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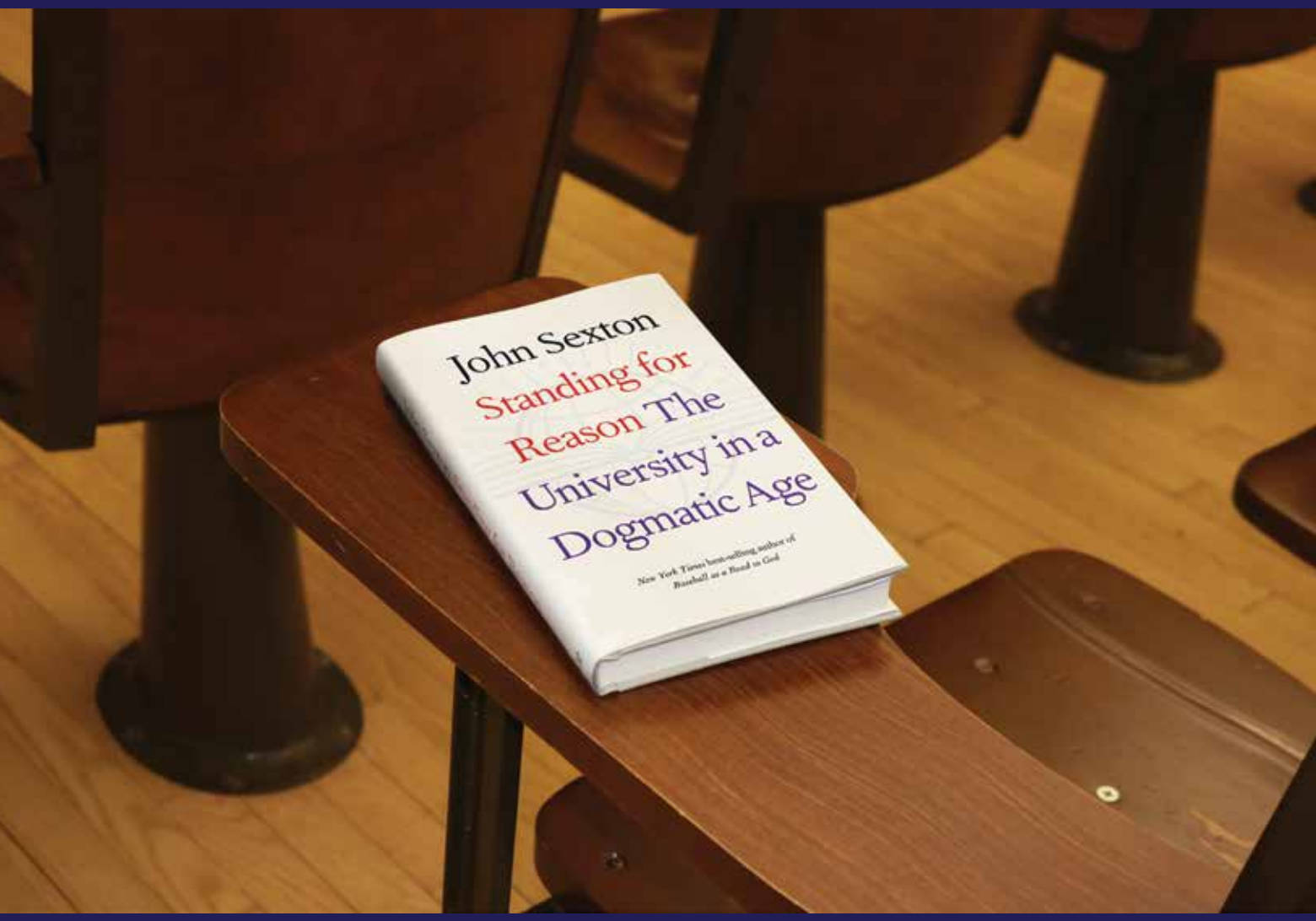

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LETTERS

Racism, anti-Semitism

SHOWING UP

I am trying to discern what Margaret O'Brien Steinfels's column was trying to accomplish ("Racism in America," March 22). Of course stories about conflict deserve fact-checking, and I agree that social media are inflammatory and not the place for deciding who is contrite enough or who can still function in office. But the column's choices of language (such as "evidence of how Black History Month has succeeded in its purpose" and "don't forget or underestimate what has worked") make me wonder if Steinfels ran the column by anyone with significant African or African-American ancestry to check for European-American self-congratulation.

Meanwhile, the city council of my community of Tulsa meets tonight to decide whether to have public hearings about policing reform—a measure resisted by some in city government and law enforcement although, as the *Black Wall Street Times* points out, "five unarmed black men have been killed as a result of excessive use of force by law enforcement officials in five high-profile cases in Tulsa in the last five years." I suggest that *Commonweal* columnists study the work of Showing Up for Racial Justice to learn ways of undermining white supremacy that involve a bigger commitment than excerpts from *Treemonisha*.

RUTH PIATAK
Tulsa, Okla.

NOT LOCKED OUT

Brad East ("The Specter of Marcion," February 22) slanders John Locke in asserting that "both Jews and Catholics" were "considered intolerable" in his *Letter Concerning Toleration*. Neither here nor elsewhere does Locke even hint that Jews should be expelled or oppressed. The *Letter*'s conclusion, furthermore, insists that "neither pagan nor Mahometan nor Jew ought to be excluded from the commonwealth because of his religion," and it earlier affirmed that Jews should not be punished for denying that the New Testament is "the word of God." Although the *Letter* conveys an array of harshly anti-Catholic statements, finally, it does not explicitly exclude Catholics from toleration.

PETER MINOWITZ
Professor of Political Science
Santa Clara University
Santa Clara, Calif.

BRAD EAST REPLIES:

Prof. Minowitz is right. I got it wrong when I wrote, loosely and without qualification, of Locke's intolerance of Jews. In his *Letter Concerning Toleration* he admirably and justly calls for civil rights to be extended to Jews, including free gathering in synagogues. It seems to me, however, that Locke's treatment in the *Letter* of atheists and Roman Catholics has logical implications for Jews (as well as Muslims and Anabaptists, though in different ways and for different reasons) that Locke fails, to his credit, to follow through to the end. Those whose commitments sunder society's bonds—whether through lack of faith altogether, allegiance to a foreign head of state, or sabotage of basic goods in common on which the polity depends for its life—are not to be tolerated. On the one hand, laws against such groups have often included the Jews among them. On the other hand, any such laws, particularly when formulated on Christian grounds, will inevitably stumble across the perennial *Judenfrage*. Locke's answer is on the side of the angels. But does he, or the liberal tradition of which he is a part, have resources sufficient to fund that answer? So that Jews are not a "problem" for the state, a perpetual exception to the rule? Here I demur. But in any case, Prof. Minowitz is correct to call for greater clarity and charity, and I thank him for that.

Netanyahu's Enablers

For a time it seemed possible that Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and his right-wing Likud party were headed for defeat in Israel's April 9 election. Benny Gantz and his Blue and White party—running from the center-right with a slate that included former Israeli military leaders—mounted the most serious challenge Netanyahu has faced, and even election-night exit polls deemed the race too close to call. Though he campaigned on a prospering economy and military security, Netanyahu was also running under the shadow of potential indictment for bribery and fraud, and he appeared vulnerable. Largely avoiding the topic of Palestine through most of the campaign, he seized on the issue rather desperately in its final days, pledging to annex parts of the West Bank if elected. Whether that pledge made the difference is uncertain—Netanyahu has made alarming promises before other elections, without following through—but no matter: forging a coalition with two far-right, ultra-Orthodox parties, he eked out a narrow victory, and will now surpass David Ben-Gurion's record four terms in office.

At this point, no one should expect Netanyahu to deviate from the hard line that has helped him make history. Freshly empowered, he is likely to push his policy agenda still further while continuing to stoke divisiveness and fear, aided by a right-leaning majority in the Knesset and unchecked by a severely diminished Labor party. No less concerning is what he might be willing to do in order to fend off a criminal investigation that he calls a "witch hunt." Some observers believe he could make good on his threat to annex the West Bank in exchange for the passage of a law that would protect sitting prime ministers from indictment. His attacks on the press—he has encouraged wealthy supporters to purchase news outlets because "I need my own media"—have raised alarm and drawn comparisons to the illiberal tendencies of Donald Trump, as has his success in identifying his personality so strongly with the office that all opposition is deemed unpatriotic, even treasonous.

Of course, there's still more for which Netanyahu can be grateful to Trump. The U.S. president has served up a number of diplomatic and policy gifts to the prime minister, including recognition of Jerusalem as Israel's capital, relocation of the U.S. embassy to that city from Tel Aviv, withdrawal from the Obama-era nuclear deal with Iran, and recognition of the Golan Heights as part of Israel. Just before the election, Trump designated Iran's Islamic Revolutionary Guard a terrorist organization—a move Netanyahu claims he convinced the president to make. Where previous administrations counseled a halt on settlement expansion and encouraged continuing negotiations, Trump's team—especially since the arrival of Secretary of State Mike Pompeo—has backed off those positions. This has raised questions about the influence of a strain of American Evangelicalism that sees a secure Israel as the fulfillment of biblical prophecy in preparation for the Apocalypse. Both Pompeo and Vice President Mike Pence speak of Israel in these terms, while characterizing any of the Palestinians' supporters, including Iran, as existential threats. Evangelical leaders like John Hagee and Robert Jeffress enjoy special access to the administration's foreign-policy discussions, and their input has been solicited for the Israeli-Palestinian peace plan that Trump's son-in-law Jared Kushner is supposed to be working on. Given the signals the administration is sending, it does not seem likely that this plan will take Palestinian concerns seriously; in Congressional testimony, Pompeo has hinted that Kushner's plan will stop short of creating a Palestinian state. If so, it would be dead on arrival. It should be pointed out that too many Democrats have supported Trump's policy gifts to Netanyahu. They appear more intent on tamping down controversy over remarks from Rep. Ilhan Omar (D.-Minn.) than criticizing pro-Israel lobbyists. To their credit, though, Democratic presidential hopefuls are very deliberately separating support for the safety of Israelis from the Israeli government's policies.

The Trump administration's uncritical support for Netanyahu will no doubt affect the way he sets about building a governing coalition in the Knesset. Though there may be some pressure to forge connections with Gantz's Blue and White party, he's more likely to stick with the far-right groups that have gotten him this far and seem ready to stand by him should he be indicted. For now at least, the two-state solution seems dead. If Netanyahu continues on the path he followed to re-election and fulfills his promise of annexation, Israel's de facto apartheid will become law. With less than ever standing in Netanyahu's way, the possibility of a just peace in the region seems ever more remote. ■

Massimo Faggioli

Blaming It All on the Sixties

HOW THE POPE EMERITUS'S ESSAY ON SEX ABUSE HAS BEEN WEAPONIZED

On the evening of April 10, six weeks after the conclusion of the Vatican's summit on the sex-abuse crisis, the "pope emeritus," Benedict XVI, made known his thoughts on the genesis of that crisis in a six-thousand-word essay sent to a periodical for Bavarian priests, quickly translated into English, and then diffused online by Catholic websites known for their hostility to Pope Francis.

The second part of the essay is a reflection on the spiritual nature of the church, and mirrors Pope Francis's own approach to the sex-abuse crisis: the pope and pope emeritus agree that the crisis cannot be resolved with only bureaucratic and juridical reforms. Both believe that the crisis involves a *spiritual* evil that must be confronted in spiritual terms.

The rest of Benedict's essay, however, departs not only from the current pope's analysis of the sex-abuse crisis, but also from that of almost everyone else who has studied it closely. Benedict focuses almost exclusively on the negative effects of the Sexual Revolution on the church. In his view, these effects were twofold: a moral decay in behaviors and the rise of relativism in moral theology.

In fact, the history of sexual abuse in the church begins well before the turmoil of the '60s: one can find evidence of it in the writings of the Fathers of the Church, who even coined terms for such abuse that are not found in classical Greek. There is a vast literature on the phenomenon and on the various tools developed by the church between the Middle Ages and the twentieth century to combat it.

Benedict's portrait of the post–Vatican II period is a caricature. Particularly surprising is his description of the 1960s and '70s as a period characterized chiefly by the growing acceptance of pornography. His characterization of the past fifty years echoes accounts of the period of "pornocracy," the *saeculum obscurum* of Rome in the tenth century.

He evinces no awareness that the Catholic sex-abuse crisis is a global crisis, involving non-Western countries that were largely unaffected by the Sexual Revolution in Europe and America. He takes no responsibility for the Vatican's failures and tragic delays during the time when he was prefect of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, or when he was pope. These include the case of Cardinal Bernard Law, who took refuge in Rome to escape prosecution in the United States, and the case of Marcial Maciel, the corrupt and predatory founder of the Legionaries of Christ. Finally, Benedict pays very little attention to the victims of sexual abuse, mentioning them only once. The real victims in the text are those, like Benedict himself, who have tried to defend the church against the seductions of relativism. Only about a third of this text ostensibly devoted to the sex-abuse crisis actually addresses sex abuse.

According to Benedict, Pope Francis and the Vatican's secretary of state, Cardinal Pietro Parolin, gave him permission to have the article published in a magazine for the Bavarian clergy. But on the afternoon of April 10 the essay was made available—and in a good English translation—to a select few Catholic and non-Catholic media outlets in the United States that have made it their business to undermine Pope Francis. Who sent it to these outlets? And why to only these? Were those in charge of communication for the Holy See informed that the article would be publicized and promoted in this way?

The *Osservatore Romano* and *Vatican News* limited themselves to publishing a short summary of Benedict's article. But overseas, and especially in the United States, Benedict's essay has been quickly and predictably weaponized by those who have been trying to discredit Francis since the start of his pontificate. It lends support to those who claim that sexual abuse is all the result of homosexuality and who reject the alternative theory endorsed by Pope Francis, which is that the crisis is fundamentally about clericalism and the abuse of power.

The confusion with respect to the office of the "pope emeritus" seems to be growing. The problem is not between Bergoglio and Ratzinger personally, but between their two offices. By resigning voluntarily six years ago, Benedict XVI changed the modern papacy. There are likely to be more such resignations in the future. That means the church needs to think carefully about the office of a pope emeritus rather than allowing it to be handled as a one-off improvisation. There need to be some rules. When a pope resigns, his secretary or secretaries should resign together with him and be reassigned. The office of "prefect of the pontifical household" should be abolished. The pope emeritus should cease to wear white, and his relations with the media should not be left to the discretion of his personal secretaries, who may have every interest in extending his influence beyond its proper bounds.

