” We may desire what we don’t want to desire, or want to desire what we don’t desire. There is simple, practical advice we can and should give about how to avoid being a victim or a perpetrator of sexual assault. But subtleties, complications, and surprises are what make sex so exciting, so human—and so impossible to govern by inflexible rules.

We do, however, need an ethics of sexuality, and the starting point should be the realization that sex is not “fun.” It’s not, that is, an enjoyable activity that we can safely detach from things that really matter. Sex isn’t like telling a joke, drinking good wine, or watching a basketball game. It’s not just that sex is more intense; it also taps emotional and moral depths that ordinary pleasures don’t. Core human values such as love, respect, and self-identity are always in play. “Casual sex” is a dangerous illusion. Sex is a problem for us mainly because we conflate it with fun. Look at college life—the post-pill paradise so many adolescents long for. Going to a football game and getting drunk are “fun,” and the sex that follows is the icing on the cake. In another social milieu, a nice dinner, an interesting movie, and some great sex add up to a fun evening.

The intimate role of alcohol (or other drugs) in our sex lives deserves special notice. It’s no accident that bars are prime venues for finding sexual partners. College students smile knowingly at a shirt that says “Drink until he’s cute.” It’s not



Nicolas Poussin, *Bacchanal before a Statue of Pan*, 1631–1633

just that we regard drinking and sex as two points on the continuum of fun. Getting drunk is a preferred method of removing ingrained emotional and moral obstacles to the fun of sex. In a culture where people get drunk precisely in order to have sex, questions of consent can become very complex.

This is no apology for despicable behavior. “No” does mean no, and sex with someone too drunk to say no is rape. But there is a disastrous misfit between a sexual ethics of consent and our popular culture’s view of sex as the ultimate innocuous fun, a delight available on demand to those not burdened with unnecessary moral baggage. If sex isn’t serious—if it’s just meaningless fun—then why should anyone hold back? Viewed this way, ignoring your “no” is pretty much like teasing you into riding a rollercoaster or pushing you into a swimming pool. If we really think non-consensual sex is seriously wrong, we need to start treating consensual sex as a serious choice, not just a good time.

Beyond a sexual ethics of *consent*, we need a sexual ethics of *commitment*, based on the idea that, even when sex is outside marriage, it should at least mean that sexual partners have an important place in one another’s lives. They should—to use the word that is always a bit embarrassing when we speak of sex—love one another.

It’s not that our culture of casual sex has no room for love. Love is often the ultimate hope of those looking for sex at parties or bars. In the standard euphemism, sex is “making love”—a phrase that suggests not a full blossoming of the real thing, but an initial budding. But starting with sex and hoping for true love is an improbable fantasy. The most we’re likely to get is a transitory thrill. Camus’ Don Juan sums up the attitude when his latest (too optimistic) conquest exclaims, “At last, I have given you love!” He shrugs and says, “Not at last, but once again.” If sex is for fun, there’s nothing more to say. But when it follows love, sex becomes an eloquent expression of deep, intense, and enduring delight.

An ethics of sexual commitment cannot be just another set of rules. The pages of definitions and restrictions we now find in college codes of conduct sadly recall the old Catholic manuals of moral theology, precisely defining each species and degree of sexual sin. Neither exercise could solve the underlying problem of a misguided conception of sexuality, whether a limitation of sex to marital procreation or a reduction of sex to a freely chosen form of entertainment. A full ethics of sexual commitment would require an intellectually and emotionally satisfying understanding of love—something like what Plato, for his time, sought in the *Symposium*. Short of that utopian hope, we can at least set ourselves to question and resist the popular culture and social practices that reduce sex to fun. ■

Gary Gutting is the John A. O’Brien Professor of Philosophy at the University of Notre Dame. His most recent book is *What Philosophy Can Do* (Norton), and he writes regular columns for “The Stone,” the New York Times philosophy blog.

TWO POEMS BY DON BARKIN

ERRATUM TO AN ELEGY FOR A DOOMED YOUTH

Sometimes you just don’t know—
you just don’t know how things,
you just don’t know how things will turn out.

You know—or you thought you knew.
You could see the way the road
was going—there, and over the rise.

It’s not that you were wrong
or right. You never knew, but what
you felt, or feared, and could taste.

Then when cresting the slow rise—
not a valley of alfalfa and the yellow wheat,
not a buzzing district of current and errands.

Not as beautiful as the wheat,
but the needful—the vague mountains
tethered to the cement town.

This is where you’ve never been.
Though slowly you start to realize
that God must surprise Himself, or no dice.

GENIUS IS CHEAPNESS

Or call it a craftsman’s thriftiness.
The skinflint Ford, wincing at
a workman hunting for his hammer,
said a man is a hammer and his friend a wrench.
Edison, liking the ring
of *Let there be*, tried this, then that
for a filament that would sing like the sun.
Einstein also, the sockless one,
saw all contract to mass and flash.

The gold-nibbed physician Sigismund
impatient with the rictus of women
thought all of it was this—just *this*.
And Henry David, the handyman,
shook life like a Christmas tree
until it breathed free of its tinsel
and sprang up like a brickyard weed—
and God and everybody laughed
at how few moves to make all this.

Don Barkin’s poems have appeared in Poetry, the Virginia Quarterly Review, Poetry Northwest, Verse, and other journals. His book, That Dark Lake, was published by Antrim House.

A Book More Equal than Others

Orwell, Animal Farm, and the Commonweal Catholic

John Rodden & John Rossi

Seventy years ago, the literary equivalent of the D-Day landing in Normandy occurred on American shores. George Orwell's *Animal Farm* landed on the shelves of American bookstores on August 25, 1946, just a year after its initial appearance in England. The book had been a success in England, selling well and making Orwell (1903–50) known beyond left-wing intellectual circles, where his reputation was that of a talented contrarian—a man of the left who seemed to take special pleasure in attacking his political confreres. In hindsight, the beachhead established by what he once called his “little squib” marked the moment of his breakthrough in America.

Some of this story has been told before. Yet a crucial part of it remains largely unknown: the role of *Commonweal* in introducing Orwell to American Catholics and securing his reputation—not only in American Catholic circles but also with the wider public. Remarkably enough, this process had already begun in the mid-1930s, fully a decade before *Animal Farm*'s American appearance and the postwar dawn of Orwell's fame in the United States and beyond.

In America *Animal Farm* won broad support from intellectuals on the left and right for its brilliant exposé of Communism's flaws. The charm and simplicity of the tale's use of farm animals to show the corrupting effects of power made the story appealing even to the politically unsophisticated. But the speed with which *Animal Farm* became a literary sensation in the United States also owed much to its timing. It is important to remember how quickly and dramatically the international political climate shifted immediately after *Animal Farm*'s publication in England. The Cold War emerged in the weeks and months following the defeat of the Axis powers. During the next twelve months the real face of the Soviet Union was revealed as Stalin took increasingly aggressive actions around the globe.

On February 9, 1946, Stalin delivered an uncompromising speech in which he declared that Communism and capitalism were incompatible, and that Communism would prevail. A

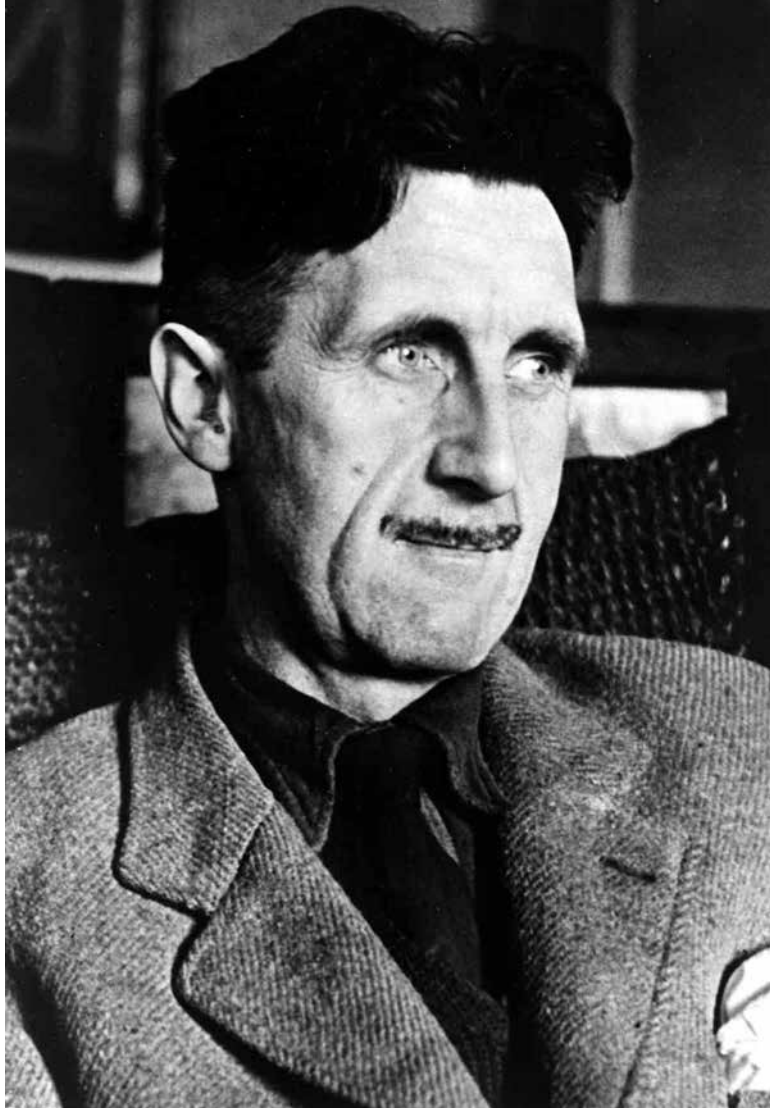
week later the Canadian government announced the defection of Igor Guzenko, a Soviet code clerk. Guzenko revealed that a sophisticated Soviet spy ring existed throughout the West and had been successful in stealing top-secret information to manufacture an atom bomb. Part of the disclosures from Ottawa showed that both the Treasury and State Departments might have top-level Soviet spies.