The publication of Benedict's essay will probably prove to be no more than a minor nuisance to Pope Francis, but it does underscore the need for a new generation of church leaders to deal with the sex-abuse crisis on its own terms rather than recycling the clichés, excuses, and evasions that have hindered the Vatican until now. ■

Massimo Faggioli *is professor of theology and religious studies at Villanova University and a contributing writer for* Commonweal. *This column is adapted from a longer article that appears on* Commonweal*'s website under the title, "Benedict's Untimely Meditation."*

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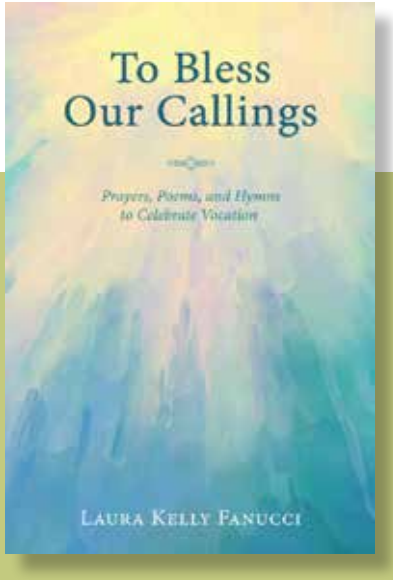

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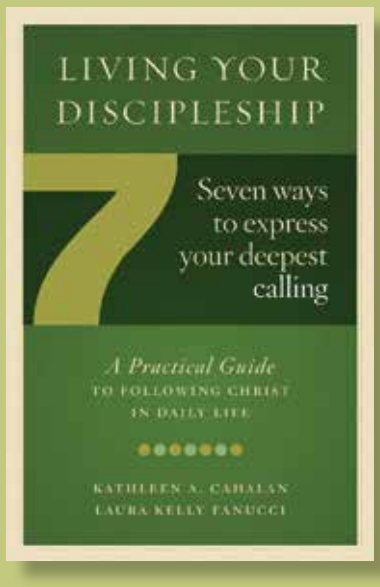

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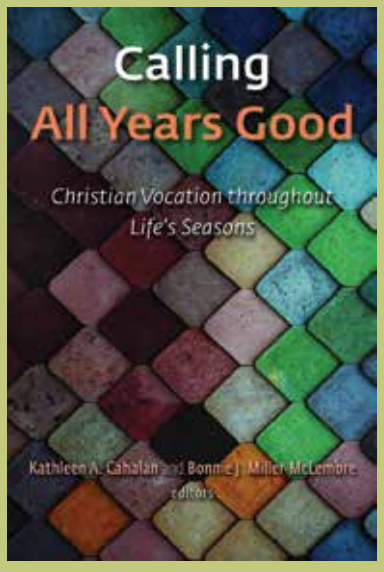

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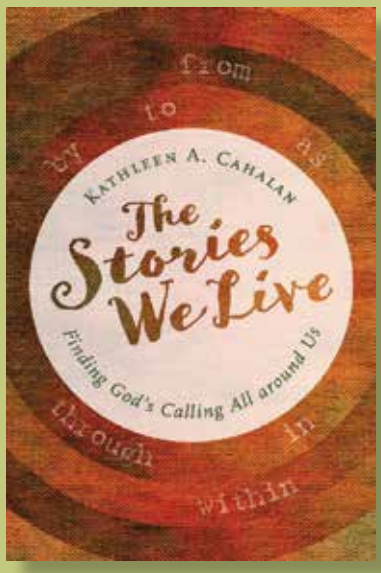

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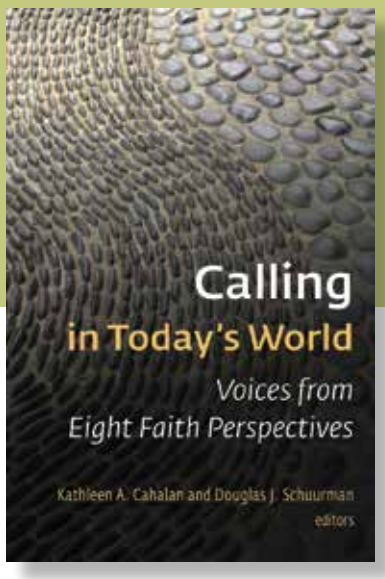

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DOES THE CHURCH DO PARADIGM SHIFT?

In an interview with *Vatican News* about Pope Francis's apostolic exhortation *Amoris laetitia,* Vatican Secretary of State Cardinal Pietro Parolin suggested that it represented a "paradigm change" for the Catholic Church. George Weigel promptly countered: "The Catholic Church Doesn't Do 'Paradigm Shifts'" (*First Things*, Jan. 31, 2018). Rightly noting the origin of the concept of "paradigm change" in Thomas Kuhn's classic *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*, Weigel went on to characterize a paradigm change as "a dramatic, sudden, and unexpected break in human understanding—and thus something of a new beginning." He cited the established principle that revelation "ended with the death of the last apostle." There may be "development" of doctrine but only in continuity with "the faith once... delivered to the saints." Such development would be an elaboration of the original paradigm, not the replacement of one paradigm with another.

Cardinal Parolin offered no account of Pope Francis's presumed paradigm change beyond a "change of attitude," "a new spirit…of approach." Weigel suggested that Parolin may mean only that we should treat those who deviate from church doctrine "with sensitivity and charity." That, wrote Weigel, would be "a worthy proposal" but hardly a "paradigm shift."

To understand this issue it is necessary to explain the special character of a paradigm change. Kuhn distinguishes change in "ordinary" science from a "revolutionary" paradigm change. There is constant change in ordinary science as new observations are made and the scope of a theory is expanded. Revolutionary paradigm change occurs only when a new theory shifts the fundamental framework that controls the data. The shift from Newton to Einstein is a classic example.

In Newtonian physics, space, time, and matter are unchanging and independent of one another: matter exists in absolute space and time. Motion is relative to the fixed measures of space and time. When space, time, and matter are fixed, material objects can accelerate by the simple addition of velocities. A bullet fired from a speeding train hits its target with the velocity of the shot plus the speed of the train.

Newton's model broke down in the late nineteenth century when the speed of light was found to contradict it. Whether one was moving toward or away from an approaching light ray, the speed of light was constant. There were various attempts to solve the problem in order to make the new observations fit Newton's assumptions. Someone even tried to explain the observations by suggesting that the impact of light rays shortened the measuring rods.

Einstein accepted that the speed of light was constant and challenged the assumption that space, time, and matter were fixed. He proposed that space, time, and matter were "relative" to the position of the observer. Roughly speaking, in Einstein's theory, space and time become space-time and matter becomes a wrinkle in space-time. For Newton, matter remains the same regardless of acceleration; in relativity theory, mass increases with acceleration, reaching theoretical infinite mass as the object approaches the speed of light.

Kuhn argued that a paradigm change was "revolutionary," but is such a change really as disjunctive as Weigel suggests? The theories of Ptolemy, Copernicus, Newton, and Einstein represent paradigm changes, but they are, after all, *developments* within the same science of cosmology. Every cosmology necessarily deals with the same range of subjects: space, time, matter, and motion. Nor does a paradigm change simply abandon the truths of the previous theory. Einsteinian cosmology includes the Newtonian equations for local systems while demonstrating their inadequacy on the vast scale unveiled by modern astronomical observation. It is in a way unfortunate that Einstein's theory came to be labeled "relativity," suggesting, as it might to some, that the laws of physics were now up to the observer. Not at all. Einstein's theory was based on a fixed constant—the speed of light—and offered transformation equations that allowed observers to agree despite being on different observation platforms.

In short, a paradigm change can retain significant continuity with past theory even as it changes the fundamental framework. If Parolin's comment is correct, some shift of a fundamental framework would have to occur in our understanding of the church. What would that look like?

In April 2018 Villanova University sponsored a high-level conference on Pope Francis. The keynote address was delivered by the preeminent church historian John J. O'Malley, SJ. He noted that recent reflection on Vatican II had led him to "rethink and radically change my understanding of several then basic categories in [the church's] vocabulary—doctrine, theology, spirituality, and pastorality. The council dissolved the boundaries separating them and restored them to a coherence among themselves that they lost in the thirteenth century."

Let me assume that O'Malley's "basic categories" constitute the essential factors that any view of the church would have to include. What is the relation of the four categories? They could be fixed and independent of one another, like the

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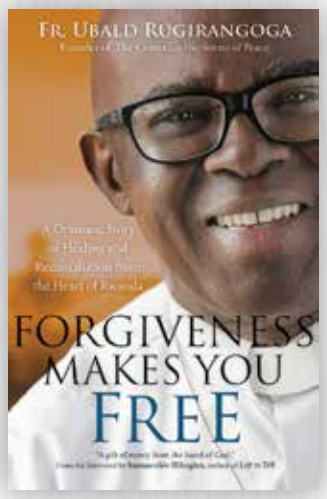

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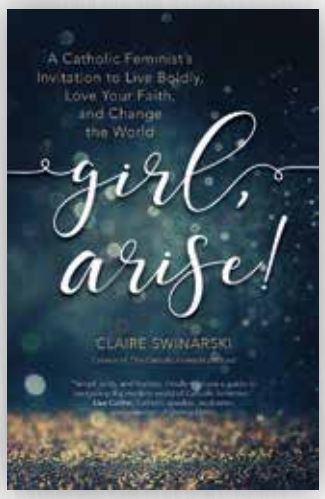

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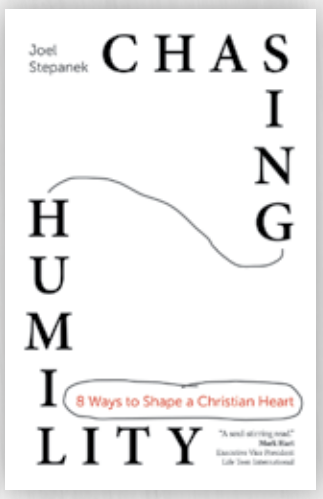

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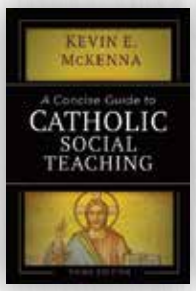

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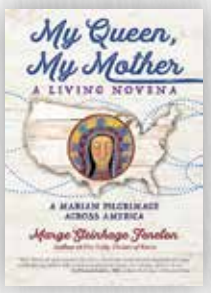

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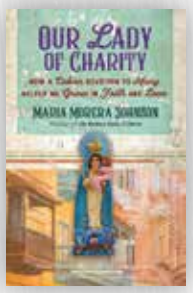

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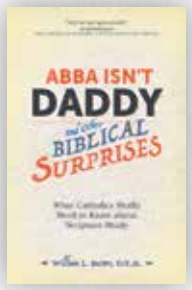

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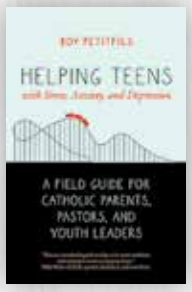

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Newtonian conception of space, time, and matter. In that case, a description of Catholic life would be an inventory of the things Catholics do in each category. A more plausible view would recognize the influence of the categories on one another. Declaration of the doctrine of the Assumption would affect spirituality, or a popular devotion to Mary might pave the way for a differing theology of Mary. This kind of mutual influence would fit O'Malley's suggestion that the independence of the categories was "dissolved" at Vatican II. What if this mutual influence was so great as to constitute a paradigm change?

If, as Parolin says, Pope Francis is following a paradigm change, what was the previous paradigm? History suggests that the fixed element in the previous paradigm is *doctrine*. Doctrine provides the basic framework that governs theology, spirituality, and pastorality. The dominance of doctrine is clear enough in the history of church councils. Ecumenical councils stretching back to Nicaea have aimed to define doctrine. Whether it was Nicaea asserting that Jesus must be spoken of as "truly man and truly God," Trent clarifying the Catholic doctrine of justification, or Vatican I declaring in what sense the pope was "infallible," the councils have been *doctrinal*.

Vatican II was markedly different. From John XXIII's opening exhortation to the tenor of the final documents, Vatican II was explicitly *pastoral*. As O'Malley has demonstrated in various studies, the council's aim was not to declare doctrine, but to *persuade*—to speak beyond the boundaries of Christian faith to the world. Critics often regard Vatican II as a minor council precisely because no doctrines were affirmed. Brushing up the rhetoric may be useful as a matter of public relations, these critics say, but nothing important changed; nothing new was defined. George Weigel could live with that. If, however, a pastoral council established a new pastoral paradigm for the church, then Vatican II suddenly looks revolutionary.

I can offer only the merest sketch of the difference between a doctrinal paradigm and a pastoral paradigm. Under a doctrinal paradigm, the main pastoral function is to teach defined doctrine; theology defends doctrine, and prayer must be guarded lest emotional excess edge into heresy. Teresa of Ávila was not the only mystic under suspicion for valuing direct relation to God over the mediation of the church. A doctrinal paradigm leads naturally to a hierarchical church structure that elevates teachers above the taught, clergy above the laity. Faith is distilled in the official catechism. This is not an unfamiliar characterization of Catholicism.

Under a pastoral paradigm, by contrast, the basic framework is the life of the community; doctrine will fail if it cannot create the loving community preached by the Lord. This is reflected in the idea of "reception." It has been argued that *Humanae vitae* cannot be doctrine because it has not been received in the spiritual life of the community. Newman pointed out that the failure of lay reception preserved the church from the teachings of Arian popes. Giving laity a positive role in receiving doctrine undermines a strict separation of teacher and taught. In a pastoral paradigm, church structure is more horizontal than it is in a doctrinal paradigm. The competing metaphors of the church as a fortress or as a field hospital capture the difference between the doctrinal and pastoral paradigms.

What grounds might be offered for choosing between them? One can argue that Jesus in his preaching, his table fellowship, and his remarkable openness to women hoped to establish a community. "Thy Kingdom come *on earth* as it is in heaven" is the Lord's prayer for such a community. In the deep story of the gospels, Jesus' Crucifixion and Resurrection ground the hoped-for community. He lives on as the eternal host at the table of fellowship, as we acknowledge his real presence in bread and wine. The doctrine of Nicaea arises three centuries later, as the beloved community learns to express the faith that sustains its hope. The community existed long before the official formulation of its beliefs.

A general argument for rejecting the doctrinal paradigm is that it misreads the Bible. The biblical scholar and theologian N. T. Wright notes that a doctrine-first approach to Christianity bypasses the *narrative* character of the Bible.

> [A]ll world views are at the deepest level shorthand formulae to express stories, [and] this is particularly clear in the case of Judaism. The only proper way of talking about a god...who makes a world and then acts within it, is through narration. To "boil off" a set of abstract propositions as though one were getting thereby to a more foundational statement would be to actually falsify the world view at a basic point.... [W]hen creational and covenantal monotheists tell their story, the most basic level for their world view is *history*.

A doctrinal paradigm for the church tends to substitute formulae for narration, a quasi-philosophical worldview for God's self-revelation in the history of Israel and the church. A pastoral paradigm acknowledges that the church's doctrinal formulations survive only in the ongoing narrative of the church's history, and only insofar as they serve the community Christ founded.

The attraction of a *doctrinal* church is that it appears resistant to the changes and chances of history. Rejecting a doctrinal paradigm seems to lead inevitably to ethical relativism and doctrinal division—precisely the concerns expressed by Catholics like George Weigel. A *pastoral* paradigm accepts the chances, changes, and *risks* of history. For the pastoral church the risk of relativism is offset by the risk of irrelevance. Doctrine is not timeless truth but eternal mystery, to be unfolded in the history of the People of God. ■

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Thomas Albert Howard

On the Brink

CAN QATAR OVERCOME ITS CONTRADICTIONS?

The State of Qatar, which protrudes into the Persian Gulf with Saudi Arabia to its south and Iran to its north, is only a little larger than Connecticut. Despite its size, however, it is an excellent place to observe current affairs, not least those pertaining to religion. This is what I learned during a recent visit to Doha's decade-old International Center for Interfaith Dialogue—the first institution of its kind in the religiously conservative, historically inward-looking Gulf States.

Qatar became independent of Great Britain in 1971, and has since sprinted into modernity, funded by abundant natural-gas fields. A few decades ago, it was a tribal desert society with an economy based on pearl diving, fishing, and camel and horse breeding. Now it is, per capita, the wealthiest country in the world, with a skyline catching up to many major cities.

Buildings reflect commercial and governmental needs, but culture is also part of the mix. In 2008, Doha opened a new Museum of Islamic Art, designed by the celebrated I. M. Pei and holding some of the most exquisite examples of Islamic art in the world. Pei took the commission on the condition that Qatar build an artificial peninsula into the Gulf to showcase his work. Qatar agreed.

Development continues frenetically, barreling toward 2022, when Qatar will host the World Cup. Several money-is-no-object stadium projects dot the skyline, along with other works of urban infrastructure. Promising to "Deliver Amazing" in its campaign to host the event, and beating out the United States, Japan, South Korea, and Australia for the honor, the country candidly recognizes this as a bid for "soft power." It wants to punch above its weight on the world stage.

Home to the most popular media outlet in the Middle East, Al-Jazeera, Qatar is also rapidly becoming a regional center for higher education. Its 2,500-acre "Education City" in Doha has lured major American universities—Texas A&M, Georgetown, Cornell, Northwestern—to set up not simply study-abroad centers, but entire satellite campuses. One might receive advanced degrees from these and other institutions without ever leaving the tiny kingdom.

Yet beneath the razzle-dazzle lurks disquiet. Power is heavily concentrated in several leading tribes, led by the Al Thani family and its leader, Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad, who took over from his father, Sheikh Hamad bin Khalifa, in 2013. Mao-ish images of father and son appear everywhere in the country. Decision-making processes in the kingdom's *majlis* (tribal council) remain shrouded in secrecy and intrigue. And while Al-Jazeera might report on the mischief of other countries' royalty, the Al Thani clan is off limits. Freedom of press is largely an export commodity, not a domestic good.

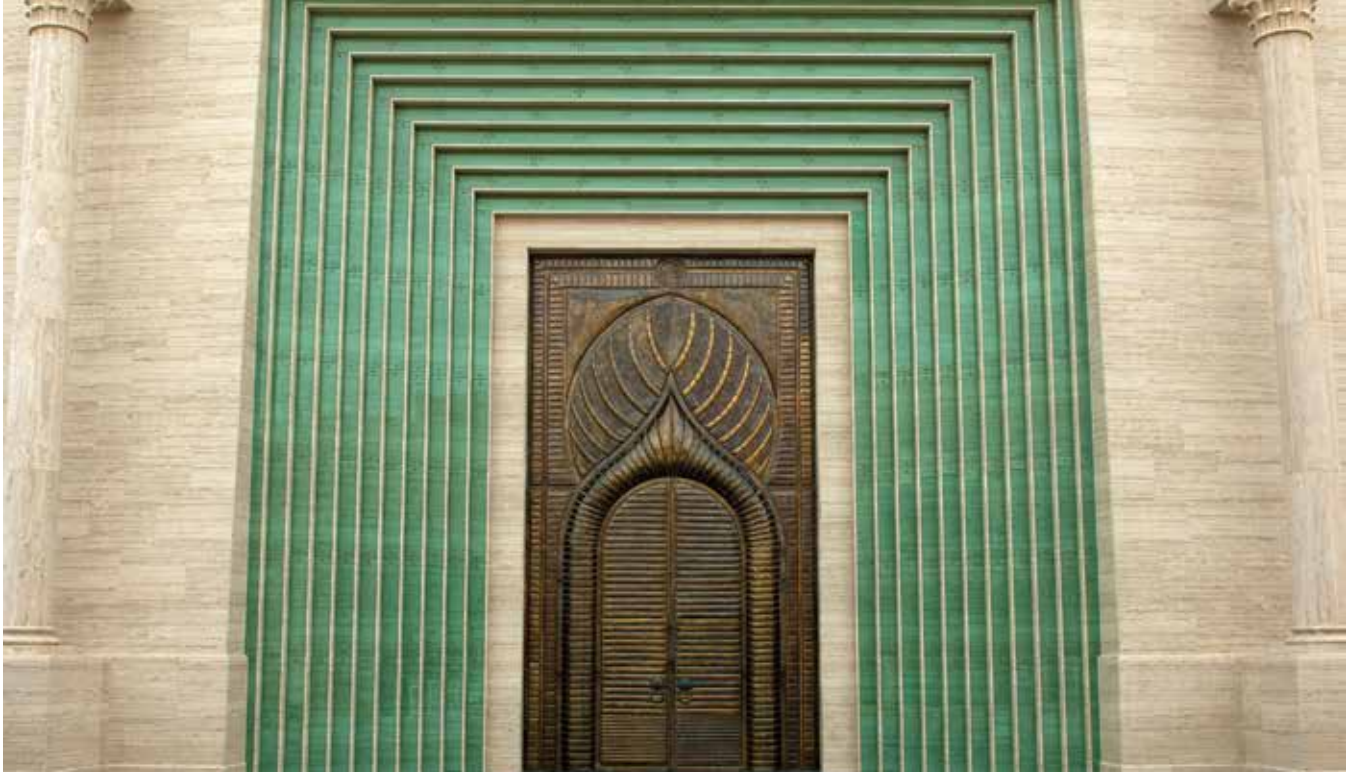
Most Qataris adhere to the traditionalist Wahhabi brand of Islam. A mammoth new mosque, dedicated to the Wahhabi leader Muhammad ibn Abd al-Wahhab (1703–1792) opened in 2011 and offers a stunning view of Doha. Many Wahhabis subscribe to a strict interpretation of a hadith forbidding non-Muslims and their sites of worship to be anywhere near the holy sites of Mecca and Medina. In their view, that means anywhere on the Arabian peninsula, including Qatar.

This raises delicate questions about the huge migrant workforce in Qatar, many of whom are not Muslims. Strangely, Qataris are a minority in their own country (roughly 20 percent of the population), the rest being foreign laborers from the Philippines, India, Nepal, Bangladesh, Pakistan, Sri Lanka, and several other countries. Often living in cramped, no-frills quarters away from Doha's urban splendor, these workers have limited opportunities for worship if they are not Muslim. This reality is common in most Gulf States, and Pope Francis rightly placed a spotlight on it in his recent trip to the United Arab Emirates.

With other Gulf countries, Qatar has established a "religious complex"—essentially a surveilled and heavily fortified compound on the outskirts of Doha where "people of the book," mainly Christians, are allowed to worship. Christians refer to it as "church city." Opened in 2008, the compound houses Catholic, Orthodox, Coptic, Syriac, and Anglican churches, offering services in multiple languages. Bewildered by the multiplicity of Protestant denominations, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, which oversees the complex, tasked Anglicans with attending to the religious needs of all Protestants—an ecumenism of bureaucratic fiat, one might say. For lack of transportation, many Christians cannot make it to the "church city," and they are not permitted to worship publicly elsewhere.

The complex is a reminder of the vanished Ottoman-era "millet system," which gave Abrahamic faiths some autonomy to mind their own affairs, so long as they kept apart from the Muslim population. Qataris are forbidden to visit the complex, and both its location and sterile design were intentional, according to the social anthropologist John Fay. They are meant, he said, to keep the place "out of sight and out of mind." Proselytization and charity work are both strictly forbidden to Christians.

In this arrangement, South Asian Buddhist and Hindu



The portal of the amphitheatre at the Katara Cultural Village in Doha

GFC COLLECTION / ALAMY STOCK PHOTO

workers (among others) have no places of worship. The government does not interfere if they worship in private, I was told by the governmental minister who directs the Interfaith Center, but they are not recognized in any official way. When I asked if the center engages the thought of Buddhism or Hinduism, I was told matter-of-factly that, according to sharia, these are not considered religions at all, but are rather "man-made philosophies." Qatar desires peaceful coexistence with them, but not open dialogue. Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi wants Qatar to allow the construction of a Hindu temple, but his requests have been largely ignored.

The migrant workforce must often endure unsanitary living situations and harsh working conditions in extremely high temperatures. Both Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch have issued reports highlighting these problems. In the past, workers have labored under the so-called "kafala" system, which tied them to a single employer, making it very difficult to change jobs or travel home. To most Qataris, migrant workers appear as dusty blurred images glimpsed from the windows of sleek Western cars.

Thanks to prodding from the International Labour Organization, there have been some improvements. Still, as I was told by a Western white-collar worker, cruel abuses persist, perpetrated not directly by the Qatari government but by unscrupulous contractors. Many workers make it to Qatar only with the help of middlemen, and spend their initial years as indentured servants paying back a "recruitment fee."

A tiny state in a tough neighborhood, Qatar has pursued a curious strategy of friendship with all. But this has sometimes backfired. Remarkably, the country is home to the largest U.S. military base in the Middle East, even as the Taliban maintains offices in Doha. Qatar counts both Turkey and Iran as friends and has supported various Islamist groups, including Hamas and the Muslim Brotherhood. Friendship with groups that seek to depose the Gulf's hereditary rulers, along with complaints about Al-Jazeera, recently led to a dust-up with Saudi Arabia, which cut diplomatic ties with Qatar in 2017 and now heads up an embargo supported by several other countries in the region. It is now easier to fly from Chicago than from Doha to many airports in Middle Eastern cities, as I discovered.

What lies in Qatar's future? Can a country that has pursued such precipitate modernization coexist with ancient tribal political structures and Wahhabist Islam? Right now spigots of natural gas seem to make all things possible. But fissures appear here and there. Exposure to Western education, according to Georgetown professor Leo D. Lefebure, has allowed young Qataris to see that their prior learning only gave them "extremely negative attitudes toward all other religions." Some young people complain that they live in a cosseted, cash-rich fantasy world overseen by paternalistic overlords. As in other Muslim-majority countries, women find themselves at the center of polarizing political and theological debates. Many Qatari women live in a mostly veiled world and are subjected to highly traditionalist interpretations of sharia law on marriage and gender relations. And what of the unwashed masses, toiling away at Qatar's insta-modernity in unforgiving heat?

At the World Cup in 2022, an estimated 1.5 million visitors will pour through Hamad International Airport. The country will stand in the global spotlight as no other Gulf State has. Will Qatar "Deliver Amazing"? Stay tuned. ■

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Squeezed Out

The European Union's Critics Have a Point

Cole Stangler

Populists are often accused of being close-minded, but diehard supporters of the European Union might be just as bad. Invoke the slightest criticism of an EU directive in front of them and their liberal values go out the door. Like expressing any sympathy at all for those who voted in favor of Brexit, skepticism over the benefits of further European integration tends to be greeted with scorn. EU critics are seen as naïve at best, xenophobic at worst, and backwards either way.

Knee-jerk hostility toward nearly any common European policies on one side, empty rhetoric about saving the European Union on the other: this is the dreary state of the debate ahead of this month's elections for European Parliament. In the Continent's three most populous countries—Germany, France, and Italy—the campaigns largely pit unrepentant champions of the EU's current trajectory against nationalists claiming to represent "the people." This divide leaves much to be desired, with those committed to a different sort of Europe—one that works for ordinary people, regardless of their ethnic or religious background—squeezed out of the discussion.

The most dominant strain of Euroscepticism has an unmistakably xenophobic flavor. Italy's Lega, Germany's AfD, and France's National Rally party (the rebranded National Front) all devote much of their energy to criticizing immigration. They charge the European Union with facilitating "open borders" and flooding their respective countries with an unsustainable influx of foreigners. The National Rally complements this narrative with a robust defense of the French welfare state, but bashing immigrants remains the party's bread and butter. It's a similar story further east: in Austria, the Czech Republic, Hungary, and Poland, Eurosceptic parties have all entered the halls of government, combining their criticism of Brussels bureaucracy with nasty attacks on migrants and religious minorities, including both Muslims and Jews.

Still, it would be a mistake to reduce all criticism of the European Union to nationalist backlash. There are plenty of reasons to be angry, and they have to do with economics and an indisputable democratic deficit. While Europe's postwar welfare states once sought to protect citizens from the ravages of global capitalism, today's European Union moves in the opposite direction. Taken together, its various directives, regulations, and fiscal rules have worked to hamstring states from acting in the best interest of their working-class majorities. Underlying it all is an opaque decision-making process that insulates Brussels from the millions of lives that EU policies shape.

The European Union is governed by a series of astonishingly strict fiscal rules. According to its Stability and Growth Pact, member states cannot run deficits that extend beyond 3 percent of GDP or maintain levels of public debt that exceed 60 percent of GDP. Since 2013, member states are also required to pursue balanced budgets. These restrictions make little economic sense, especially since there are no pan-European debt-sharing measures and the European Union can't issue bonds of its own. The world's most powerful economies, moreover, would all be in violation of at least one of these rules: China ran a budget deficit worth 4 percent of GDP in 2017, the year with the most recent available data; Japan has held a debt-to-GDP ratio of over 200 percent since the financial crisis; and the United States currently boasts a deficit-to-GDP ratio of 3.9 percent and a debt-to-GDP ratio of 104 percent, with the country's Republican president not even pretending to care about balanced budgets.

On top of these constraints, each member state's budget needs approval from the European Commission, the European Union's executive branch. The institution is made up of appointees from the governments of member states—a fact that gives it some democratic legitimacy, but not nearly enough given its immense authority. To put it in U.S. terms: imagine a newly elected state legislature in Michigan determined to tackle poverty, but first having to run its entire budget by a Congressionally-appointed committee in Washington, D.C., only to be told that it needs to scrap its plan and instead focus on trimming spending. That's roughly what happened to Italy's new populist government last year. After Rome presented an original budget in defiance of the

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Jean-Luc Mélenchon, leader of La France Insoumise

European Union's deficit and debt rules, the Commission threatened the Italian government with what's known as an "excessive deficit procedure," a set of hawkish fiscal policies to be carried out under its close surveillance. The costs of noncompliance can be prohibitively high. If it had been ignored, the European Union could ultimately have leveled a fine worth up to 0.5 percent of Italy's GDP, a whopping €9 billion. Facing these risks and mounting anxiety from investors, Italy eventually conceded and settled for another budget that involved less spending. It doesn't take a flag-waving Lega voter to see the problem here: there's basically nothing the people affected by these arbitrary economic rules can do about them.

At the same time, the European Union has implemented a series of regulations (laws that are immediately applicable across member states) and directives (general principles that must be enacted through national laws) that have together chipped away at public oversight of the economy. Over the past few decades, the European Union has approved directives that require the liberalization of gas and electricity markets, telecom markets, and the postal service. It's also put into place a series of regulations and directives that force countries to open up their public rail systems to private-sector competition. This comes in addition to the ruthless waves of privatization the European Union required of countries seeking bailouts after the financial crisis of 2008: Ireland was forced to privatize its electricity and gas supplier, Portugal was forced to privatize its energy operator, and Greece was forced to sell off its regional airports.

All of the above obviously feeds into the socio-economic resentment shared by many low-and-middle-income people across the Continent today. Where they direct that hostility varies a great deal. At a different time in European history, a powerful labor movement along with socialist and communist parties helped to aim popular frustrations more squarely at big business and the super-rich. While they were far from perfect, institutions like France's *Confédération Générale du Travail* (CGT) or the Italian Communist Party helped identify both the common enemies and allies of workers. Such class-based analysis would bring some much-needed clarity to the debate today.