During the year between *Animal Farm*'s initial publication and its appearance in the United States, the Cold War shaped thinking in American political and cultural circles with regard to the Soviet Union and the nature of Communism. The imposition of a Communist government in Poland through a manipulated election in the fall of 1945 was the first signal that the Russians would not abide by the Yalta accords. In the course of the next two years the Sovietization of Eastern Europe continued, culminating in a coup d'état in Czechoslovakia in March 1948. A series of show trials, arrests of dissidents, and a crackdown on religious groups soon followed.

A galvanizing factor in changing American opinion of Russia was Winston Churchill's March 5 speech in Fulton, Missouri, which alerted the American public to the dangers of Russian imperialism and made the expression “Iron Curtain” famous. At approximately the same time, although unknown to the general public, George Kennan sent his famous 8,000-word “Long Telegram” to Washington, outlining the sources of the Soviet Union's aggressive behavior and political objectives. (A public version would appear a year later in the journal *Foreign Affairs*.) Kennan's warning sent shock waves through Washington's corridors of power. Meanwhile, in the early spring of 1946, civil war broke out between the Chinese Communists under Mao Zhedong and Chiang Kai-shek's Nationalists.

Suddenly Communist sympathizers and fellow-travelers who had cheered on the Soviet Union found themselves and their cause unpopular. The impact of these events on Russia's image in the United States can be traced in a series of Gallup polls. In August 1945, just after the Allied victory, 54 percent of the American public had a “positive view” of the Soviet Union. By January 1946, that figure had dropped to just 25 percent. In March 1946, following Churchill's speech and the Guzenko revelation, 71 percent of the American

John Rodden is the author of four books on modern Germany, including *Repainting the Little Red Schoolhouse: A History of Eastern Germany* (Oxford). **John P. Rossi** is professor emeritus of history at La Salle University.



public named the Soviet Union as a nation seeking world domination. Weeks later, Victor Kravchenko, a mid-rank Soviet apparatchnik who had defected to the United States two years earlier, published his shocking report of Stalinist Russia's crimes and of the Soviet Gulag. *I Chose Freedom* appalled and outraged the American intelligentsia and had an even bigger impact in Europe.

The anxious mood inspired by all these developments primed the country for the appearance of Orwell's "animal-legory" in the summer of 1946.

Orwell had a difficult time securing a publisher for *Animal Farm* in England—at least four major English presses rejected it. A partial explanation for Orwell's difficulty in finding a publisher is that the Cold War did not develop as quickly in England as it did in the United States. The Soviet Union remained popular in England for its role in defeating Nazism. The new Labour government tried to accommodate the Russians—"Left speaks to Left" was one of the slogans of the time. By the end of 1945, however, Prime Minister Clement Attlee and Foreign Secretary Ernest Bevin had no illusions about the Soviet Union's intentions. Bevin had fought bloody battles in the past over the attempts by Communists to seize control of the British trade-union movement.

The shift in American public opinion made it easier for Orwell to find a publisher in the United States, though certain liberal circles continued to oppose serious criticism of the Soviet Union. Peter Viereck, writing in *Confluence*, then edited by the young Henry Kissinger, claimed that *Animal Farm* had been rejected by twenty publishing companies. This was surely an exaggeration, but there was still considerable pro-Soviet sympathy in intellectual circles. Angus Cameron, the editor of Little, Brown, and a prominent fellow traveler, rejected the book out of hand. Dial Press turned it down on the grounds that "it is impossible to sell animal stories in the USA." Finally, Harcourt Brace took a chance on Orwell's fable, and got rich in the process.

Animal Farm was an immediate success in the United States. A witty and skillful allegory of the key events of the Russian Revolution, Orwell's "fairy tale" (as he often called it), delivered a devastating indictment not only of the events of the Revolution but also of Communism as a political and economic system. The Book-of-the-Month Club chose *Animal Farm* as a September 1946 selection, ensuring that its sales would dwarf those achieved in England. Indeed a half-million copies of that edition were sold during the next four years, and *Animal Farm* soon became required reading in American high schools and colleges.

It wasn't long before the sentence "All animals are equal but some are more equal than others" became a familiar slogan.

While reviews of *Animal Farm* in the popular press were all laudatory, the *Nation* and the *New Republic*, with their long history of pro-Russian bias, dismissed Orwell's indictment of the Soviet Union. The *New Republic*, which had been an apologist for every twist and turn of Soviet conduct for a decade, could see no connection between the slaughter of the loyal workhorse, Boxer, and the millions of victims of Stalin's collectivization of agriculture. Elsewhere reviewers exalted *Animal Farm* as a contemporary classic. In the *New Yorker*, Edmund Wilson compared Orwell as a satirist to Jonathan Swift and Voltaire. In a lead review in the *New York Times*, Arthur Schlesinger Jr. described the book as "a story of deadly simplicity" written "with such gravity and charm that *Animal Farm* becomes an independent creation, standing apart from the object" of criticizing the Soviet Union.

But it was *Commonweal* that presented the most perceptive and well-informed discussion of the book—in a review that demonstrated a thorough acquaintance with the rest of Orwell's work, most of which was still unpublished in the United States. Orwell's enthusiastic reception in America among the former Trotskyists at the *Partisan Review* and Dwight Macdonald's *Politics* (both of which had published his essays) was understandable, given Orwell's own inde-

pendent socialist, quasi-Trotskyist stance. But who could have guessed that a Catholic journal would also become one of the most prominent advocates of his work during the next decade?

Of all Catholic periodicals—both in the United States and in the United Kingdom—*Commonweal* alone devoted extensive space and positive attention to Orwell's work, beginning with his realistic novels of the 1930s, continuing with *Animal Farm* and *Nineteen Eighty-Four*. It was only after his death in 1950 that most other American Catholic organs paid much attention to Orwell. *Commonweal* recognized Orwell's work as early as 1937, when it reviewed his first two novels, *Burmese Days* and *A Clergyman's Daughter* (something that not even the Trotskyist or English Catholic press had done). The magazine was then the only Catholic periodical to have taken note of his work—fully two years before the English journal *Month* published the first article about Orwell in the British Catholic press.

What made *Commonweal* take such an early an interest in Orwell? One possible answer: Spain. In December 1936, Orwell left England to fight in Catalonia with a motley left-wing militia (consisting of Trotskyists, anarchists, and other radicals) known as the POUM. By that time, Orwell was already becoming well known in London intellectual circles for his book reviews, gritty realistic novels and reportage, and essays such as "Shooting an Elephant" and "A Hanging." English Catholics could not abide his writings about the Spanish Civil War, which disregarded the atrocities committed against the Catholic Church, particularly the murder of priests and nuns, while emphasizing instead the atrocities committed by General Franco's forces. It is to *Commonweal's* credit that it acknowledged this dimension of Orwell's work but nonetheless dared to seek common ground with him on other issues, especially since the Spanish Civil War had been one of the most divisive events in the magazine's history. Controversy over the war precipitated the resignation of one editor, the anti-Franco George Schuster, and the forced retirement of its founding editor, Michael Williams, who had opposed Franco at first but later supported him. Both men had originally resisted the church's pro-Franco stand and its condemnation of the Loyalists running the Spanish Republic. They had urged a more nuanced view of the war, arguing that neither side was innocent. Yes, they acknowledged, the Republicans desecrated churches and murdered clergy, but Franco was supported by modern tanks, fighter planes, and troops from Nazi Germany and Fascist Italy, which used Spain to test

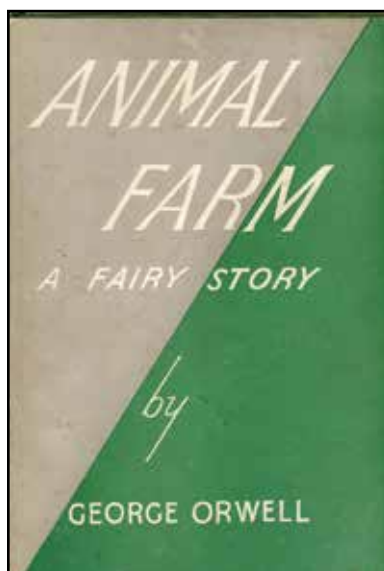
the weapons and tactics that would soon ravage Europe. The Loyalists were drawn to what they considered a utopian society and what they rightly saw as the opening round in a global battle against fascism. The bloodthirsty anticlericalism evidenced early in the conflict, plus revenge for Stalin's aid to the Popular Front, settled the question in favor of Franco for most Catholic church officials and publications, almost all of which were either under church control or sponsored by religious orders. Although polls showed that four out of ten Catholics supported the Popular Front, *Commonweal's* position was very unpopular with the Catholic establishment, especially in New York City, where the magazine operated. The controversy over Spain unleashed an onslaught of criticism against the magazine and cost it many subscribers. Its editors were isolated, holding a position shared by only one other Catholic publication—the pacifist *Catholic Worker*.

The issue of the Spanish Civil War remained problematic for many American Catholics into the 1940s and 1950s. Writing in *Commonweal* in 1953, Frank Getlein recommended that Catholics view the conflict with the same "ruthless honesty" that characterized Orwell's writings on the war, especially in *Homage to Catalonia*. Whereas Orwell had fiercely attacked his fellow leftists who downplayed Stalin's betrayal of the revolutionary cause, most American Catholics closed their eyes to the failings of Franco's side.

What makes it especially difficult to explain Orwell's appeal to the editors and contributors of *Commonweal* is his well-known hostility to the Catholic Church. Indeed, he considered the church's political tendency plainly fascist, distinguishing it from Anglicanism, which did not "impose a political 'line'" on its followers.

The collaboration of the Spanish church with Franco during the Spanish Civil War permanently hardened his attitude, though anti-Catholicism is evident throughout his work. Orwell mocked the idea of heaven and the Catholic (and Anglican) priesthood in *Down and Out in Paris and London* and *A Clergyman's Daughter*, denounced "Romanism" as the ecclesiastical equivalent of Stalinism in *The Road to Wigan Pier*, compared "orthodox" Catholic intellectuals to Communist Party writers throughout his journalism, and linked religious with political orthodoxy in O'Brien's power-crazed speech in *Nineteen Eighty-Four*. After spotting a Bible Society sign noting that the local Protestant shop did not carry the Catholics' Douay Bible, he wrote a friend: "Long may they fight, I say; so long as that spirit is in the land we are safe from the RCs."

In truth, Orwell's attitude toward Christianity in general and Catholicism in particular was more nuanced than it might seem at a glance. He did express sympathy for the



The cover of the first British edition of *Animal Farm*

traditions of the Anglican faith—he was buried in an Anglican churchyard and his biographers note that he seems to have had a phase of regular church attendance during his early thirties. Even his notorious hostility to Catholicism was more complex than most observers recognize. It would be fair to say he was not so much anti-Catholic as anti-church: it was not the faith as such that he found noxious, but the illiberal institution behind it. Unlike most Marxists, whose rigid historical materialism led them to treat religious ideas as unworthy of consideration, Orwell engaged such ideas directly. He agreed with much of the church's modern social teaching, though he lamented that its defense of private property kept it from going far enough. It was the hypocrisy of the church—indeed the extent to which it betrayed its own teachings and values, thereby turning itself into another mere “-ism” like Marxism—that Orwell scorned.

Some Catholics thinkers earned strong praise from Orwell. He had great respect for the French novelist and essayist Georges Bernanos, who shared his hostility to totalitarianism. He was keenly, though not uncritically, interested in G. K. Chesterton, whose novel *The Napoleon of Notting Hill* exerted some influence on the conception of 1984. In a review of Frank Sheed's *Communism and Man*, Orwell observed that Sheed's analysis of Marxism was honest, intelligent, and free of the complacent sense of moral superiority he detected in many Catholic intellectuals. By contrast, he was severe in his judgment of Graham Greene's work precisely because he thought that Greene did not take his faith seriously enough. In a negative review of *The Heart of the Matter*, Orwell pointed out that Greene repeatedly suggests that a Catholic sinner is superior to a good pagan, a suggestion Orwell considered both snobbish and morally unserious. He lamented that Greene “appears to share the idea, which has been floating around ever since Baudelaire, that there is something rather distingué in being damned.” He suspected that this idea was a symptom of Christianity's decline:

This cult of the sanctified sinner seems to me to be frivolous, and underneath it there probably lies a weakening of belief, for when people really believed in Hell, they were not so fond of striking graceful attitudes on its brink.

Besides being morally frivolous, the “cult of the sanctified sinner” also made Greene's novel psychologically implausible. Its Catholic protagonist, a commissioner of police in a West African British colony, traps himself in an adulterous affair. He commits sacrilege and, finally, suicide to avoid hurting either his wife or his mistress. Orwell wasn't buying it:

If he really felt that adultery is mortal sin, he would stop committing it; if he persisted in it, his sense of sin would weaken. If he believed in Hell, he would not risk going there merely to spare the feelings of a couple of neurotic women. And one might add that if he were the kind of man we are told he is—that is, a man whose chief characteristic is a horror of causing pain—he would not be an officer in a colonial police force.

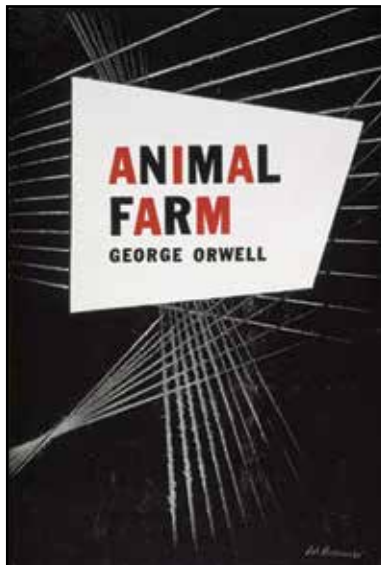
The reviews of Sheed and Greene alone demonstrate a surprising theological sophistication on Orwell's part—and an unusual degree of interest in Catholic teaching for a British socialist. Orwell was, to use the poetic phrase that Max Weber applied to himself, “religiously musical.” But he also had a nose for hypocrisy, posturing, and snobbery, and his criticism of Catholics often focused on those vices. He was suspicious of the fashionable upper-class vogue to “swim the Tiber” during the 1920s and '30s. He thought the conversations of Evelyn Waugh and (Orwell's Etonian classmate)

Christopher Hollis were motivated at least in part by nostalgia. (It did not help that both Waugh and Hollis were politically conservative.) By contrast, although Orwell disliked Irish nationalist writers such as Sean O'Casey, he felt affection for the 3 million working-class Irish laborers in Britain, almost all of them Catholic. His argument was with Rome, not with the Irish Catholic worker in the pews of London's East End.

It bears noting here that English and American Catholicism were—and still are—very different. During Orwell's lifetime, American Catholics formed an immigrant church of working-class families, not unlike the families Orwell visited during his trip to the industrial Midlands of England in 1936 to do research for *The Road to Wigan Pier*. Orwell's distrust of English Catholicism was rooted in his

old-fashioned radical view of it as the religion of the upper-class recusants.

Orwell regarded the church as fundamentally and irremediably illiberal. The *raison d'être* of *Commonweal* was, then as now, to prove that this need not be the case. If the magazine embraced Orwell, it was not only because of his political courage, but also because of his moral seriousness—what one might call his heroic decency. American Catholics could overlook Orwell's hostility to religion because he was seen as a man whose ethic was essentially Christian. He sympathized with the poor and victims of oppression throughout the world, including the victims of the British Empire. Moreover, he was honest enough to admit that the decay of religion in the modern world had left a spiritual void, one that was filled by totalitarian ideologies like Nazism and Communism. Orwell believed that Christianity had fostered a genuine sense of altruism, and he lamented what he called the decay



The cover of the first U.S. edition of *Animal Farm*

of religious belief because that decay might weaken belief in human dignity and free will. This anticlerical skeptic was someone with whom American Catholics could establish, as it were, a cordial ecumenical dialogue. It also didn't hurt that Orwell happened to share the Catholic view on some powerful cultural issues. For example, he despised what he called "birth control fanatics" and opposed abortion.

In July 1946, just a month before the publication of *Animal Farm* in the United States, Charles Brady in *America* reviewed Orwell's collected essays, *Dickens, Dali and Others*. The review was headlined "Virtuous Skeptic," for Orwell was "that tonic thing among left-wingers, a man who applies his healthy skepticism to his own collectivist theories... and has the mother wit to see that 'most revolutionaries are potential Tories.'" The relatively unknown Orwell was "a man we Catholics ought to get on reading terms with for he is very definitely on our side," a kind of Catholic fellow-traveler. That is precisely how *Commonweal* had always approached him, accenting the Orwell whom Catholics could admire and emulate. This was in keeping with Michael Williams's original desire, expressed in *Commonweal*'s inaugural issue in 1924, to avoid the kind of "partisanship he saw in most Catholic publications."

The magazine's review of *Animal Farm* was a tour de force, arguably the most insightful and comprehensive notice that the fable received on either side of the Atlantic. *Animal Farm* was reviewed in *Commonweal* in September 1946 by Adam de Hegedus, the Hungarian-born British author. The review reflected his experience of living in England for years. De Hegedus knew Orwell's literary work far better than did American intellectuals. De Hegedus believed that an aggressive nationalism had almost destroyed European civilization in World War II. He saw *Animal Farm* as Orwell's commentary on the disease of nationalism. He recognized that the book demonstrated Lord Acton's "immortal thesis according to which power corrupts and absolute power corrupts absolutely."