After all, the European Union per se isn't responsible for the woes of the working class. Get rid of it and everyone's problems don't go away. The ultimate culprits are the powerful multinational corporations, the ultra-wealthy, and an overgrown financial sector that have all managed to use the EU's various rules and treaties to achieve long-standing aims. These forces favored the privatization of state services well before the creation of the monetary union, and they'd continue to if it were ever to collapse. Likewise, it's in the DNA of business lobbies to fight to keep private-sector wages in check, just like their allies in government seek to do in the public sector. It wasn't the European Union that birthed the modern corporation or its obsession with rewarding shareholders, and blowing it into smithereens won't do anything to alter boardroom incentives that put a premium on pleasing Wall Street and the City of London.

Ideally, a pan-European working-class identity would take shape to counter this onslaught from capital. In fact, it already exists to some extent, especially in strongly unionized sectors. Ask a mail delivery carrier in Normandy, for instance, whether he feels like his interests are closer to those of his boss in Paris or to those of a colleague in Eindhoven; the answer he'd give should be obvious. Many European labor unions, too, are already running transnational organizing drives—like those at Ryanair and Amazon—and recognize that these sorts of initiatives are critical to their long-term viability. Some left-wing political parties are also improving links to one another. While Europe's old alliance of social-democratic parties has largely abandoned its dreams of social change, newer parties like *La France Insoumise* and *Podemos* in Spain have filled the void and sought to strengthen ties across borders.

Still, these efforts have only limited effects. For much of the low-to-middle-income population, national identity tends to trump class consciousness, and aggrieved people often struggle to make sense of why their social status fails to meet expectations. The European Union becomes an easy scapegoat for all their woes. It is an extremely dense set of institutions and treaties—complicated by design—that doesn't lend itself to clear analysis, allowing its critics to bestow on it an almost mystical power. The European Union isn't just blamed for the local hospital being overcrowded or the train station closing—it's also seen as the reason why the steel industry fled or why someone's hometown is losing young people. In short, it's why the world seems worse than before. According to this view, only a departure from the European Union or a return to the national currency can bring the good times back, or, at the very least, stand a chance of doing so. This kind of thinking often goes hand in hand with another trope: the idea that migrants and foreigners are to blame for boosting unemployment, depressing wages, and straining public services.

This is all fertile terrain for the far right, and indeed, the old monsters are back. From Germany's AfD to Hungary's *Fidesz*, a new crop of populists is thriving in the confusion, doing their best to target anger at immigrants and a caricatured version of the European Union—anything to avoid grappling with questions of class or wealth inequality. But they're not the only ones to benefit from the situation.

While they'd never acknowledge it in public, the current leadership of the European Union and its allies could not ask for better foes. Well aware that voters are frustrated and that faith in the European Union is on the wane, the likes of Jean-Claude Juncker and Emmanuel Macron understand their future success hinges on remaining the lesser of two evils. The high brass of the European Union's current ruling coalition—the European People's Party (EPP), the Alliance of Liberals and Democrats for Europe (ALDE) and the Progressive Alliance of Socialists and Democrats (S&D)—all share an interest in portraying criticism of the European Union as reactionary and backwards, as a perilous step toward the abyss. From Paris to Berlin, defenders of the current order want all cosmopolitans with a shred of doubt over the European Union to be asking themselves one question when they go to cast their ballots in May: "You're not one of *them*, are you?"

This strategy is a deeply cynical way of dealing with criticism. But it also risks further legitimizing the nationalist camp, something French Socialists experienced in the early 1980s. Still in the early days of his presidency, François Mitterrand was worried about mounting opposition from the mainstream Gaullist right. In response, he instructed the state broadcaster to give more air time to Jean-Marie Le Pen, the founder of the then-young National Front (FN), a fringe party fueled by colonialist nostalgia and social conservatism. Mitterrand also moved to hold legislative elections under a system of proportional representation instead of the two-round scheme typically used in the Fifth Republic, thereby ensuring that the FN would peel off support from the mainstream right. These moves might have satisfied Mitterrand's most immediate goal, but they weren't wise in the long run. The FN went on to win over thirty seats in the National Assembly in 1986, giving it an indispensable platform from which to spout its toxic views. Sixteen years later, in 2002, Jean-Marie Le Pen shocked the French political world by winning nearly 5 million votes and qualifying for the runoff round of the presidential election. In 2017, his daughter Marine earned more than 10 million votes in the second round.

Where does this leave everyone else—those of us who believe in a European Union that allows states to tax, spend, and regulate on behalf of the working class and one that authorizes national governments to implement the platforms citizens elected them on? Is there any hope for reviving European social democracy? Or even, as the socialists Ralph Miliband and Marcel Liebman once asked, going "beyond" it?

In the March issue of *Le Monde diplomatique*, French philosopher, sociologist, and economist Frédéric Lordon concludes that it's time for left-wingers to cast their European pipe dreams aside. He argues not only that the European Union is an obstacle to any ambitious, progressive political agenda, but that it cannot possibly be reformed in any meaningful sense. Changes to treaties require the unanimous approval of member-states, and Berlin is all but certain to block any effort to change the existing order. Boasting record budget surpluses and a powerful export-oriented manufacturing sector, Germany is served quite well by the existing budgetary rules and monetary policies. Lordon may ultimately be right. Even so, it seems hard to know for certain without putting up a fight.

One of those to embrace that battle is former Greek finance minister Yanis Varoufakis. In 2016, he launched the Democracy in Europe Movement 2025 (DiEM25), a

coalition of parties bent on saving the EU by reforming it from the inside. Still, while DiEM25's agenda sounds great on paper—it calls for expanding and "democratizing" the EU budget as well as a European treasury that could issue bonds—the group lacks a strategy for carrying it out. The European Parliament cannot propose legislation on its own, which means DiEM25 needs allies in national governments to make any difference in Brussels. At the moment, it has none and its coalition shows no signs of winning power anywhere. Not one of DiEM25's electoral partners won more than 5 percent in the most recent national elections.

Another more confrontational initiative comes from *La France Insoumise* ("France Unbowed"), the country's left-populist party. It won nearly 20 percent of the vote in the first round of the last presidential election: but it is not without its flaws. Its most identifiable figure, Jean-Luc Mélenchon, has a king-sized ego and the party suffers from a serious lack of internal democracy. Still, *La France Insoumise* appears to have a more convincing approach to the European Union than DiEM25, perhaps because its leaders are forced to seriously reflect on what governing would actually look like: if a left-wing government intent on carrying out its platform were to come to power in France today, it would immediately find itself in open confrontation with the European Union. This is something Varoufakis and his ilk don't have to worry about.

While *La France Insoumise*'s plan is designed for France, it could also work for other European heavyweights like Italy or Spain—countries with large economies and bargaining power to spare. From day one, the domestic government in question would announce a "Plan A" and a "Plan B." The former would be to reform the treaties, in other words, to remove the arbitrary restrictions on states' abilities to meet their citizens' needs. The second would be to prepare for an exit from the European Union, an option that would pressure European partners—i.e. Germany—into negotiating and ultimately making concessions on those treaties. In the meantime, the domestic government would begin implementing its agenda at home, ignoring those European treaties that pose a problem, and if necessary, moving to "opt out" of them. All this, the thinking goes, would nudge Brussels toward accepting reform.

If, for whatever reason, the state decided it didn't want to fully leave the European Union, there is also a clear precedent for opting out of treaties while remaining in the union. Well before Brexit, the UK had already declined to join the monetary union and the Schengen agreement that ensures free movement among signatory nations. Denmark, too, has chosen not to join the Eurozone, all the while remaining a member of the European Union.

Threatening to leave the European Union might sound dangerous—especially in the era of Brexit, whose costs are on full display. But if the goal is to genuinely remove the European Union's suffocating restraints on public investment, this seems a more convincing path than simply sticking to the current course, self-censoring criticism for fear of empowering the wrong people, and hoping the German government has a change of heart. Sadly, this remains the strategy of most left-wing parties and thinkers who proclaim faith in a "different Europe."

Either way, changes to the treaties won't result from the upcoming parliamentary elections. Even if the European Parliament had authority to rewrite fiscal and monetary rules, it will almost certainly lack a majority in favor of taking such drastic measures. Turnout in EU elections tends to be low, drawing interest mainly among the most motivated of Europeanists and the most passionate of Eurosceptics. Feeling caught in the middle and with few alternatives, many others will stay home, and it's hard to blame them. ■

DOMINIC SAVIO

I perceived your sweetness from your haloed portrait
on the prayer card. The Jesuits in charge of our parish
created an after school club dedicated in your name.

To be aligned with you meant that we might have
a calling; after all, we were eager to hear angelic voices,
and the small white missals we read from, and carried

into Mass, were fragrant with candles and holy water.
The gild edges of the book sent a shiver in me every time
I rubbed my index finger along the glimmer I thought

might have emanated from you. Our vestments, such
as the white surplice we wore, resembled those of altar
boys, although we had red sashes to adorn our slender

waists, making us look like a host of prepubescent martyrs.
Dominic Savio, student of Saint John Bosco, who died
of pleurisy at 14, you were canonized for your *heroic virtue.*

Your last words to your father were that you had already
forgotten what the parish priest had taught you, but,
oh, what wonderful things you were just beginning to see.

—Wally Swist

Wally Swist's books include Huang Po and the Dimensions of Love *(Southern Illinois University Press, 2012),* Candling the Eggs *(Shanti Arts, LLC, 2017),* The Map of Eternity *(Shanti Arts, LLC, 2018),* Singing for Nothing: Selected Nonfiction as Literary Memoir *(The Operating System, 2018), and* On Beauty: Essays, Reviews, Fiction, and Plays *(Adelaide Books, 2018).*

‘This Life Is Not Easy’

The Redemption of Raymond Carver

William Giraldi

It’s been a little over thirty years since the death of Raymond Carver—cancer killed him in 1988; one winces to think he was only fifty—and still he is thought of mostly as the high priest of working-class malaise, chronicler of blue-collar doldrums. Abandoned by the American Dream, left nearly destitute by its fallacy, the men and women in his world, in the early stories especially, live meticulously disappointed lives, far from the glow of God. Dreams, remarks one character, are what you wake up from. They know not to count on wishes: “another wish that wouldn’t amount to anything,” as the narrator of “Feathers” has it. Even when wishes stumble into realization, they are the wrong wishes: “That’s one wish of mine that came true. And it was bad luck for me that it did.” In Carver, as Irving Howe once put it, “ordinary life is the enemy of ordinary people”—people who dwell within “the waste and destructiveness that prevail beneath the affluence of American life.” That’s a devastating appraisal: When you have for an enemy your very life, how are you supposed to succeed if it means defeating yourself?

Carver’s stories certainly sanction this glum reading; some try to cut off the possibility of any other. His people marry, parent badly, work, drink, smoke, cheat; many are let go from jobs they are too good for and furious at a fate so scornful of their needs. All have downgraded their ambitions to match their means and the clobbering strictures of reality. Ordinary objects turn sinister, become omens of ruin: a birthday cake, a refrigerator, an ashtray, an automobile. Everything is hard in Carver’s world, as everything was in Carver’s first life, before sobriety saved him. In one of his most morally squalid stories, “Vitamins,” the narrator’s wife tells him: “This is hard, brother. This life is not easy, any way you cut it.” That sentiment applies to the lot of us—adulthood entails the management of dream-death and the enduring of letdown—but for Carver’s people there’s no ready path of escape, no imaginable avenue of betterment. Just as Christ’s anguish on Calvary is the nucleus of Christianity—no Passion means no Resurrection—Carver constructs his fiction upon the foundation of hardship, on the centrality of suffering: except there’s no resurrection for his characters.

In her biography of Carver, Carol Sklenicka says this: “The basis of Carver’s stories in real despair often shows. It is one source of their power.” I suppose that’s true only if you believe that Carver wasn’t capable of literary invention: whether or not something is “real” in a writer’s life matters not at all for whether or not it works in his fiction. Still, there’s no way around the fact that Carver was committed to autobiographical renderings. The first act of his life does indeed read like a Carver story: husbandhood and fatherhood by the absurd age of nineteen; the calloused years of alcoholism and menial labor at jobs he despised; bankruptcy and infidelity and separations; resentment and bitterness; emotional assaults upon those he loved most; cigarettes by the crateful. His characters are deprived of the second act Carver himself was granted: sobriety, unlikely success and esteem, a curative second marriage, meaningful friendships. Even the two ostensibly content couples in “What We Talk About When We Talk About Love” remain alcoholic after surviving the florid adversity of their lives. The talk is of love now, but domesticity, you sense, is still a killer.

Howe dubbed Carver’s people “plebeian loners struggling for speech.” They’re plebes all right, and they certainly struggle for speech, though some don’t know that speech is possible for their mangled emotions; they have not bought into the Word and have no word for what roils in them. But with scant exceptions, his characters aren’t true loners, and therein lies much of their trouble: other people. The blunted lovers and spouses and ex-spouses, the tyrannical children and bosses, the mysterious and menacing strangers: they conspire to make a bad week worse. In “Elephant,” the narrator’s widowed mother, brother, and children hit him up each month for money they have no means of paying back. Between these loans and an alimony he cannot alter, he’s paying out more than he makes, and he handles this first with exasperation and then with a kind of common-man

William Giraldi’*s newest book is* American Audacity: In Defense of Literary Daring *(Liveright, 2018).*

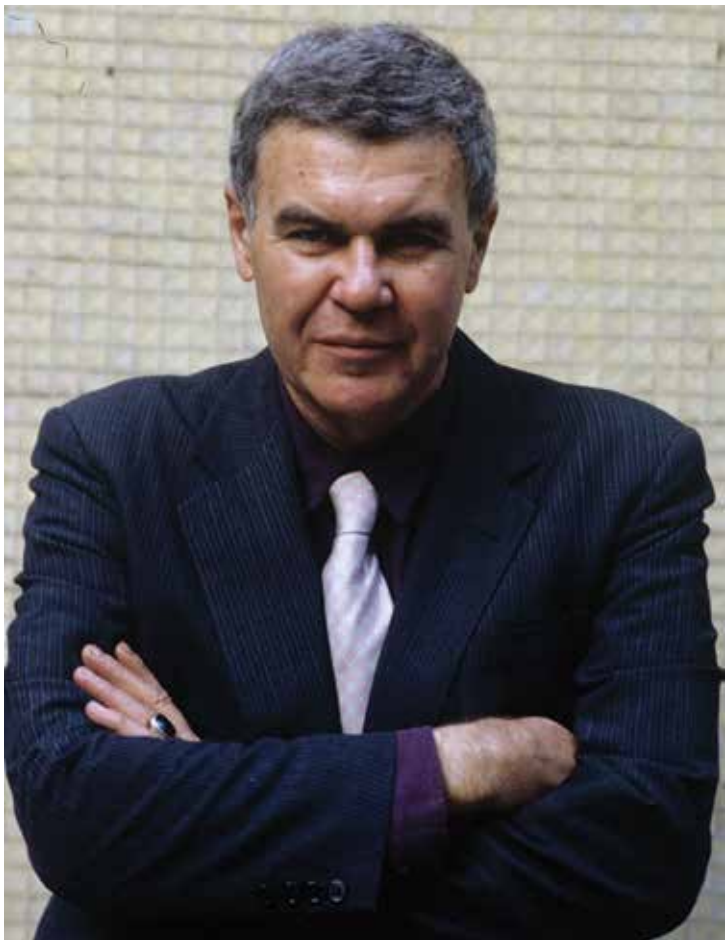
martyrdom, a shrugging acquiescence to the leeches in his life. What choice does he have? Choices are for those born into a different lot.