Placing *Animal Farm* within a Catholic context, de Hegedus associated the fable with "man's craving for the absolute, which is the most powerful basis of nationalism." De Hegedus called *Animal Farm* "poetry...the type of journalism that stays news." He also described it as a "parable," noting that Orwell "is an artist who knows precisely how effective it can

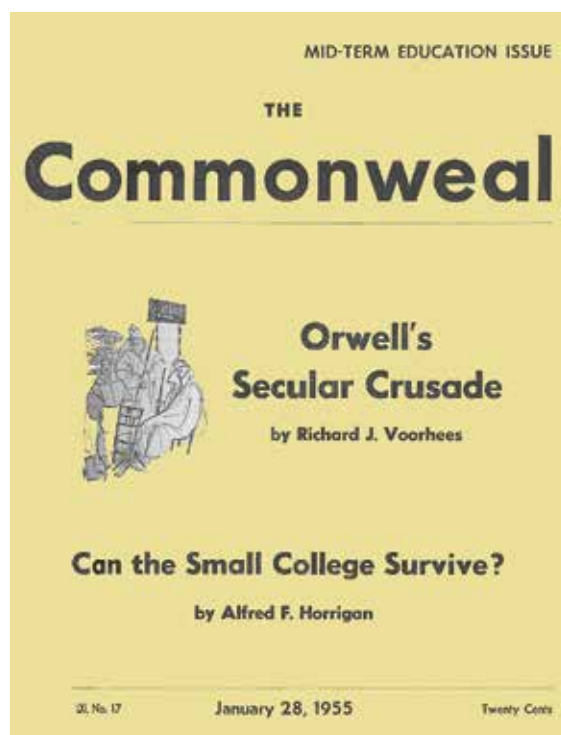
be not to say explicitly what he means, and this little tale of 120-odd pages has more explosive energy and actuality than a five-hundred page carefully documented report on Russia." De Hegedus added the shrewd and accurate observation that Orwell is "angry with Russia because Russia is not socialist," but he also insisted that Orwell himself was "not a real socialist but a well-meaning and intelligent radical liberal." The review concludes with a short discussion of the first collection of Orwell's essays published in the United States, along with observations on *Burmese Days* and *A Clergyman's Daughter*. It was clear that de Hegedus was also familiar with Orwell's other work, including *Down and Out in Paris and London* and *The Road to Wigan Pier*, which he described as "the best book about poverty in England."

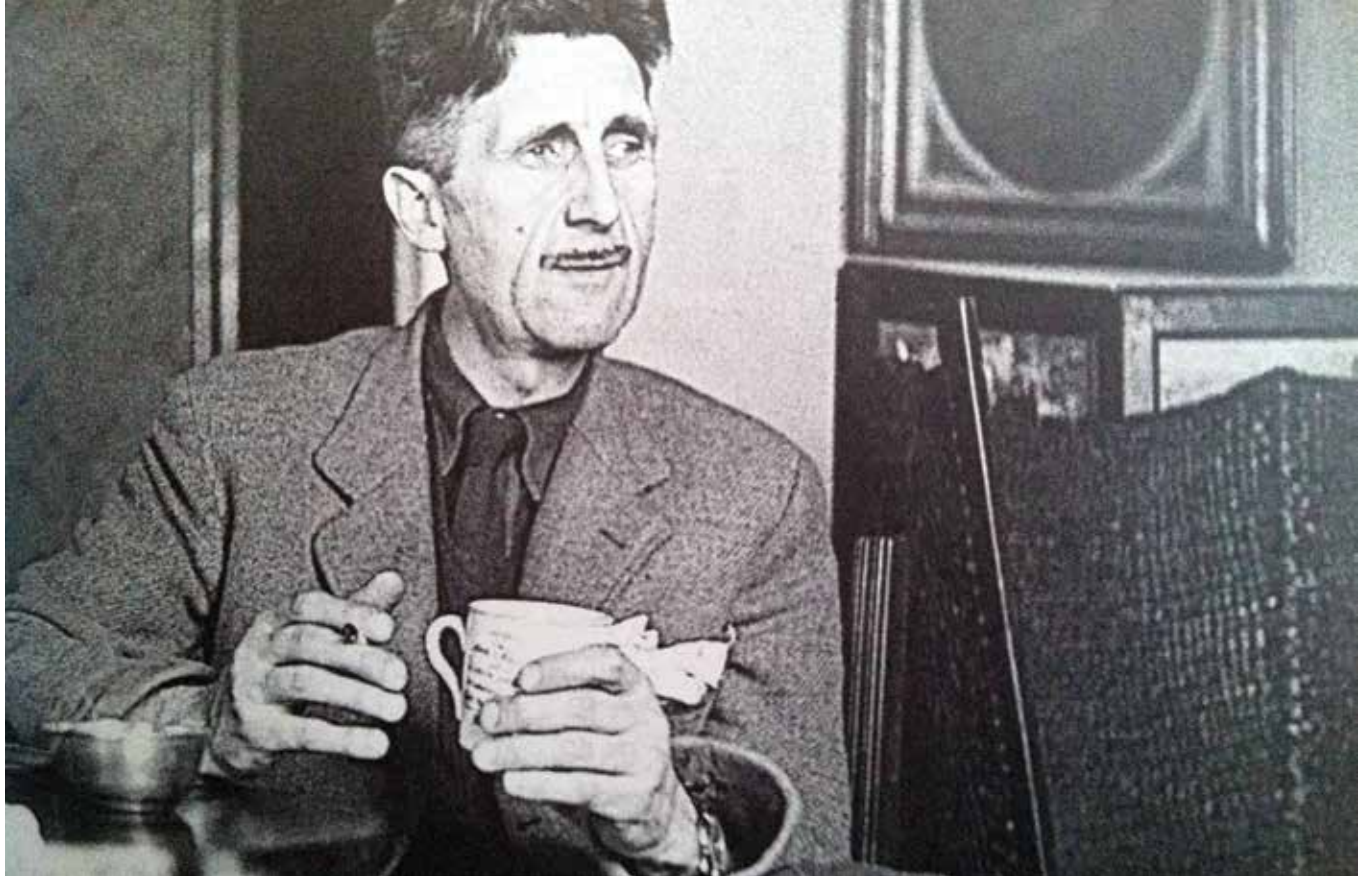
Commonweal's subsequent writing about Orwell went far beyond *Animal Farm* and *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, spotlighting his affinities with Catholic ideas and ideals. In fact, *Commonweal* featured Orwell in ten substantial essays and reviews after his death in January 1950, just seven months after *Nineteen Eighty-Four* appeared. In 1953, Richard Weaver, the conservative author of *Ideas Have Consequences*, reviewed a posthumous collection of Orwell's essays for *Commonweal*. He praised Orwell as a "good humanist" who in *Animal Farm* and *Nineteen Eighty-Four* had condemned the mania of the age: ideology.

In a 1954 essay for *Commonweal*, the English critic Geoffrey Ashe, pondered at length why Orwell's work should appeal to Catholics. Ashe argued that, despite Orwell's atheism and his

overriding concern for the material progress of the working classes, Orwell also longed for a "reign of kindness, brotherhood, beauty, truth." *Animal Farm* portrayed the impossibility of reconciling these two goals and the inevitable spiritual crisis to which the vainglorious dream of revolution leads. To Ashe, *Animal Farm* was nothing less than a rejection of utopianism. Ashe claimed that Orwell's socialism was essentially a Christian ethic—do no harm to others—and that, toward the end of his life, he transcended socialism, for though he proved unable "to budge an inch towards Christian orthodoxy, he clung to Christian values."

Later in the 1950s, *Commonweal* touted Orwell's importance in another long essay titled "Orwell's Secular Crusade." Richard Voorhees, who wrote the first academic book on Orwell ideas (*The Paradox of George Orwell*, 1960), devoted four pages to what he called the central conceptions





George Orwell in 1946

of Orwell's "philosophy"—the danger of nationalism, the problem of power, the dignity of the common man, and the role of religion in society. Like Chesterton, Orwell possessed common sense, loved nature, and cherished the common man. One of Orwell's observations about the modern world—that "it is a restless, cultureless life...in which children grow up with an intimate knowledge of magnetos and in complete ignorance of the Bible"—would have appealed to Chesterton. Where they differed, of course, was on the question of religion. Voorhees argued that Orwell was "just not interested in religion except as an institution which seemed to him an impediment to socialism." Even in *Animal Farm*, Orwell found time to express his hostility to religion. The raven, Moses, preaches about Sugarcandy Mountain where all obedient, submissive animals will go to their reward. But this did not negate the political force of his appeal for Catholics: Orwell's loathing of Soviet Communism fortified Catholics, whose own anti-Communism had rendered them suspect in American intellectual circles. *Animal Farm* and *Nineteen Eighty-Four* were openly welcomed as support for the Catholic stance against Communism. According to Voorhees, Orwell was one of Chesterton's "good agnostics."