"Down on their luck, that's all," says one narrator about a family that's just been foreclosed on. "No disgrace can be attached to that." True, but take away the "dis" from "disgrace" and there's none of that, either. The colossal hardships in Carver are never romanticized because his people are too near the blast zone; romanticizing one's own upheaval takes the hindsight of recovery—it takes nostalgia. If there's one line in Carver that perfectly catches the ethos of his whole battered ensemble it's from "The Bridle," when a character says of a family: "They don't know where they're going or what they're going to do."

Carverian deprivation might be brought on by bad birth and worse luck, or instigated by needy others, but that deprivation finds encouragement in the self-strafing decisions his people are helpless not to make. This is what the alcoholic husband in "Chef's House" can't grasp. When his wife, in a moment of earned optimism, asks him to loosen his hold on their past discord, to suppose that they are different people able to make smarter decisions, he says: "Then I suppose we'd have to be somebody else if that was the case. Somebody we're not.... We were born who we are.... I'm not somebody else. If I was somebody else, I sure as hell wouldn't be here.... I wouldn't be me. But I'm who I am. Don't you see?" She sees all right: she sees he is resigned to the sloth of no hope and more booze.

Even if life has so far unfolded as hoped, as it has for the couple in "A Small, Good Thing," there are those threatening unknowns waiting to unhinge it, "those forces he knew existed and that could cripple or bring down a man if the luck went bad, if things suddenly turned." *If it weren't for bad luck*—you know the rest. A drunk in "Where I'm Calling From" admits: "I was happy with the way things were going"—he means with his life, until it was ravaged by the haplessness of alcohol.

The bad-luck defense goes only so far in Carver, though. Most of his stories are bafflements of human behavior, songs of the self-menaced, the muted cries of souls sabotaged by their own bungling and lack of belief. In "Where I'm Calling From," the alcoholic narrator in rehab asks: "Who knows why we do what we do?" The narrator of "Mr. Coffee and Mr. Fixit" admits: "I don't know what we were thinking of in those days." Good questions with no good answers. The truth doesn't work for most of Carver's people because it would mean beholding themselves not as predetermined casualties of a bogus American Dream, or as targets of a capricious God, but as independent enactors of their own fate. It would mean they are culpable in their own suffering, and that's a hard admission for many to make.



Raymond Carver in 1987

AGENCE OPALE / ALAMY STOCK PHOTO

The distinct Carverian character, says Howe, lives "a meager life...without religion or politics or culture." If they've adjusted to living on the periphery of culture, and living with jettisoned dreams, they've adjusted also to living without the ballast of religion. Frank Kermode once made the point that Carver's is "a society in despair": not a family, mind you, not a town or region or class, but a society in toto. It does often appear that way in his fiction: the whole world has gone rotten.

The seven deadly sins seethe everywhere in Carver, but it's the term "despair" that gets a workout in almost any study of his life and work, mostly as a synonym for "dejection" or "depression." Carver was no Catholic—he came from a clan of tepid Methodists—and so he was not concerned with the doctrinal definition of despair as the sin of shunning God. Despair is born of a ravening inwardness and spiritual sedition his people don't bother with. Aquinas includes despair among his six crimes against the Holy Spirit, one that will not be forgiven because in despair one accepts one's damnation—think of Faustus; think of all the soul-sick in Sartre, Camus, Kafka, Beckett—and that acceptance becomes a

rejection both of Christ's sacrifice and of Providence. This is what Gerard Manley Hopkins means when he writes: "Not, I'll not, carrion comfort, despair, not feast on thee; / Not untwist, slack they may be, these last strands of man / In me." For Carver's people it might be more accurate to say that *God* has bailed on *them* (*Deus absconditus*), has lost all interest in the janitors, roofers, and barmaids who never gave him much mind. Here's John Updike, in 1994, writing about Carver's America:

> The church is a footnote to the social scene and religion a dim undertone at best in the inner lives of the characters. It is not merely that lives seem to have little meaning beyond the immediate emotional need; the very lack of meaning is scarcely felt by characters who no more look within themselves for significance than they look into the flickering dramas of television or the flickering affective lives of their friends and kin. The world they have grown up in... is thin soil for the illusion of self-importance that religion needs to take root in.

Even when Carver's characters can realize the vanquished meaning in their lives, as the narrator of "Fat" certainly does—she ends her story with "My life is going to change. I feel it"—they have limited comprehension of what they're supposed to do with that realization. When belief does make an appearance in Carver, it is only by rote—by a kind of dulled cultural memory, as when a couple in "Feathers" says grace before their meal.

Some of Carver's storytelling sensibility might contain residue from a Methodist upbringing, but there's no real way we can tag Carver as even an infrequent believer. His biography is clear on this. In a 1983 interview, Carver was asked whether or not he was religious, and he replied with characteristic candor: "No, but I have to believe in miracles and the possibility of resurrection." The bulk of his characters, though, never come close to believing that. Gordon Lish, Carver's editor first at *Esquire* and then at Knopf—and never mind for now the well-trod controversy over whether or not the early Carverian aesthetic was really a Lishian aesthetic—has remarked that Carver's people are "impoverished in spirit," and that's mostly true.

In his interviews and nonfiction, Carver often resorts to religious expression—in that 1983 interview he speaks of the "spiritual nourishment" provided by art—but that expression is only the secular hijacking of religious metaphors for emotional purposes. In his essay "Fires," he says this about the attritional years of raising children: "Everything my wife and I held sacred...every spiritual value, crumbled away": more metaphorical talk, secular suffering decked out in sacral garb. Likewise, the prayer at the end of his story "The Student's Wife"—"God...God, will you help us, God"—shouldn't be taken for anything more than the desperate enacting of a ritual long without relevance. If better lives are reserved for those who have been better born, then God is for those whom God chooses. That's very Protestant of him; there can be no sacramental striving in Carver.

Carver's literary program takes no stock of the sublime. His language achieves a demotic splendor, a conversational artfulness, but it cannot connect with that junction where this world rubs against the other.

In his quote about miracles and resurrection Carver means the seeming miracle of his sobriety and his resurrection into the new life that followed: he means to be grateful for a second chance. What the forty-year smoker didn't know in 1983 was that he'd need a revitalized confidence in miracles by 1987 when he was diagnosed with lung cancer. He'd need the grace that had thus far eluded him. Once cancer got into his blood, grace got onto his mind. In 1988, not long after his diagnosis and the surgery that didn't work, Carver told an Italian interviewer: "I feel good in my own skin. Sure, the radiation is tough, but it will be okay. I have faith. I'm calm. I feel I'm in a state of grace."

Talking to the *New York Times* three months before his death, he called up grace again: "In the last few years, some light and radiance, and, if you will, grace has come into my life." In Paul, and in Romans especially, grace is achieved primarily through unflagging faith. For too many Catholics, grace is understood as a merit award from the boss, a gift for good behavior. Protestants are having none of that; they prefer the arbitrary: God will forgive and bless if he wants, and if so it will have nothing to do with you, or nothing you can point to. Carver wants to marry these two views, or marry elements of them: he seems to comprehend the grace of his post-addiction life as both a reward for his sobriety and a mystery outside his grasp.

In his brief essay "Meditation on a Line from Saint Teresa," the line Carver ponders is this: "Words lead to deeds.... They prepare the soul, make it ready, and move it to tenderness." And then: "There is something more than a little mysterious, not to say—forgive me—even mystical about these particular words and the way Saint Teresa used them, with full weight and belief." By "full weight and belief," he

means, I think, the full weight *of* belief. About the word "soul," Carver says it is one "we don't encounter much these days outside of church," and that's truer now than it was in his day. Soul isn't all that trendy. Soul is a bit musty. We surrendered to the radical soullessness of technology and right away became soulless ourselves.

"To give the mundane its beautiful due" is how Updike described his own literary program, and in Carver the mundane is honed to ominous implication. You don't often see Carver's name hitched to Whitman's, but consider the Whitmanian exuberance of the everyday: almost nothing is too insignificant to escape Whitman's communion. Carver's socially insignificant people, and the insignificant artifacts of their lives, are not insignificant to him. Wholly unlike Whitman, though, Carver's literary program takes no stock of the sublime. His language achieves a demotic splendor, a conversational artfulness—always a grand talker, Carver wrote stories in an eminently spoken register; his art is as oral as Whitman's—but his language cannot connect with that junction where this world rubs against the other. Though Carver's characters often pine for exalted things, they cannot articulate their pining. The oppressive immediacy of their lives prevents such articulation. Transcendence is a privilege Carver's people have perhaps heard rumor of but have not been granted access to.

And yet there are transcendent sparks in Carver I keep going back to, moments of human communion that raise his people briefly above the wreckage of their worlds. Here are some of the lovely closing lines of "Fever"—about a father of two young children abandoned by his recreant wife—as he waves goodbye to a nanny who can no longer help him:

> It was then, as he stood at the window, that he felt something come to an end. It had to do with Eileen and the life before this. Had he ever waved to her? He must have, of course, he knew he had, yet he could not remember just now. But he understood it was over, and he felt able to let her go. He was sure their life together had happened in the way he said it had. But it was something that had passed. And that passing—though it had seemed impossible, and he'd fought against it—would become a part of him now, too, as surely as anything else he'd ever left behind.

What's notable here is the clause *he felt able to let her go*, and also what he does immediately after these lines: "He brought his arm down and turned to his children." Not to the bottle, not to cigarettes, not to a damaged lover with damage to give, but *to his children*. There's a minim of grace in that gesture, of self-forgiveness and, yes, of hope, however fugitive.

Carver's most famous story, "A Small, Good Thing," ends with an unambiguously Eucharistic gesture. A mother orders a cake for her child's birthday; the child is then killed by a car and the baker, unaware of this calamity, is left with the unpaid-for cake, a slight that prompts him to make harassing phone calls. The parents confront him at his bakery and, mortified by his own callousness, the lonesome baker serves them pastries: "Eating is a small, good thing at a time like this." Here we have a trinity of sufferers, a sharing among the dispossessed. The metaphor insists that the baker become the priestly agent dispensing the body of Christ to a couple at the start of a lifelong grief. "Eucharist" comes from the Greek *eucharistia*, "thanksgiving," but for what could these three wrecked people possibly be giving thanks? For the small, good thing of this communion, unplanned and temporary, but very much needed in the moment.

The only Carver story that addresses belief in a more than oblique manner is the title story of his collection *Cathedral*. The blind friend of the narrator's wife visits, and after the wife nods off, the two men are left uncomfortably to themselves. The TV shows a documentary about cathedrals, and it occurs to the narrator that the blind man has not the slightest notion of how a cathedral looks. So he tries to describe one but can't, and tells the blind man: "In those olden days, when they built cathedrals, men wanted to be close to God. In those olden days, God was an important part of everyone's life." *Those olden days*: so olden and irrelevant to him he might as well be talking about the Pliocene. And when the blind man asks the narrator if he is "in any way religious," the narrator shakes his head no, but of course his guest can't see him, so he says: "I guess I don't believe it. In anything. Sometimes it's hard.... The truth is, cathedrals don't mean anything special to me. Nothing."

But then something almost miraculous happens. The blind man asks the narrator to draw a cathedral. He puts his hand on the narrator's as it draws so he can trace the movements and determine the shape. The narrator is so buoyed by this, his dormant spirit so unexpectedly uplifted, he keeps drawing, now with his eyes pinched shut as the blind man cheers him on. "Put some people in there now," the blind man says. "What's a cathedral without people?" This is one of the grandest moments of humanism in all of American short fiction, but humanism by way of holiness. "His fingers rode my fingers as my hand went over the paper," the narrator says. "It was like nothing else in my life till now." Such a moment could have happened only in late Carver, post addiction—post despair.

The writer Tobias Wolff once recalled that his introduction to Carver happened while escorting Grace Paley to an event: "I have always been happy to remember that I met Ray in the presence of a conjurer named Grace." Carver's people are kin to the Beckettian sufferer who declares: "I can't go on. I'll go on." In its seeming absurdity that's a wonderfully balanced assertion, the first part undone by the second. It's also an assertion that applies to Carver's own two lives: the suicidal drinking that almost succeeded, and his life's coda for which he always gave thanks—a decade of grace in which he composed the fiction that for many remains holy writ. ■

Anyway in Spring

Danielle Chapman

The cancer comes back again in March. Walking through Yale's crenellated cloisters, observing sunshine single out the Victorian graves, the gargoyles, the cobblestones casting their circumspect romance, she recalls that March three years ago when her husband was being recruited to teach here, before the cancer came back the last time. How instantly she'd fallen for New Haven, this little city true to its name. Then, how soon the fantasy of welcome had been met by the insult of the bad blood tests, the pain in the knee, boot treads clomping bluntly on bleak sidewalks. Look but don't touch. You can't have this. Don't let down your guard.

This is the vigilance in which they're living when, in April, the cancer goes away again, and her husband is released from the hospital with a shrug from the Communist-bloc doc. "Who knows, maybe it was just a virus," he grins. "We love viruses!"

In their neighborhood, buttercups smear Connecticut creeksides, and her daughters gather bushels to hold under her chin and ask, *Do you like butter?* Then affirm, by the degree to which her ever-whiter skin reflects yellow: *Oh ho ho, do you like butter!* Blossoms riot the earth because her husband has had cancer for eleven years, but is still alive. Unreasonably gleeful, she prays in her Prius outside Planet Fitness's purple Judgment Free Zone, facing into two skull-shaped speakers between the headrests of a Chevette whose window reads NO JOKE in Olde English scroll, seagulls missiling down onto the asphalt to fight over a whole baguette none can lift, praising Connecticut, where she lives with her husband, kids, and dogs, and

> blond reeds scallop the canals, wuthering
> slithers behind the strip malls.

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They've stopped going to the church where worship took place in a huge modern log cabin, dream catchers hung from the eaves, and quotes from Abraham Joshua Heschel and Maya Angelou were fingerpainted on the windows. There, they didn't have to suffer the fact of being Christians. Christians there were professors, scholars of church history, and flinty New Englanders who, even in severest grief, persisted; who understood that Christian triumphalism was ahistorical, if not diabolical. Sermons often meandered into the latest geopolitical crisis—Syria or Zika—and ginned up the same kind of diffuse, self-righteous empathy she felt after gorging on her Facebook feed. Meanwhile, she craves the word Christ, sharpened at the end, as if to skewer her inner ear.

Now on Sunday afternoons they drive downtown to a church whose pastor and congregants ask God directly, "What are You doing *here*?" and are willing to hear an answer. They trust the visualizations that they get in prayer, and speak in confident detail about what God is doing in Beaver Hills and in Uganda. They seem liberal because of their t-shirts and Adidas, and because they agree that Trump may well be the Antichrist. But unlike the liberal churches they've attended since her husband's diagnosis, this one believes in evil. These Christians think Satan causes racism and economic injustice. She wonders what they think causes cancer.

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After the initial diagnosis, eleven years ago, in Chicago, they'd moved through Cancerland as if it were an iced Atlantis. The escalators pulled them up to the next level of glass balconies or spilled them down to the ground floor, where people milled, with their afflictions and aspirations, past Barbara's Bookstore and Pulse, the Northwestern Hospital gift shop, its silk scarves pulled into pastel knots at the corner of her vision. She knew every entryway and exit, particularly the Skybridge connecting the parking lot to the second floor. She often walked swiftly above Saint Clair Street, between the various shades of ice blue, with a wind about her that was something like an avenging angel. It forbade her to look down, at that other, briefly radiant, romantic Chicago: the expensive city, those blocks between the beach and the Ritz. In all that hospital glass—some clear, some tinted aquamarine, some frosted or mellowed with milk—there was a certain concept of transparency that it behooved her to believe in. As if being seen were akin to being cured.

Recently the doctors have started saying that her husband's disease has moved "beyond the end of knowledge," a deeply un-doctorly phrase that makes her wonder what happens now to all she thought she knew, back then. She knew, for instance, the double revolving doors of Northwestern's Galter Pavilion, outside of which the taxis parked, and which reflected the wide white panes of the Affinia. She knew the west-facing windows of the oncology waiting room that looked out on great, grated heating turbines and beds of furiously sparkling manila gravel. She didn't know the first oncologist because they fired him after he cornered them in the exam room with his Zeus grin and drew a diagram of her husband's projected life span on a whiteboard. Five to seven years.

But she did know Dr. Berman, as one might have known the radiantly sober ghost of Gershom Scholem. His parents had been sent to separate Nazi concentration camps, where they each assumed the other had died, only to run into each other—literally, bowed head to bowed head—at the water spigot in the middle of an enormous relocation camp after the war. Dr. Berman and his twin sister were two of the world's foremost research oncologists, responsible for many of the drugs that now kept terminally ill patients alive indefinitely. He was *calm*—so calm, her husband joked, you could walk in with a hatchet in your head and he wouldn't flinch.

She knew to bring her husband a Chicken Caesar Wrap from Panoply! on the days he got infusions; to let him sit up in bed, firing off emails, even as Crystal administered the drip; not to call it "chemo"; not to panic if he broke out in hives; to simply mash the CALL button and watch Crystal gallop in with Benadryl, burbling all the while over her recent humanitarian trip to Africa and the fiancé who'd quit her a week before the wedding.

She knew for the first time when she was twenty-eight years old, and knew it frantically every time the number after the decimal point in the blood draw ticked down. She knew it the way one knows a stiffened lymph node, rolling it like a bead under her thumb, as they drove home afterwards, Chicago's Xanadus (the Rock N Roll McDonalds, Rainforest Café, Excalibur) looming up around them, their promises of pleasure as tasteless as helium, even as the Dan Ryan Expressway drew them down into its grip, and the winter city prickled up behind them like "the needles of the fretful porpentine."

She knew it as if it were the only thing worth knowing. So what does she know now?

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"Sure, take a look—they're incredible," her friend, the novelist, an atheist, says, without tilting her head up to look at the prize-winning orchids tendriling down from her father's bespoke birdcage greenhouse. "The little bitches."

Their laughter meanders through the sculpted paths, a garden of East Coast consciousness so well considered that even the touches of disorder—pokeweed meandering around the sunken slate—acquire an aspect of deliberate élan.

As often happens with her friend, they sit, drinking their seltzers, acknowledging the glory of the weather and their children, while their conversation nevertheless returns to Death. The fox with kits stalking the chipmunks behind

the herbs. The alligator in the Guadeloupe. The dangers, mainly human, of camping. ("A cozy family, what stupid sitting ducks!" her friend leers, imitating a murderer.) And, most especially, within themselves: that place, beyond the pale, within the garden; that place of clarifying terror, which they each have touched and tasted, and to which they hope never to return; yet whose existence is witnessed by the understanding, twisted as DNA, into each others' eyes.

Meanwhile, the children plop to the bottom of the narrow pool, like a slotted fountain in a Modern museum. After a round of Criss-Cross Applesauce, they erupt into a game they call Bubble Catastrophe, the highest pitch of which matches the cry of osprey overhead.

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If earth can make me this glad, do I need God? she wonders while walking the dogs through Spring Glen, the cherries and the lilacs whooshing in the wind, whipped into cream, while the "thrush's eggs look little low heavens." When with instant ferocity her joy turns back on her to ask, *Well then is this life what Christ calls you to sacrifice?* Dualities are mean, she thinks. If any living things could withstand the Imperishable Light, they're these. Anyway, in spring, even the unuttered, abject prayer is answered with

> violets' blue wigs madcapping medians
> under the ALTERNATIVE HEALING sign
>
> forsythia burnishing
> its bottlebrush
>
> or cherries or pears or plums
> rummaging blush from
> shimmying hinds.

Dr. Berman had been sanguine about the idea of them getting pregnant. "There's no reason you shouldn't," he'd said, smiling sagaciously as if to imply that there were many reasons that they should.

It would require some medical intervention. Her husband, first of all, would have to preemptively bank sperm because the Rituxan-Velcade trial had been shown to mutate DNA. She'd have to go in for surgery, to remove a uterine septum, a piece of extra tissue that descended into the uterus like the cleavage in a Valentine heart and on which an egg couldn't implant. All of this was uneventful, except for the fact that the sperm bank was staffed by a single man named Conrad, a bored fifty-something with bleached hair and an angular, leathery face that suggested hard decades spent as a cocaine-addicted cabaret singer. She and her husband thought it likely that, in his boredom, he had inseminated Chicago with leagues of little Conrads.

Nevertheless, they put ten vials on ice. Each time they used one, their chances decreased by ten percent. After the first two tries, the doctor, an ironic young Russian woman, prescribed Clomid, a low-key fertility pill, and when they didn't get results, she had to shoot herself up every morning by squeezing an inch of belly fat and plunging in a needle full of high-octane hormones. It didn't hurt. Soon, the ultrasound showed four viable eggs. *What would happen if they all got fertilized?* they asked, and were told that, by a process called "selective reduction," the four would be reduced. It was the terminology, its clinical efficiency, that spooked them. "I wouldn't worry," Dr. Svetlana said, her pale face coming briefly into focus in the middle of her smudge of frizzed hair. "In these cases it's unlikely that even one gets fertilized. That's what you need to be worrying about."

Astonishingly, when they went in for the next ultrasound, there were two embryos, exactly.

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The morning sickness struck the day after she harvested the cilantro that had bushed up in the square foot garden they planted before she got pregnant. A lady at work who barked at everyone and liked to be called the Culinary Czar instructed her to make it into cilantro pesto. On their honeymoon in Costa Rica, blue Morpho butterflies had lifted up from a meadow of wild cilantro in a clearing in the rainforest. Now she threw up cilantro pesto all night long.

For the rest of her pregnancy, Chicago reeked. Every alley and aperture huffed its steaming stinks at her, specifically. Spiteful cat piss and aggressive onions. The odors of Albany Park, the zip code in which more languages were spoken than any other in America, no longer liked her. Humanity, it seemed, could not respect her sensitivities. "I'm just like a giant garlic sausage walking in the door, aren't I?" her husband asked when he noticed her shrinking from him.

By then, the Rituxan-Velcade had worked, and Dr. Berman thought he was going to be fine. Lots of people were getting long remissions, and for some the cancer hadn't come back at all. Plus, Dr. Berman said, if there was any time to have cancer, this was it. Every day a new miracle drug was being born.

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Oh twins, what a blessing. I always wanted twins! women at the gym (where the elderly Polish and Korean ladies lotioned themselves in the steam room, flapping up their breasts and bellies, glaring at anyone who opened the door and released the pent-up heat) would say when they asked and she told them. Though often people asked, *Do twins run in your family?* And once, later in pregnancy, when all the lifeguards warily observed her elephant-head-sized belly, a stranger in the locker room took her in and quipped, as if affronted, *Natural, or IVF?*

Though the word *blessing* wheedled, wormlike, in her ear, as it always had, all sanctimonious sound and little substance, she couldn't deny she felt it, even on the last month of bedrest, as she lay on the couch, doggedly plowing through a tome on the Russian Revolution while her husband stockpiled a Doomsday supply of soups in the deep freeze.

She felt it bearing forth, breaking her back, seizing her legs with charley horses, parching her and keeping her awake, that which she had for so long forsaken or been forsaken by, maybe because there was no word for it, this blessed-in-foresakedness, which she'd been slow to receive, but, now, she knew, was nearly here. *It's rapture*, a friend had said of having babies, a friend who shared her fascination with St. Teresa. *But you're not supposed to say so.*

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The first days after the girls were born, doped on the freak luck of two perfectly healthy twins, she and her husband had watched their faces unfurl between walls of glowing lambswool. Baby A mashed down her lids over eyes wide-set like a little lizard's, smiled at some idea of the bountiful, contorted her lips into sideways hoots, rooted for a drink, and drew back with a smack. Baby B smirked as she slept, her eyebrows jigging, as if witnessing some amazement behind her lids; then yawned, then stretched, then goat-whinnied her way into a different dream. They bounced them on the yoga ball and napped with the lamps on and ate from the supply of soups. Outside, it was frigid February. Snow sugared the roofs of the garages, and ice pastry-flaked the block of chain-linked yards opaled by a hidden sun.

The first time they left the house, they took a walk around the block, through the neighborhood that had been advertised before the housing crash as HOT! ALBANY! PARK! The tax attorney, the Lavendería, the funeral parlor proclaimed their *INCENTIVOS*, their *GARANTÍAS* in bold. It occurred to her how long it had been since they'd actually looked at each other. When she turned to her husband, his clear gaze filleted her. "Do the babies make you think more about the illness?" he asked.

The white sky, blank as blotter paper, absorbed bare branches like aneurysms of ink. "Yes," she said in a tone not entirely kind. "But it doesn't change the joy."

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When the girls were two months old, her husband's blood test showed a slight uptick in a certain, unpronounceable protein, an ominous but inconclusive sign. When they were five months, his knee blew up again, this time to the size of a cantaloupe. At the end of the summer, they learned that his hemoglobin was below ten. His knee showed signs of "extensive necrosis." The bone had died. The orthopedist audibly gaped at the MRI and said, "I've honestly never seen anything like that before."

She walked into the nursery and saw the girls' toys: those primary-colored shapes that mothers are always waving before a baby's face, contorting their own faces into masks of delight to conjure the child's delight, which, at that age, is an emotion inseparable from seeing. The building blocks, the mirrored books, Mr. Whoozit—each of their shapes shrank through her like charms shrieking through a cauldron.

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She knew the words to the hymn, "What Wondrous Love Is This," though they had always come to her at the wrong times, as once, shortly after the diagnosis, when she noticed a peach pit on the grass outside of their church in Chicago being devoured by ants. *What wondrous love is this, O my soul, O my soul.* The words washed through her as she watched the ants clean the pit of its last fruit. *What wondrous love is this / That caused the Lord of bliss / To bear these dreadful millions for my soul.*

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When the girls were eight months old, her husband was admitted to the fifteenth floor with an infernal swelling under his chin, ten out of ten on the pain scale. No one had a clue what it was, and he simmered in bed for days as the specialists crept in to inspect him. The view of the water, glowering beneath the towers, was breathtaking. She sat on the windowsill staring down until her breasts hardened into missiles, then went into the bathroom to pump. When she got back, Lake Michigan looked as little and immutable as a geode under glass. She was a soul peering down through a rip in Paradise, at the infinite spiraling toward damnation, contemplating falling through that scalding air without her husband—and with, *my God*, their babies.

When Dr. Berman walked in, gravely calm, and told them that the only option would be a bone marrow transplant, she sobbed aloud and buckled onto the bed. "Don't cry," said the nurse, an early twenty-something with a magenta streak in her blond hair. "Cancer is a word, not a sentence."

Her husband wouldn't look at her; he stared out at the lake, seeing, she knew, his death as clearly as the line between the water and the sand. That's when she locked herself in the bathroom, fished a scrap of paper out of the diaper bag and wrote the thing she could never account for afterwards: *It takes the pain of the worst in order to recall the hope—the total hope—for a cure, which exists, flint-like and as unlikely as any belief, somewhere inside me.*

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First he got his bones scoured by three treatments of Thalidomide-spiked chemo. For one week every month, they pushed his IV around a rink of reflected light, little lucid rooms where doctors and nurses and interns and PAs administered infusions. The tubing, the syringes, all of that precision, negated the urge to feel. Instead, the transplant team gave out gift bags of purple CELEBRATE LIFE key chains and thermoses. Then they harvested his stem cells. The morning of the transplant, a chaplain performed an interfaith blessing. A tech dressed in a Hazmat suit rolled in a hibachi full of dry ice that held the vial of her husband's potential life. The tech unscrewed the container slowly, making a show of it as he unleashed the genie from

its cowl of smoke. Then, to break the silence, the nurse with the magenta streak shouted, "You'll have two birthdays to celebrate now!"

✸ ✸ ✸

"Do you like this stuff?" her husband asks.

She's found him at home in their Connecticut Tudor, sampling a gift bottle of Laphroaig. "Yeah, sure, I love it. It's like sucking at the very source of Scotland."

"Yeah, like drinking from a dwarf's butt."

He's got the crazy light about him that he had in the beginning. Before cancer. When everything that he said startled her. He always appeared abruptly—just back from the gym, body flexed within his crisp, blue business shirt; at her door, offering her an apple; walking into Coffee Expressions as she was walking out. His eyes were lit, sharply faceted, prismatic almost, shooting in multiple directions at once, catching her at angles she didn't expect to be seen from. He was brilliant; disconcertingly so. After work, they'd slip out of their offices separately and meet at the elevator of his high-rise, which sucked them up to the twenty-second floor like a gasp. The fact that no one knew they were together magnetized the view, those skyscrapers whose shapely differences they'd admired from the deck of the Chicago Architecture Tour. How some seemed to drip upward, or devour their own reflections.

Though they never would have uttered the word back then, they both felt the vertigo of teetering over Eternity—about to fall in it. Now here he is, in their kitchen, twelve years later, his eyes' glacial blue deepening as he raises his eyebrows suggestively and says, "I like this flexible work schedule." Alive.

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During the recruiting visit to Yale, they'd stopped to see an old colleague, a designer respected for his protean, Modern touch. By coincidence he'd recently moved to Connecticut, too, bought a white Bauhaus-style tower on the highest point in town, and begun a massive renovation. The whole time he was undergoing chemo for incurable brain cancer. Gin-frizzled, bone-thin, he led them through the hanging streaks of construction plastic, the unfinished dream, while snow filled the valley below—the river, the yards, the factories, the red granite gullets of the towering rock against which red-tailed hawks dove. An elaborate Japanese garden, designed by the wife of the man who built the tower, twisted around one side of the property, but, as they gazed at it, the man said he planned to demolish it. "It's got to go," he said from beneath his oversized woodman's cap. His eyes gleamed within his translucent face, just as they always had when he'd unveiled a new design. Why was he so radiant? He was about to die. What did he believe?

Make it new.