If *Animal Farm* shaped the American public's view of the Soviet Union and its interpretation of the Cold War, it was *Commonweal* that played a key role in that development. It had drawn attention to Orwell's work long before any other American publication. It took courage, tolerance, insight, and independence of mind for a Catholic journal to praise a figure with such a strong antipathy to religion. It is noteworthy that no other Catholic journal—not *America*, not the *Dublin Review*, not the *Tablet* or *Month* in England—

gave more than passing attention to Orwell until after his death, at which point virtually everyone (even the editors of the *Nation*) jumped on the Orwell bandwagon. It is a testament above all to *Commonweal*'s longtime editor and publisher Edward S. Skillin that he was open to the work of this idiosyncratic Englishman.

What's more, while other Catholic publications gave Orwell merely brief or belated recognition and presented him even in the 1950s and early '60s chiefly through a Catholic lens, *Commonweal* not only sought to see similarities between Orwell and the Catholic tradition but also made a strenuous effort to see Orwell on his own terms, fully acknowledging his differences with both church teaching and the magazine's own editorial positions. Years before Vatican II turned the church decisively toward the world, *Commonweal* exemplified a stance of liberal tolerance and critical engagement with the modern secular age. If the magazine was sometimes castigated in official church circles as insufficiently Catholic, it was also ahead of its time in making American Catholicism more truly catholic and less narrowly sectarian. Its reception of Orwell serves as a fascinating case study of *Commonweal*'s history and editorial culture. The magazine's editors and contributors neither anathematized Orwell nor sprinkled him with holy water. Instead they simply gave him the respect they thought he deserved, welcoming his support for the cause of liberal democracy and intellectual freedom without soft-peddling his hostility to Catholic Christianity. He was, in *Commonweal*'s judgment, a skeptical humanist from whom American Catholics could learn a great deal. On the seventieth anniversary of *Animal Farm*'s appearance in the United States, that verdict warrants reaffirmation. ■

Celia Wren

A Bath of Déjà Vu

'STRANGER THINGS'

Remakes of vintage culture are often most satisfying when doused in a transformative energy that makes the entire package new. Great works of literature soar up from borrowed characters and plots. A brilliant reinvention of Chekhov's *The Seagull*—Aaron Posner's *Stupid F***ing Bird*—has recently taken the American theater by storm. Even the guilty pleasure that is Netflix's *House of Cards* incorporates an overhaul: in addition to setting an older British political thriller in the United States, the creators gave the adaptation more-rounded characters.

No such ingenious alchemy is at work in the Netflix hit *Stranger Things*, a sci-fi/fantasy/horror series that brims with homages to 1980s entertainment. Rather than striving to recontextualize or freshen its retro inspirations, the creators allow the series to luxuriate in a comfortable bath of déjà vu. The brainchild of Matt and Ross Duffer (fun fact: they're twins!), *Stranger Things* chronicles eerie happenings in the small town of Hawkins, Indiana, in 1983. When a small boy disappears and there are sightings of mysterious figures near a secretive government laboratory, the town police chief (David Harbour) begins to investigate. The laboratory's mission, he theorizes at one point, is to stay "one step ahead of the Russians."

Also investigating are local kids Mike (Finn Wolfhard), Lucas (Caleb McLaughlin), and Dustin (Gaten Matarazzo), who are determined to find their missing buddy, Will. Meanwhile, Will's distraught mother (Winona Ryder) begins to think she can communicate with her son through her home's electrical current, which has begun to flicker ominously. She may be losing her mind. Or she may be on to something.

As the mystery unfolds, the show's visual details and plot points repeatedly allude to 1980s pop culture. Will,



from left: Caleb McLaughlin, Finn Wolfhard, Millie Bobby Brown and Gaten Matarazzo

Mike, Lucas, and Dustin—who evoke the protagonists of the 1986 movie *Stand by Me*—frequently play Dungeons & Dragons, the fantasy role-playing game that was big in the '80s. The inscrutable girl Eleven (Millie Bobby Brown), whom the bike-riding boys meet in the woods, is akin to the pint-sized loner at the center of 1982's *E.T. the Extra-terrestrial*. Characters talk about Yoda—first seen in *The Empire Strikes Back* (1980)—and '80s music by The Clash.

While reveling in such references, the creators of *Stranger Things* do a competent job of setting up the story's central mystery, laying out clues and shivery thrills like so many pieces of a jigsaw puzzle. Making the show even more engaging are the terrific performances by the child actors, whose appeal to family audiences, as well as to viewers who grew up in the '80s, is surely a big part of the show's success.

Occasionally, too, there's a hint that *Stranger Things* is not just recalling 1980s entertainment, but reflecting on how we use popular culture as a lens for interpreting reality. At one point, as the Hawkins boys sleuth, Dustin finds a valuable tip in his Dungeons & Dragons reference material, which contains a description of a sinister "Vale

of Shadows." But the series never builds such moments into a more robust chain of insight. Instead, it settles for many familiar story tropes, including a subplot involving school bullies, another involving a high-school clique that attracts Mike's teenage sister Nancy (Natalia Dyer), and the tired conceit of a government conspiracy and cover-up.

Of course, sometimes one craves reliable, comfortable entertainment, even if it is objectively shopworn. And the '80s setting helps make the elements of horror and suspense go down easy. We go to horror for catharsis: the displacement of current worries onto a shocker plotline that climaxes and resolves. In this case, the plot also reminds us of the Cold War, a past crisis that did not end in cataclysm. These days, we worry about hacking and cyberwarfare, not to mention terrorist-inspired or -organized rampages that can hit any part of the world at any time. Looking back, the anxieties of the Cold War era, including those of the '80s, can seem alluringly contained.

And if I could communicate with supernatural forces through the electrical grid, I might be tempted to do so. It would sure beat associating every light bulb with global warming. ■

Eugene McCarragher

Ruskin Was Right

Capitalism in the Web of Life

Ecology and the Accumulation of Capital

Jason W. Moore

Verso, \$29.95, 336 pp.

After Nature

A Politics for the Anthropocene

Jedediah Purdy

Harvard University Press, \$29.95, 336 pp.

Among John Ruskin's ensemble of talents—art historian, accomplished draughtsman, eloquent scourge of capitalist modernity—we also need to retrieve his prescience as a prophet of ecological disaster. In his eerie and foreboding *The Storm-Cloud of the Nineteenth Century* (1880), Ruskin discerned moral and metaphysical plague in the climate of industrial England. The clouds, he wrote, bore traces of “iniquity”; “bitterness and malice” infected the winds; and “poisonous smoke” made of “dead men’s souls” bellowed from the satanic factories. (His illustrations of the sky are as ominous as his prose.)

If “there is no wealth but life,” as Ruskin had declared in *Unto This Last* (1862), the ecological implication of “Mammon-service” was that there is no life but wealth. “Blanched Sun,—blighted grass,—blinded man”: the desecration extended everywhere. “Blasphemy,” Ruskin pronounced it, a violation of “the visible Heaven” that ruined “all the good works and purposes of Nature.” The judgment of history would be harsh, Ruskin rued, for “of states in such moral gloom every seer of old predicted the physical gloom.” Still, the forecast was not utterly despairing; the nefarious

smog would dissipate with the arrival of hope, reverence, and love—ancient virtues rooted in a conviction that life was indeed the world’s true wealth.

Because it relies primarily on the soul rather than on instrumental reason, Ruskin’s therapy for a bedeviled planet seems quaint and even retrograde today, when the most popular response to ecological trauma is a battery of technological fixes. It’s bad enough that so many Americans deny the scientific evidence of “climate change”—itself a bland, denatured term reflective of the void at the heart of the administrative ethos. What’s also dispiriting is that even those respectful of empirical reality exhibit little sense of the scope and magnitude of the changes necessary in our lives. Driving eco-friendly cars, installing more efficient light bulbs, sorting the trash more wisely, funding innovations in geo-engineering—these and other rites of “green” consciousness comprise the latest fashion in bourgeois moralism, but even cumulatively they amount to little in the way of fundamental transformation. As with “income inequality” (another decaffeinated term), Americans want change without changing too much; the preservation of the American Way of Life remains paramount, even in the face of mounting evidence that that way of life is part of the problem. Likewise, the most sensitive oracles of planetary tribulation insist that we need not just new modes of production, but a new conception of our place in nature. As Naomi Klein asserted in *This Changes Everything* (2015), we need nothing less than “a new civilizational paradigm.” Something like Ruskin’s radical metamorphosis. Alas, Klein realizes, “post-Enlightenment Western culture does not offer a road map for how to live that is not based on an

extractivist, nonreciprocal relationship with nature.”

In their very different books, Jason Moore and Jedediah Purdy attempt to sketch out such a map. Yet despite their critical acumen and their awareness of the ecological and political stakes, neither Moore nor Purdy quite succeed, and their failure stems in part from their indifference to Ruskin’s hallowed trinity of virtues. They both lack the ontological imagination that will be required to avert the worst effects of the storm-cloud of the twenty-first century.

A professor of sociology at SUNY-Binghamton, Moore draws on Marx and Engels to formulate a theory of capitalist nature. Not of capitalism *and* nature—a binary opposition that emerged, Moore contends, from the accumulative logic of capitalism itself. Rejecting the Cartesian dualism of “nature” and “society,” Moore proposes instead *oikeios*, a Marxist appropriation of the ancient Greek term for “household.” Stripped of its patriarchal and apolitical connotations, *oikeios* captures the “creative, historical, and dialectical relation between and also always within, human and extra-human natures,” and thus enables us to see humanity as a part of the natural world. As one form of *oikeios*, capitalism is a historically specific “way of organizing nature” for escalating productivity and profit. The illusion that society is somehow set apart from nature, and above it, both legitimates capitalism and inhibits alternative forms of *oikeios*.