✸ ✸ ✸

Modern artists often have the most Puritanical aesthetics, she thinks upon waking, in America at least, per William Carlos Williams and the exhausted tone of "Spring and All." She, meanwhile, has become the sort who occasionally feels the urge to praise even azaleas,

> the scarlet smirch of them, Velvet
> Christmases and salmony
> carpeting blurring into miniature
> bottlebrushes, the awfuller
> the azalea color—
> the Gatorade, the cauliflower—
> the more they overpower her
> with joy at being heard.

✸ ✸ ✸

By the end of May, all signs of the cancer have, impossibly, left her husband's blood stream. They refuse to say so out loud, to inform their mothers, or to offer praises at church. Yet when one of the prayer ministers asks, "Do you mind if I lay my hands on you while I pray?" she agrees. And, as love charges blindingly upon her, she staggers forward and dissolves into a bliss of weeping.

Her husband is, in fact, well enough that they are able to fly, all four of them, to Texas. It's still spring there, too. Wildflowers spray the weeds under the mesquites, and between the cacti the frayed blue and orange edges of the Indian paintbrush blur into fields where kids feed. A band of ibex graze on the pasture above the neighbors' cedar, while Fern, the neighbors' miniature milk cow, moons like a pet around their fire pit and putting green. After watching the sun rise on the horses, their daughters pretend to ride their shadows, and run barefoot to rub their noses, sun haloing uncombed hair and manes as one. Then they all walk out together to pick flowers, as she did when she was little, in Tennessee, soaking their sneakers with dew. The girls call the bright pale starbursts "highlighters" and seek the rare pink lipstick hue that stairsteps up a raggy stem like an orchid, until, in a clearing among crabby black cedars thorned like a fairytale lair, one girl finds one, delighting the other, who vaults downhill squealing onto steps of prickly pear and waving grasses dabbed with foam.

They walk and pick till the dew burns off into true heat, then traipse up into the deer blind and sit together in its cool dark vestibule. The girls tell them what Uncle Mitchell said the window was for—to watch, not hunt, for game—when just then a troop of antelope, a horned male and three females, spring on all fours out of the brush into their rectangle. Instinctually they all jump up and rejoice at such a sighting. As if this is what a deer blind were actually for. ■

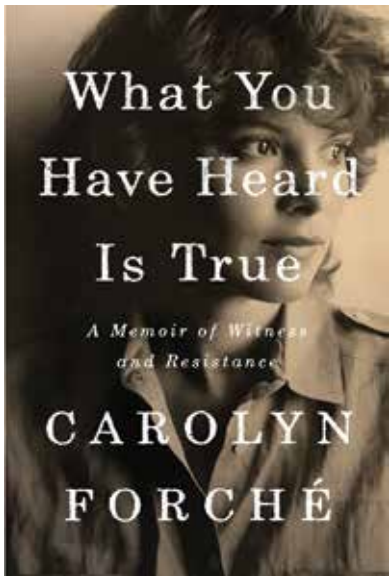
Danielle Chapman *is the author of a book of poems,* Delinquent Palaces. *She teaches creative writing at Yale.*

‘I Just Had to Say Yes’

An Interview with Carolyn Forché

Nicole-Ann Lobo

Carolyn Forché is a poet, editor, translator, and human-rights activist. In 2013, she received the Academy of American Poets Fellowship, which is awarded for distinguished poetic achievement. In 2017, she became one of the first two poets to receive the Windham-Campbell prize. Forché is a University Professor at Georgetown University and lives in Maryland with her husband, the photographer Harry Mattison. She recently spoke with *Commonweal* Garvey Writing Fellow Nicole-Ann Lobo about her most recent book, *What You Have Heard Is True: A Memoir of Witness and Resistance*. The interview, which was recorded for the Commonweal Podcast, has been edited for length and clarity.



Nicole-Ann Lobo: To start with, could you tell us a little about the period in your life the memoir focuses on?

Carolyn Forché: Yes. Well, I was in my twenty-seventh year. In the summer, I traveled to Spain with my friend whose mother was a Salvadoran-Nicaraguan poet named Claribel Alegría. We wanted to translate Claribel’s poetry into English. I spent that summer doing that and I heard them talk about a very mysterious relative of theirs who lived in El Salvador. They presented him very curiously—as a sort of a Robin Hood. He was intelligent and mysterious and he was a motorcycle-race champion and he had all these different interests, but they weren’t quite sure who he was. They didn’t know whether he was involved somehow with the developing guerrilla movement, or whether he was working for the CIA, or what he was doing. And that fall in November, he showed up on my doorstep with his two daughters and spent three days at my house—remember I was only twenty-seven, I didn’t know anything about El Salvador except Claribel’s poems—and he talked to me for three days. His idea was that war was coming to El Salvador and he very much wanted a poet from the United States to come and learn as much as she could about the situation there so that, when the war began, this poet could somehow explain it to the American people, because he believed that the policy of the United States would be crucial.

NAL: When I read your description of how you first met this man, Leonel Gómez Vides, I was completely shocked at how courageous and open-minded you were just to say yes to him. I was wondering what you think accounted for this decision.

CF: Well, you know, during that previous summer I felt really ignorant of Central America. And the people who were gathering every day to talk about politics and literature at Claribel’s house were very intriguing and compelling, and they had fled murderous military regimes in Argentina and Chile, Uruguay, Paraguay. I was very curious. I wanted to do something. I didn’t want to just be a passive North American. And also, like many young people today, I wanted to do some good in the world. I wanted to join the Peace Corps, and I’d never done that. I had all sorts of ideas about what I might do with my life. And this was a moment when someone was actually opening a door, and presenting an opportunity to me. I knew that if I didn’t walk through that door, if I said no, I could never really view myself the same way again. I could never tell myself I’d never had the chance. So for me, it was something I just had to say yes to.

NAL: It must have been difficult to relive so much of what you write about in this book. It’s jarring to read so many descriptions of death and decay and violence all around. What made you decide to publish this book now?

CF: Well, it took me a long time to even begin writing it. I left El Salvador in March 1980. I did go back at the end of the war and several times since then, but I didn't begin my memoir until 2003—twenty-three years later. I had written a few poems, as you know, about that time, but nothing else. I had to process it. I had to mature. I had to think about it and have some distance on it. And also during those early years, I was traveling around the U.S., giving poetry readings and talking about El Salvador and trying to help build a sentiment toward anti-intervention in Central America and toward sanctuary and toward witness for peace.

When I finally began writing, it took me fifteen years. I always wondered, will I ever finish this and are these events receding and far in the past? Will they still matter? To my surprise, at the moment when the book was finally published, we had the situation of the refugees fleeing the horrors and the dangers of Central America for our borders, and seeking refuge.

And so once again the story has become important to us—only this time, in another way. And so I was hoping to write a story that would allow young readers in particular, but really anyone, to go through the journey that I went through, to take that journey with me, and somehow come to understand how my activism was born and how my consciousness was formed, and also learn something about what these people are running away from, what the refugees are fleeing. Because of course people don't just pick up their children in their arms and grab a rucksack with a few possessions and run thousands of miles through a desert. They don't do that. They don't leave their homes unless what they're running from is more frightening than anything they can imagine in their future.

If you are going to put yourself at the service of the poor, you must also accept their fate. You have to be fully with them, including in their manner of death.

NAL: You write in one passage that you would "never again feel the fear that [you] felt in those days, even in other countries at war." And that there was "a special quality to the fear" that you experienced in El Salvador. Could you say more about this?

CF: Well, for one thing I would say that it was a fear that everyone felt. It was a fear that was in the air, it permeated life, it was the ground of our being, really. Because the time when I was there, we refer to now as the "time of the death squads." The war had actually begun, but it wasn't being called that yet. And at that time it was a war of terror against the civilian population—in the cities as well as in the countryside.

You know, the death squads were everywhere. They were apprehending people, people were disappearing. They were killing people. At the time I was there, I would say at its height, they were killing a thousand people a month in the capital city alone. So the quality of the fear was that you never knew. You couldn't sleep, because most people were abducted or taken from their places of residence in the middle of the night. Or you'd be grabbed from the street. So if you were walking somewhere, or driving somewhere, or just in your room at night...anything could happen to you at any moment. So it wasn't like being in a war where you're either in an area where the fighting is occurring or you're not.

The population of El Salvador was being preyed upon by squads of killers, who not only killed people, but killed them slowly and brutally and engaged in mutilation. It was very, very difficult. I never lived again in an atmosphere where every moment of daily life was permeated with fear.

NAL: Toward the beginning of your memoir you write about the Catholicism of your youth. Later, you met Óscar Romero, and you write that you had the feeling then that you were in the presence of a living saint. You describe a soft light seeming to emanate from his eyes and skin; you call it the light "sanctity bestows." How did your experiences in El Salvador affect your personal faith or your spirituality?

CF: You know, that's a really interesting question because I went to Catholic school for twelve years as a child and I was taught by Dominicans, and after my formal schooling in a Catholic school ended, I went out into a secular university and out into life, and it was during the time of the Vietnam War and the civil-rights movement. I drifted away from practicing Catholicism. It wasn't that I was no longer spiritual, but I didn't practice Catholicism and I had that sort of questioning attitude that all high-school students develop. And then I find myself in El Salvador and suddenly there's the popular church, and people having Masses on boulders in the middle of the countryside, and I'm meeting these wonderful priests who are deeply committed to the poor and wonderful nuns also deeply committed to the poor, and I'm introduced to the principles of the theology of liberation.

And there is of course Msgr. Romero at the heart of everything. He is the one voice in the country that has any institutional power that is speaking back to this barbarity and this butchery. And you know, despite what it eventually might cost him, he was brave. They were all brave, these nuns and priests. I saw faith practiced in a living way. In a

PHOTO BY HARRY MATTISON FROM *WHAT YOU HAVE HEARD IS TRUE*

way that I think Christ would have approved of. I had never been in a community like that. I had never met Catholics like that. And I'm not saying that the whole church was that way because of course there was still the old, established, hierarchical, conservative church in El Salvador, but the vibrancy of the popular church was not to be denied.

So I tiptoed back into Catholicism through this. I said, "I'm not a good Catholic," and Msgr. Romero gave me Communion anyway. Nobody cared if I wasn't a good Catholic. Nobody asked me when the last time I went to confession was, because I'd have to be truthful; it had been years. I found myself surrounded by these wonderful souls who had all accepted the preferential option for the poor, which is of course the understanding that if you are going to put yourself at the service of the poor, you must also accept their fate. You have to be fully with them, including in their manner of death.

One thing that really impressed me about the Salvadorans that I was with then was how they were really willing to die for each other. Many of them *did* die. So I saw fully a living church. And when you come back, and you lose touch with that living church, you feel it, you mourn it. It's something you grieve the loss of.

I don't really think I'll ever see that again. Maybe it was also partly due to the fact that we were in such an intense situation. But it was alive. And Msgr. Romero? He was a human being. He said his knees used to wobble or shake when he was afraid. So he wasn't unafraid—he was courageous, which means you're afraid but you do it anyway. You're afraid but you stand up anyway.

And I saw that light around him, or thought I did, the last time I was with him, which was about a week before he died. The light I saw around him was when he was thinking about his answers to a journalist's questions. And I taped what I think is the last interview he ever gave, which was in response to that journalist's questions.

And then after that, we went to supper in the kitchen of the Convent of Divine Providence where he lived—he had a little *casita* there—and Leonel and myself and Madre Luz and a few younger nuns and Monsignor all had supper. And that was when Monsignor said that I really had to leave the country, and I spent my time trying to persuade *him* to leave because he was in great danger, and we were all very worried about him.

And he said to me "No, my place is with my people. And I'm staying here. My place is with my people, and now, your place is with *your* people. You must go home and you must tell Americans about our situation." I wasn't quite ready to leave, and I was upset that I couldn't persuade *him* to leave. But of course he had to stay, and of course I had to go.... We've all known he's a saint for a long time, and I'm happy that the Vatican now knows it. ■

Dorothy Fortenberry

'One of Those Serious Women'

Last Days at Hot Slit
The Radical Feminism of Andrea Dworkin
Edited by Johanna Fateman and Amy Scholder
MIT Press, $17.95, 408 pp.

When I was thirteen, I decided it was time to be a feminist. In my family, this wasn't really something that needed to be announced, but nonetheless I felt compelled to claim the label as my own. From this point on, I would be buying the manifestos about patriarchy with my allowance money, thank you very much.

My boyfriend—also, of course, a feminist and at fourteen, a year more radical than I—told me that women shouldn't be ruled by men's oppressive beauty standards, which I interpreted as a directive to stop shaving my legs. Wanting to be both a good feminist and a good girlfriend, I complied. And then I wore knee socks for the better part of a year because I hated the way my shins looked, but I didn't want to disappoint him or the movement.

I hadn't heard of Andrea Dworkin then, but I did know that feminism was mostly about body hair and righteousness. As I got a little older and started shaving again, I learned that thinking about feminism this way was absurd, out of touch. Feminists weren't mean and hairy and fat. They were sexy and played in bands and wore baby-doll dresses and smeary, dark lipstick. Thus liberated, I hit the thrift stores in search of lace-lined slips, hopeful that now I was doing it right.

Andrea Dworkin

STEPHEN PARKER / ALAMY STOCK PHOTO

The new collection of Dworkin's writings *Last Days at Hot Slit*, edited by Johanna Fateman and Amy Scholder, is an exhilarating reminder that however you're currently doing feminism, it's probably wrong.

The book samples Dworkin's writings from 1973 to 1999, including personal letters, speeches, and excerpts from her nonfiction and fiction. It also features previously unpublished material like the vicious and hilarious "Goodbye to All This," a burn book of a breakup letter to her sex-positive fellow travelers.

Dworkin's writing is forceful, unapologetic, pleasurable without making its author seem likeable. She describes herself, pointedly, as "one of those serious women." What *Last Days* reveals, according to its editors, is that Dworkin shaped our current world without ever being recognized or appreciated as Great, in the ways that Great Men traditionally are, and it's hard to disagree with them. We get our ideas of how we're supposed to be—shaven or not, angry or otherwise—from somewhere, and one of those places is her work.

Dworkin puts her own lived experience as a woman front and center. She writes about rape, and she writes about her rapes. She writes about domestic violence, and she writes about the husband who beat her. In her essays, you can feel her rage that these things happened to her, but also her anger that bodily trauma has, by necessity, become the focus of her creative output.

This isn't the kind of writing she wanted to do.

As a girl, Dworkin's heroes were male writers (Rimbaud, Baudelaire, Genet, Ginsburg) who flaunted their excess and debauchery, and in her more autobiographical pieces, you can sense the kind of urban, European, bourgeois-skewering writer she thought she'd grow up to be. The disappointment that she did not, could not, live this way because she was a woman suffuses all her writing. How does someone go from wanting to live in the gutter, drunk on life and its excesses, to wanting to ban pornography? Because of fear, a fear created and sustained by men. As she put it in *A Battered Wife Survives*, "The fear does not let go. The fear is the eternal legacy."

Dworkin was a serious woman, but she also writes about having fun, especially during sex or while roaming around New York or having sex while roaming around New York. It's some of her saddest writing to me, because it carries the deepest sense of loss. In her autobiographical novel *Mercy*, while describing a woman she longs for, she captures the rollercoaster of sexual longing: "I want to want; I like wanting just so it gets fulfilled and I don't have to wait too long; I like the ache just long enough to make what touches it appreciated a little more, a little drama, a little pain."

But there never seems to be just a little pain.