Capitalism relies on what Moore dubs “Cheap Nature,” the bio-geological analogue to the cheap labor it exploits in its factories and offices. In a deft translation of Marxist economics into ecology, Moore shows that just as capital depends

on low wages, so it mobilizes the unpaid “work/energy,” not only of reproduction, but also of land and atmosphere in the forms of low-cost food, energy, and materials. Likewise, just as particular human labors become “abstract labor” that can be purchased, rationalized, and standardized, so Cheap Nature is “abstract nature,” a mere storehouse of resources whose marketization requires a uniformity that inevitably reduces biodiversity. (The “monoculture” of capitalist farming is only the most egregious example of this.) Moreover, just as capital requires a rising rate of surplus value (the excess of value produced by workers over their wages), it likewise needs an “ecological surplus” of Cheap Nature. Like surplus value, this surplus tends to fall; nature becomes more expensive, and capital must expand the ambit of ecological appropriation by growing geographically. Compelled by the rage to accumulate, capital is an insatiable ecological predator, always on the lookout not only for new areas of human life to commodify, but also for new, untapped “frontiers” of unpaid work/energy.

Thus capitalism has an inexorable tendency to erode its own ecological foundations; from its inception in the sixteenth century, it has been marked by the inability of nature to yield “a rising stream of unpaid work—performed by human and extra-human natures alike.” In the twenty-first century, Moore argues, capitalism may well face an insurmountable ecological crisis, as the “infinite character of capital’s demands” will inevitably confront “the finite character of the biosphere.” “Today’s frontiers,” he maintains, “are [not] of sufficient mass” to permit a restoration of Cheap Nature. Indeed, nature itself is already in revolt against its impressment into the service of capital. Citing evidence of the earth’s depredation, from soil depletion to the growth of “superweeds,” Moore contends that—like Ruskin’s nature screaming “blasphemy”—“all of life rebels against the value/monoculture of modernity, from farm to factory. No one, no being, wants to do the same

thing, all day, every day.... Extra-human natures, too, resist the grim compulsions of economic equivalence.”

Giving voice to nature’s ordeal, Moore calls for “a new ontological politics” to subvert the metaphysical and moral imagination of capitalist nature. Like John Bellamy Foster—whose *Marx’s Ecology* (2000) has become a kind of ur-text for Marxist ecological thinking—Moore affirms historical materialism as the basis for a solution to our ecological crisis. His Marxist *oikeios* recognizes the historical and mutually creative relationship between humans and the rest of nature. Socialism would therefore constitute an ecological revolution in which nature itself was the proletariat.

Unlike Moore, Purdy is no revolutionary: after his youthful indictment of irony in *For Common Things* (1999), he went on to join the establishment as a professor of law at Duke and a fellow of the New America Foundation, a liberal think tank. Surveying American ideas about nature from the Puritans to contemporary neoliberals, Purdy shows that our “environmental imagination” has had four phases, each of which has left deposits in the national consciousness.

In the “providential-settler” imagination of colonial and early republican America, God gave nature to human beings to “develop”—i.e., to turn it into profitable commodities. The mastery of nature was “a mission of republican progress, and also a consummation of divine design,” while unconquered nature or wilderness was “a mark of failure” or apostasy. The second, “Romantic” environmental sensibility, represented by Philip Freneau, Henry David Thoreau, and John Muir, created “a vernacular of wonder” for those who recoiled from providentialist rapine. Seeking a spiritual refuge from the marketplace, Romantics espoused a bourgeois natural theology that, with its high-minded, apolitical rhetoric, “proved easy to package as a consumer experience,” Purdy observes. The third, “conservationist” vision was a secular metamorphosis of providentialism that

substituted benevolent bureaucrats for clergymen, farmers, and merchants. Associated with Theodore Roosevelt, the Sierra Club, and the Wilderness Society, and embodied in our national parks and wildlife preserves, “conservation” conceived nature as a network of systems that required technocratic oversight. Despite its magnanimous scientific veneer, conservationism was no less utilitarian than its Protestant predecessor.

The fourth and most recent environmental imagination draws on the expertise of conservationism but eschews its well-mannered bid for dominion. Introduced by Aldo Leopold—author of *Sand County Almanac* and a veteran of the Forest Service—this last view has become central to the emergence of contemporary ecological thinking. Still looking at the world as a constellation of systems, it enjoins what Leopold called “an intelligent humility toward man’s place in nature.”

Purdy clearly favors the latter view, and enlarges it into a “democratic Anthropocene” as his own version of ontological politics. The Anthropocene, a term borrowed from geology and climatology, is the period in which human activity has been the dominant force in nature. Purdy calls not for a diminution of our intervention in nature, but for greater popular participation in our economic and technological interactions with the planet. (Moore prefers the clumsier neologism “Capitalocene,” because he thinks “Anthropocene” obscures the power relations of class societies that make some more responsible than others for ecological degradation.) While Purdy grants that markets and eco-technology remain indispensable tools, he insists that “political judgment must precede economic pricing.” He notes that cost-benefit analysis is often used to nullify political and ideological conflict through the spurious neutrality of numbers.

Purdy worries that democracies will be inadequate to the task of averting ecological disaster. Democratic failures, he notes, have often been “failures to impose self-restraint.” In order



John Ruskin, July Thundercloud in the Val d'Aost, 1858

to curb our improvidence, Purdy urges us to adopt a blend of what he calls “uncanniness”—a recognition that we do not, and perhaps cannot, fully know another living being—and a “new animism.” Nature, in his view, is not “natural capital” but rather “a Sister, Brother, or even Comrade”; it is “doing work, work in which human labor collaborates.” This makes Purdy sound like some Franciscan-cum-Marxist. Lest educated readers get spooked by this counsel, he explains that neo-animism is “a moral attitude and mode of experience” fully compatible with modern disenchantment.

As compelling as they are, neither Moore nor Purdy envisions satisfying alternatives to the capitalist Anthropocene. Like other attempts to read Marx as a radical ecologist, Moore’s is shadowed by Marx’s indisputable enthusiasm for industrial development, a trait he shared with his capitalist antagonists. In its Marxist versions, at least, socialism has always presumed the expanding material abundance generated by technology. That’s why the best Marxist ecological thought has always been catalyzed

by writers outside the main current of Marxism—writers who have usually been at odds with the “progressive” trajectory of Marxist materialism. To his credit, Moore resurrects Lewis Mumford’s concept of technics as opposed to technology (the former encompassing our images and attitudes as well as our tools and machines) and endorses his thesis that industrialization began with the re-imagining of nature as a mechanism. What Moore neglects to mention is that Mumford was a stringent critic of Marx’s Promethean productivism who repudiated the mythology of “progress” that united capitalists and socialists in extractivist fraternity.

The commitment to unlimited economic growth, as common on the left as on the right, is what makes a “democratic” resolution to our ecological turmoil appear so improbable. The hope that the American Way of Life can be green-washed is as pervasive as it is futile; among the wide swath of self-described “moderates,” it’s not uncommon to see “green” moralism coupled with adherence to conventional measures of prosperity. At the same time, neither Moore nor Purdy advances an “ontological politics” that effectively

counters capitalism’s predatory relationship to nature. Moore never reconciles the hints of ecological sensitivity in Marx’s work with his affirmation of industrial development—nor could he, since according to “historical materialism” communism has to be gestated in the womb of capitalism. While critical of economic rationality, Purdy downplays the extent to which the market saturates our moral landscape; the “providentialist-settler” sensibility remains a powerful element of the American imagination. And while his recommendation of “animism” as an “attitude” and “experience” may preserve some sense of nature’s

intrinsic value apart from human needs, it seems too much like the projection of a frail interior enchantment rather than a conviction of something real about the world.

Romantic in its apprehension of reality, Ruskin’s sacramental imagination was not a mannered effort at a “re-enchantment of the world.” Like Pope Francis in *Laudato si’*, Ruskin firmly believed in a world in which matter mediates the immaterial—this was not just a trick of fancy, an attitude, or a metaphor. Ruskin’s recognition of the earth as “the visible Heaven” aligns with Francis’s pronouncement that divine love is “the fundamental moving force in all created things.” Love must precede political judgment in any democratic reconstruction of the Anthropocene. Far from being a form of spiritual evasion, a truly sacramental political ontology may well be our only hope for rescuing the planet from an ecological crisis that is also a kind of sacrilege. ■

Eugene McCarraher is associate professor of humanities at Villanova University. He has recently finished writing *The Enchantments of Mammon: Capitalism as the Religion of Modernity*.

BOOKMARKS

Anthony Domestico

The fifty-fifth story in Joy Williams's *Ninety-Nine Stories of God* reads as follows:

55.

The Lord was asked if He believed in reincarnation.

I do, He said. It explains so much.

What does it explain, Sir?
someone asked.

On your last Fourth of July festivities, I was invited to observe an annual hot-dog-eating contest, the Lord said, and it was the stupidest thing I've ever witnessed.

NEGLECT

The Lord of this story isn't the Lord we're used to hearing about. He isn't omniscient or omnipotent. He doesn't appear to be the source of judgment or mercy. Rather, he is much like us: grasping at whatever explanation might best account for his experience of the world (here, reincarnation); bemused and disgusted, puzzled and wearied, in the face of human absurdity.

Williams is a brilliant novelist and an even more brilliant short-story writer, a precise but unfussy stylist with a true visionary's sensibility. *Ninety-Nine Stories of God* (Tin House Books, \$19.95) is something of a departure from her previous work. The structure of the above story—a bold-type number, followed by the short story itself (some even shorter, even just a single sentence), followed by a capitalized gloss of the story at the end—repeats itself throughout the book. This is flash fiction at its flashiest: the stories are radically condensed, often koan- or parable-like in their brevity, containing the merest scrim of a narrative and asking the reader to do much of the interpretive work.

In this story, we might laugh at humanity's unrefined appetites, but this laugh quickly gives way to questioning. How does reincarnation offer the Lord an explanation of a world that contains such a contest? (Maybe because a species that would indulge in such a stupid act deserves to find itself, in the

future, inhabiting a lower life form.) Who has neglected whom—or what—in this story? Has the Lord neglected his creation in allowing such gluttony? Has humanity neglected reason? Has America neglected its ideals, celebrating political independence by consuming absurd amounts of processed meat? Finally, why end the story with the word “witnessed”? In what sense is the Lord a witness to creation? Is he a prophetic witness, criticizing humanity's stupidity? Or is he a witness to a crime, unable to do anything but say *yes, this contest, hard as it is to believe, has in fact taken place?*

In this and in many of the book's other stories, the Lord stands at a distance from the world, baffled by humanity and its actions. Williams's God is often an absentee God:

The Lord was invited to a gala. Beautiful women, beautiful men, beautiful flowers. Astonishing music from that moment's finest string quartet. All that was served was champagne and mountains of Kamchatka caviar.

The hosts were somewhat nervous about the Lord's reaction to the caviar.

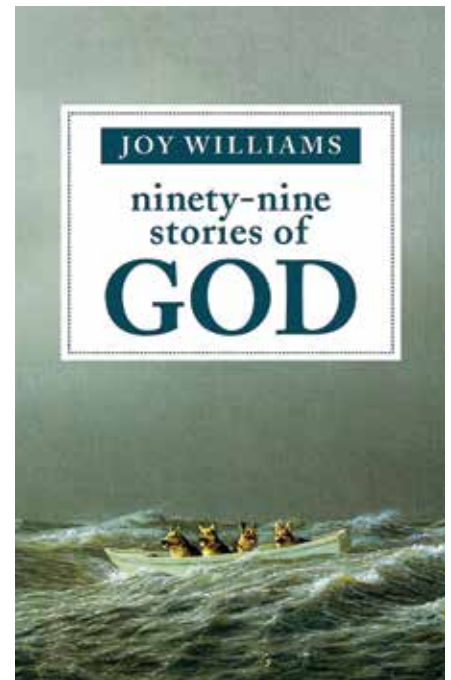
After all, the lives of many thousands of female wild salmon were sacrificed for their eggs, and the renewable potential of their offspring lost forever.

But the Lord never showed up.

PARTY

As with the hot-dog-eating contest, the Lord here seems horrified by humanity's casual, cruel wastefulness, especially its willingness to destroy the natural and animal world to celebrate itself or its gods.

In both her fiction and her nonfiction, Williams has written about our inability—rather, our unwillingness—to see the world as gift and grace. As she put it in *Ill Nature: Rants and Reflections on Humanity and Other Animals*, “Your fundamental attitudes toward the earth have become twisted. You have made



only brute contact with Nature; you cannot comprehend its grace.” Throughout *Ninety-Nine Stories of God*, we see this twisted attitude playing out, and we see that this playing out alienates God from humanity. A later story begins like this: “The Lord was living with a great colony of bats in a cave. Two boys with BB guns found the cave and killed many of the bats outright, leaving many more to die of their injuries. The boys didn't see the Lord. He didn't make His presence known to them.” When the boys implore the Lord to “hang more in the world of men,” he refuses: “the Lord said He was lonely there.” Another story ends with this exchange between the Lord and a pack of wolves that are being hunted down and killed:

Sentiment is very much against us down here, the wolves said.

I'm so awfully sorry, the Lord said.

Thank you for inviting us to participate in your plan anyway, the wolves said politely.

The Lord did not want to appear addled, but what was the plan His sons were referring to exactly?

FATHERS AND SONS

God often appears addled in these stories, a figure of comic ineffectuality. He waits in line at a pharmacy for a shingles shot and is peppered with bureaucratic questions: “Have you ever had chicken pox?”; “How did you hear about us?” In a different story, the Lord “had always wanted to participate in a

demolition derby,” but participation is determined by raffle and God’s name has never been called: “If He hadn’t been the Lord, He would have suspected someone was trying to tell Him something.” In yet another, the Lord decides to adopt a turtle, only to be told that he will have to build an enclosure and so, horror of horrors, go to Home Depot.

Not all the stories in Williams’s book explicitly feature God. In fact, many appear to be as concerned with issues of grammar and diction as with theodicy and theology. In one story, a married couple argues over whether an experience should be described as “pantomnesia” (“Greek roots meaning ‘all’ or ‘universal’—panto—and ‘mind’ or ‘memory’—mnesia”) or “*déjà vu*” (which “simply means ‘already seen’”). In another, a child wants to name its pet rabbit Actually, but the parents are resistant: “It was the first time one of our pets was named after an adverb,” and they “thought it to be bad luck.” Why? It’s not spelled out, but perhaps because the adverb seems distanced from the world, neither a thing nor an action. The final paragraph reads: “Everything proceeded beautifully, in fact, until Actually died.”

But even these stories of grammar and language, Williams suggests, are in a way stories about God, because to speak of God, to write stories about the Lord, is to be confronted by problems of language. How do you speak of that which simultaneously exceeds and serves as the very grounding of language? That’s the crucial challenge for all theological writing, and it is expressed explicitly at the very center of *Ninety-Nine Stories of God*, in story #49: “One should not define God in human language.... We can never speak about God rationally as we speak about ordinary things, but that does not mean we should give up thinking about God. We must push our minds to the limits of what we could know, descending ever deeper into the darkness of unknowing.”

Toward the end of the collection, Williams quotes from Simone Weil’s notebooks. There, Weil expresses her desire for, and feelings of inadequacy before, the Lord: “How could he love me? And yet deep down within me

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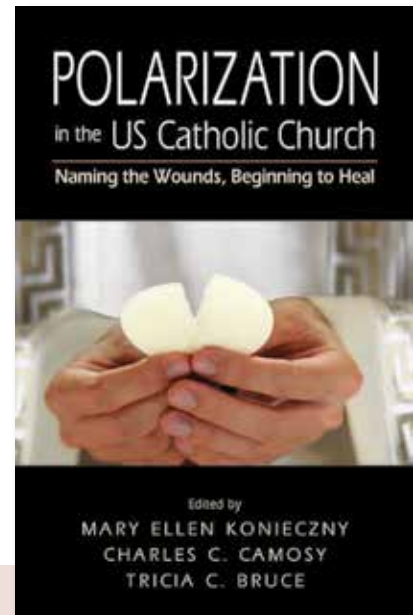
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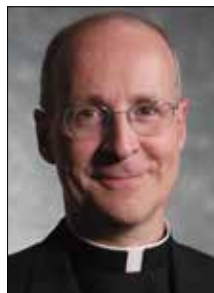
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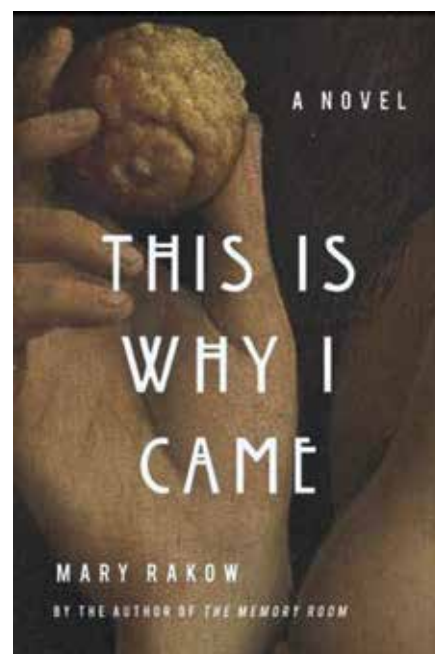
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something, a particle of myself, cannot help thinking with fear and trembling that perhaps, in spite of all, he loves me." Whenever we talk about God, we're also talking about language and desire, absence and absurdity. Williams's book suggests that the reverse is true as well: whenever we talk about language and desire, absence and absurdity, we're talking about God, whether or not we know it.

I suspect that Mary Rakow doesn't need to be reminded of how fruitful a prompt to literary writing theological thinking can be. After all, Rakow knows her God-talk, having received a master's from Harvard Divinity School and a PhD in theology from Boston College. Her latest and second book, *This Is Why I Came: A Novel* (Counterpoint, \$24), bears more than a passing resemblance to *Ninety-Nine Stories of God*. Though Rakow classifies *This Is Why I Came* as a novel, it proceeds, like Williams's book, by anecdote and story, often condensing religious narratives of great weight and significance into a single page or two. Like Williams, Rakow gives us a God who can be weak (sometimes comically so) and fearful (often painfully so). In Rakow's novel, God isn't just absent; he is hiding. In one story, for instance, a character sees "God walk away until he came to an empty throne, seraphim and cherubim carved in linden wood, plated in gold, and instead of seeing him mount the throne he watched God crouch behind it, hidden." *This Is Why I Came* is a story of definite abandonment and possible reconciliation, and it shows how feelings of bereavement and hopefulness might give rise to both theology and literature.

If Williams's book is a miscellany—a cobbled-together assemblage of parable, story, and non sequitur—Rakow's is more straightforward. *This Is Why I Came* begins with a narrative frame. A lapsed Catholic woman named Bernadette has come back to Mass "after an absence of many years." Her faith was once a comfort but it hasn't been for a long time. She is angry, doubting, "always afraid and worrying." Appropriately, it is Good Friday. As Bernadette approaches the confessional, she holds what she describes as a "little hand-



made book" stuffed with "images cut from magazines, art museum catalogues, photocopies from art books in her home." It is really, though, "a Bible of her own"—that is to say, Bernadette's idiosyncratic and heterodox retellings of the major stories of the Old and New Testaments. The rest of *This Is Why I Came* presents us with these Biblical recastings: Cain's murder of Abel; Noah's building of the ark; Jesus's baptism; the raising of Lazarus; and many others, forty-seven in all.

Two questions immediately present themselves to the reader: Why would Rakow rewrite the Bible, and how does her version differ from its source? The first question is easily answered: Rakow looks to Biblical narratives because the Bible is, for the Western imagination, a great fount of storytelling, an almost limitless source of drama and pathos. Particularly in the Old Testament sections, Rakow wonderfully imagines how it might feel to live one's life in a time of miracles and prophecy, when characters can't do anything without thinking of, and worrying over, God's demands: to multiply, to build an ark, to sacrifice a son, to proclaim righteousness.

Such demands are often unpleasant. To repurpose Wordsworth, painful was it in that dawn to be alive, but to be God's chosen was very hell! Rakow's Jonah, for instance, feels "as if he [were] being dragged around by God and his ever-increasing need to be loved"—to be loved both by Jonah, his prophet, and

by the people Jonah exhorts to “realize [that] repentance was necessary.” Moses, longing to hear God’s voice and feel God’s love, desperately justifies why he doesn’t: “He knew if he let disappointment come, he would crumble, so he told himself, it’s better this way. Perhaps the invisibility of God is a sign of mercy. Not only mercy but *magnam misericordiam*. Great mercy.” Isaac, barely escaping sacrificial death, ever afterward “had nightmares that became dreams in daytime, no longer requiring darkness but stood firm against sunlight, that real.”

When we get to the New Testament, Rakow spends pages with Joseph, focusing on his bewilderment when faced with a wife and son who seem to signify “the jolting arrival of a completely new kind of time”:

They seemed unconcerned with happiness, which he held as life’s greatest gain, a true measure of the spiritual life. Life was made for joy, after all. And he did not take it for granted much less devalue it as they seemed to do. He looked at them as they walked ahead, feeling how keenly he wanted a simple life, a life without the supernatural in it.

These stories, both Old and New, are awash in dread and terror and beauty. They aren’t lifeless myths; they are mythic stories once again given flesh and blood.

So what is different about Rakow’s version? In a certain sense, not much—or, at least not much that will surprise anyone who has read other recent recastings of biblical narratives (Frederick Buechner’s *The Son of Laughter*, for instance). God here can be petty and tyrannical and utterly mysterious, but any reader of Buechner or Harold Bloom (or the Bible itself) will already know this. I suppose that the scope of Rakow’s enterprise is different. She isn’t just retelling a single biblical story, à la Buechner; she’s retelling the entire Bible.

But what really makes Rakow’s retelling fresh, I think, is her incessant focus, like Williams, on the darkness of God—on hiddenness and absence as a constitutive part of religious experience. All theology, and all theological fiction, is a matter of emphasis: Do you emphasize God’s transcendence or his



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immanence? The problem of evil or the experience of grace? Rakow prefers, or at least finds it necessary, to dwell in divine absence. Around the time of Noah, God looks out at the world and sees emptiness: “instead of love, like himself, he saw wickedness and it grieved God. He had trouble seeing himself in the breeze, in the pony’s hide, in the daffodil and most of all in man, where the heart was so powerful for ill.” We all know how it feels to see the world not as sacrament but as vacuum. In Rakow’s retelling, God experiences this nullity, too, seeing his once-beautiful creation as, in Philip Larkin’s words, just “deep blue air, that shows / Nothing, and is nowhere, and is endless.” Later, Mary Magdalene thinks, “All good men go away,” and she is right: Jesus does depart, even if he promises to come again. Zaccheus “keep[s] a jar of water for [Jesus], even though he doesn’t come. Sometimes I call him ‘The visitor who doesn’t come.’”

At the end of the novel, we are yanked back out of divine history and into the narrative present. Bernadette goes to confession, where she admits, “I don’t feel I am committing a sin that I can’t believe in God anymore. I can’t will it.

What happened, happened. But I really wish it would change.” To which the priest responds, in words that I suspect both Williams and Rakow would assent to, “It’s not a sin to refuse to believe in a God who’s too small.... To doubt the God you believe in is to serve him. It’s an offering. It’s your gift.” ■

Anthony Domestico is an assistant professor of literature at Purchase College, SUNY. His book on poetry and theology in the modernist period is forthcoming from Johns Hopkins University Press.

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Prairie Romanesque

Faith Bottum

The Western prairie is a Protestant place, mostly. Northern European immigrants were typically the ones who followed the Homestead Acts to build their hardscrabble farms in the Dakotas, and they found a physical landscape that matched their mystical landscape: empty and windswept, a dry yellow land of little besides God and the self.

Perhaps that's why the Catholics of Hoven, South Dakota, were so defiant. In a town of no more than 600 people at its peak—406 now, according to the last census—a community of German Catholics decided to make a statement. From 1917 to 1921, they erected St. Anthony of Padua, a towering Romanesque Revival church with pews for 1,200 parishioners. They would defy the white-clapboard architecture that small-town churches used in America. They would defy the Protestant tone of the nation. And they would defy the bleak spirituality of the American prairie.

Most of our experience with beautiful Catholic churches comes from the cities: New York, Chicago, Boston—places where grand Gothic statements of faith and social power are found on nearly every other corner. The cathedral in Sioux Falls, South Dakota's largest town, is this kind of church: built on the city's highest hill, it is an aggressive declaration to the Protestant majority that Catholics had arrived and the future belonged to them.

The rural prairies, however, were a less obvious place for Catholic architecture. Most of the early immigrants to the Dakotas were Scandinavian Lutherans. In time, they would build more solid stone and brick churches, the typical low-key Protestant buildings found along the streets of small-town America, but the first churches they built were stripped-down wooden halls for community worship and Bible study.

The first Catholic church in Hoven was like that, too, built after the town was founded in 1883. When a windstorm destroyed Hoven's wooden buildings in 1917, however, the local priest—a wonderfully forceful and dynamic Bavarian named Anthony Helmbrecht—decided he'd had enough. He rallied his two hundred parish families to build a church that would stand up to the harsh landscape. By the time the church was done in 1921, a ridiculous \$500,000 (around \$10 million in today's currency) had been spent constructing a massive building modeled after the Romanesque cathedral in Ruhmannsfelden, Bavaria.

The twin spires rise 140 feet in reddish brick, and the exterior

is decorated with stone carvings and 31 enormous stained-glass windows contributed by the German craftsman Fr. Helmbrecht commissioned. Anton Dohmen, an architect from the Bavarian community in Milwaukee, designed the church, and Anton Zwach, a German contractor from Dubuque, came up to South Dakota to build it.

Inside, the ceiling ribs are adorned with floral and geometric shapes, trimmed with regal gold. Chandeliers give the place a soft, cozy glow, despite the wooden pews for 1,200 people. The stained-glass windows show Mary's ascension, the Flight out of Egypt, and images of St. Joseph. Painted plaster imitates marble in the nave, pointing toward the Romanesque altar and intricate Bavarian tabernacle.

Careful restoration work by the townsfolk in the 1980s helped preserve St. Anthony's, and the bishop of Sioux Falls has declared



it a destination for South Dakota's pilgrims. But no listing on historical registries will hide the fact that it is a beautiful and very Catholic building in a dying town on an empty prairie.

And yet, in the nearly one hundred years since it was begun, St. Anthony's has developed a kind of calmness, a gentleness beyond the defiance with which the church was built. It has settled down on the prairie, grown in place, and, in its way, helped catholicize that stark country. Becoming an old church, it no longer speaks only of its German identity in the first years after World War I. And that harsh Dakota prairie no longer seems a place of just God and the self. The Catholic Church is there, too: softening the physical horizon and easing the mystical landscape, with an oversized parish building that has survived all the prairie can throw against it. ■

Faith Bottum is a student in the Black Hills of South Dakota.

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