Dworkin was a Bad Girl, ditching school, fighting with (or sleeping with) her teachers, and then she was a Hurt Girl, doing drugs and turning tricks, and then she was an almost Dead Girl, and then she couldn't be a Bad Girl anymore.

To read Andrea Dworkin in 2019 is to experience whiplash as you vacillate between twin poles of "…duh" and "WHAT?!?" Half of her once-inflammatory points have become commonplace truisms; the other half are more out-of-bounds now than when she proposed them. On issues like rape and domestic violence, her prose is vivid as ever, but her insights as a thinker can be obscured by their success. "All women live in constant jeopardy, in a virtual state of siege" was a mind-blowing claim in 1975; now it's a *Teen Vogue* tweet.

She writes without concern for her critics, otherwise known as "every asshole who thinks that what will heal this violent world is more respect for dead white men." She notes that "Women cling to irrational hatreds, focused particularly on the unfamiliar, so that they will not murder their fathers, husbands, sons, brothers, lovers, the men with whom they are intimate.... Fear of a greater evil and a need to be protected from it intensify the loyalty of women to men who are, even when dangerous, at least known quantities." She declares (re: Leo Tolstoy, Kōbō Abe, James Baldwin, Tennessee Williams, Isaac Bashevis Singer, and Gustave Flaubert), "I love the literature these men created but I will not live my life as if they are real and I am not." And she proclaims, "Given the structure of power politics and capital in Amerika, it is ridiculous to expect the federal government to act in the interests of the people." Any of these sentences (barring the conscientious misspelling of America) and many others would be right at home in our current discourse. Reading them can make you feel like Dworkin, had she lived until today, would be doing some form of victory lap.

But the sections from *On Pornography* and *Intercourse* are a reminder of all she didn't win. When I encounter women discussing porn these days, it's as a helpful marital aide or fun diversion. The kind of mainstream pop feminists who would hesitate to recommend a mascara that wasn't "cruelty-free" have no problem sharing porn faves. Dworkin's vision of an anti-porn left lost profoundly to her pro-porn comrades, but nowadays there's hardly even an anti-porn right. Instead there's a pro-porn White House and the rest of us seem unable or unwilling to judge. "Pornography is the holy corpus of men who would rather die than change," Dworkin writes. Men who would rather die than change seem to be running the world, while some of the rest of us try to see if we can imagine a sexual ethics more noble and sweeping

than "well, she didn't say no at the time" and/or "we paid cash."

The difficulty of articulating such a noble and sweeping sexual ethics, however, can be seen in the selections from *Intercourse*, which are by turns reasonable and bizarre. Dworkin's basic point was not, as her critics had it, that all heterosexual sex is rape, but that the experience of sexual intercourse varies according to one's respective biological reality. This revelation is sane enough and mundane enough that I once heard sex columnist Dan Savage express a variation of it on a parenting podcast. ("If every time you said 'yes' to sex, you got f****d, you would say yes less often.")

But Dworkin's insistence on the primacy of intercourse as the defining feature of female life is where she loses me. Again and again, she describes the mechanism of heterosexual sex as the crucial fact that shapes us, as women, forever: "Intercourse remains a means or the means of physiologically making a woman inferior, communicating to her cell by cell her own inferior status, impressing it on her, burning it into her by shoving it into her, over and over."

I get what she means, but that's not the story I would tell about my own body and how it shaped my politics.

Nothing I have experienced in the realm of sex, personally, has radicalized me half as much as getting pregnant, bearing children, and being a mother. Dworkin sees women as being, in essence, the space which is entered and violated. But we are also, in birth, the space which is exited, and let me tell you, that's no picnic either, particularly in "Amerika." Trying to find health insurance while pregnant and being told that I had a disqualifying "pre-existing condition" communicated to me my inferior status far more powerfully than intercourse ever did. The primacy of Dworkin's lived reality shapes her world and the fact that she chose not to have children shapes it, too. For her, womanhood begins—but also ends—in the heterosexual sex act itself, not any of its varied consequences.

Overall Dworkin's attitudes toward motherhood in the book are, to be generous, mixed. She nods briefly to the importance of universal preschool, and she describes in passing the strong stay-at-home moms of her youth—but her hatred of her own mother and lionizing of her father permeate the latter half of the collection. She has strong positive memories of her father watching television news on Sunday mornings, debating the issues of the day, forming her intellect and moral character. Whether her mother was in bed resting her weak heart or doing the breakfast dishes while this was going on is left to the reader's imagination.

Dworkin died in 2005, at the age of fifty-eight from an inflamed heart. Controversial as always, she had spent the '90s as a fierce critic of Bill Clinton for his personal and political failings with women, a far-out stance at the time but one that seems far more defensible today than, say, Gloria Steinem's. Her life was one of provoking the many and inspiring the few, and maybe those lives are never easy or comfortable.

Dworkin's first selection in the book, from *Woman Hating* (1974), is her most hopeful and ambitious. She is young, she is bold, she's been hurt, but she knows what it will take to build an equal world. "One cannot be free, never, not ever, in an unfree world, and in the course of redefining family, church, power relations, all the institutions which inhabit and order our lives, there is no way to hold onto privilege and comfort," she writes.

Dworkin's last essay is the most painful to read. Titled *My Suicide*, it includes a description of her last sexual assault, the one that most people, including her friends, had a hard time believing. But it's also an apology of sorts, an admission that she is selfish. That she is a "trembling piece of shit." Dworkin wants women sexually, she has a "flat-out appetite now," but feels unable to touch them due to her own psychological limitations. "Touching is even harder than talking and I'm buried alive."

She feels like she let down young women. That the revolution she dreamed of is out of reach, partially at least, through her own failure. That she is "dull and tired and sick of life." She asks the God she sometimes believes in to forgive her for wanting to die. The idea that Dworkin's work could reach a new generation of feminists seems unimaginable, most of all to her.

Just as my journey to militant feminism was prompted by an offhand comment by a slightly older boy, my brush with Riot Grrrl was prompted by an offhand comment by a slightly older girl. I can't remember her name anymore, just the ease with which she asked, "Do you know L7?"

Through our brief acquaintance, I learned about zines and girl bands and the kind of feminism where you show your shaven legs through ripped tights. Two of the most iconic bands of this era were Hole and Bikini Kill, and they provided to me what I don't think anyone provided to Andrea Dworkin—a way to be angry and young and loud and female without having to be a French male poet. Courtney Love, the lead singer of Hole, famously played pornographer Larry Flynt's wife in the hagiographic film made about him. Kathleen Hanna from Bikini Kill started another band called Le Tigre with Johanna Fateman, one of the editors of *Last Days at Hot Slit*.

I hadn't heard of Dworkin in middle school, but even after I heard of her, I didn't read her until this collection showed up on my doorstep. All the same, I was living in a world that she described and helped create. A world that's changing, in some ways. A world where a woman still can't write about her ideas without writing about her body. ■

Dorothy Fortenberry *is a playwright and screenwriter. She just finished her third season as a writer and producer on Hulu's award-winning adaptation of* The Handmaid's Tale. *Her essays have been featured in publications including* Real Simple, Pacific Standard, *and the* Los Angeles Review of Books.

Anthony Domestico

Elegy Season

Possessed by Memory
The Inward Light of Criticism
Harold Bloom
Knopf, $35, 544 pp.

I'm almost certainly the only student in the history of the Ashland Public School System to dress up as Harold Bloom for Career Day. I was in fifth grade and my look was carefully curated: a big baggy sweater and a pair of khaki pants, intentionally tousled hair, with a copy of Bloom's 1994 *The Western Canon* in hand. A more ridiculous image of my kid self is hard to imagine.

To be clear, I wasn't really a Bloom fan at the tender age of eleven. My dad had bought *The Western Canon*, that rare book of literary criticism that became a national bestseller, and I'd excitedly, confusedly read it from start to finish. I didn't understand much of what Bloom had to say. What was this "School of Resentment" that he so frequently railed against? Who were these "New Historicists" who were "attempting to reduce and scatter Shakespeare"? And what the hell did a sentence like this mean: "But the real me, the me myself, is not only a known realm but the faculty of knowing, something close to the Gnostic capacity to know even as one is known"?

Yet despite my inability to follow most of Bloom's arguments, I knew that I wanted to know what he knew, to love all those writers (Dante and Chaucer, Dickinson and Pessoa) that he loved, to feel as passionately about poems and novels and plays as he did. The greatest future I could imagine was one in which I got to read all day long, and Harold Bloom—garrulous, brilliant, pompous, impossibly well-read Harold Bloom—was what I thought a professional reader looked like.

My relationship to Bloom's work has changed over the years, as have my tastes. (If I had to dress up as a critic now, I'd probably choose Patricia Lockwood.) There's much that I admire about Bloom: his leaping, associative mind, sensitive to how one poet's words or soul might rhyme with another's; his defense of the aesthetic as the primary criterion by which to judge art; above all, his sense that deep reading is "the proper use of one's own solitude." I've come to find other traits less admirable: some merely annoying (his tendency to repeat himself), some maddening (his sloppy argumentation; his frequently self-pitying stance that imagines the world is out to get him and readers like him). Still, I agree with William Giraldi's assessment of Bloom's achievement: "No other American critic since Emerson has done more than Harold Bloom to make literary comment as artful, as creative, as *dynamic*, as the literature it aims to assess."

You'd need to be a Bloomian reader—that is to say, impressively committed and impossibly fast—to have kept up with his output since that Career Day: more than a dozen books, many edited anthologies, more than a few critical introductions. Now, we have his latest, *Possessed by Memory: The Inward Light of Criticism*. Checking in at over five hundred pages, it contains thoughts on Shakespeare (of course: after all, Bloom famously wrote a book entitled *Shakespeare: The Invention of the Human*), on Kabbalah, on Browning and Dickinson and Swinburne and Milton and the Psalmist and many, many others.

Bloom's publishers promise that this is "arguably his most personal and lasting book," a synthesizing tome that recontextualizes his sixty years as a critic. Similar claims have been made for 2015's *The Daemon Knows*, and 2011's *The Anatomy of Influence*, and 2004's *Where Shall Wisdom Be Found*. We're continually being told to appreciate Bloom's latest since this might be the final word from our era's Samuel Johnson. Jump to next year, when another five-hundred-page book rolls off the presses.

But *Possessed by Memory* really is a kind of valediction. In the first sentence of his first chapter, Bloom writes, "As I near the end of my eighties, I am aware of being in the elegy season." This book dwells in the elegy season from its first to its last page, and it concerns itself throughout with ends: the end of friendships (Bloom mentions dozens of poets and critics whom he has loved and lost) and the end of Bloom's own life.

STEPHEN PARKER / ALAMY STOCK PHOTO

Harold Bloom

Many of the book's chapters are short, more brief reflection than sustained argument, and hardly a chapter goes by without an intimation of Bloom's own mortality: "I lose old friends every month or so now. Consolation is difficult to find, but elegiac poetry helps."

The style of *Possessed by Memory* is recognizably late Bloom. There are sharp close readings (in "Possessions," Hart Crane "builds his poem on substantives and verbal forms of counting") interspersed with passages that can verge on poetry mad-libs: "No one would want to chant the Passion of Wallace Stevens or William Carlos Williams. Yet it is possible to speak of the Passion of T. S. Eliot. Again above all others, we can affirm the Passion of Hart Crane." As with most things Bloom, this obsessive finding of poetic affiliation can be exhausting. But it can also be illuminating, as when he writes of the American poet Amy Clampitt that she "loved Gerard Manley Hopkins, himself a superb amalgam of Keats and Walt Whitman." Such a sentence helps us understand Clampitt anew, hearing Hopkins's music in a line like "the scree-slope of what at high tide," and it begins to sketch an idiosyncratic poetic family tree: from Keats to Whitman to Hopkins to Clampitt. Bloom never sees writers in isolation but always in constellation, and these constellations are often dazzling.

At least half the text in *Possessed by Memory* is quotation; the book is as much Bloom sharing poetry as it is his writing about poetry. The coda, "In Search of Lost Time," moves deftly between Proust, Augustine, Flaubert, Stendhal, Vermeer, and many others, offering a history of Bloom's own readerly life. Of its thirty-six pages, roughly twenty-four are block quotations. At times, it seems as if Bloom quotes so much and at such great length because he can't bear to silence his favorite writers; they resound in his own inner ear and he wants them to resound for his readers too. At other times, though, it seems that he quotes so much and at such great length because he can't be bothered to decide where to cut things off.

Bloom has never been afraid to write himself into his criticism. But in this book the personal is more personal. Bloom continually reminds us and himself of his failing body: the falls he's experienced and the recoveries they've demanded; the CT scans and fainting fits and restless nights. "Terrible sleeper as I am," he writes, "I lie awake and chant to myself the concluding eight lines of Shelley's ode."

Throughout his career, Bloom has imagined literature as a form of *agon*—which is to say, as a deeply felt, sometimes loving, sometimes bitter conversation conducted across time and space. *Possessed by Memory* is perhaps most moving as a history of the conversations that Bloom has had about literature: conversations with poets like Richard Wilbur and Peter Cole, with critics like Helen Vendler and Geoffrey Hartman. In one excellent chapter, Bloom describes what he calls the American Sublime: the "longing for an unfallen American Adam and Eve," the poetic and religious "hope of moving beyond limits" found in Emerson, Melville, and others. Bloom addresses this literary history through personal history: his friendship with the late scholar Angus Fletcher. "In the end," Bloom writes, "the loving agon between Angus and me turned on the nature of the American sublime." Fletcher, despite his interest in the visionary impulse of Whitman, "urged caution lest all Enlightened measure and balance break." Bloom, by contrast, saw the best American writing "break[ing] measure and balance, in order to restore the image of the fully human."

The chastened sublime versus the unbounded sublime: it's a fascinating critical argument, and Bloom enfolds it within a moving account of his own relationship with Fletcher. Bloom locates their disagreement in biography and sensibility: "Only now, after Angus's death, have I begun to understand a crucial difference between us. I have never been at home in the natural world. Angus, who spent his childhood and youth sailing around Long Island, was always alert to environmental splendors and the possibility we would lose them." Bloom suggests that this sense of imminent loss led to Fletcher's valuing of order and balance, his privileging of "the great poems of natural limits." Bloom, feeling no such tie to the natural world, loves best those poems that "at their strongest verge on transcendence." Here, in four pages, we get a sharp reading of the history of American aesthetics, a suggestive argument about the relationship between biography and criticism, and a condensed history of a friendship that is beautiful on its own terms: "I cannot accept that [Angus] is gone. When I write, read, and teach, he is with me."

"This book," Bloom writes in his introduction, "is reverie and not argument." (One could say the same of many of Bloom's books, but never mind.) Yet that statement about Fletcher—that when Bloom writes and reads and teaches his friend is with him—does present an argument of sorts, an argument about the ability of poems and friends and memories to possess us, to live on and through and with us. "When you have a poem by heart," Bloom writes, "you possess it more truly and more strangely than you do your own dwelling place, because the poem possesses you." The reader makes a home for the poem; then, she finds herself at home in the poem.

Early in *Possessed by Memory*, Bloom describes the intensity of his childhood reading: "When I was very young, I read poems incessantly because I was lonely and somehow must have believed they could become people for me." Bloom claims that this "vagary could not survive maturation." His career suggests otherwise. "Out of the Cradle Endlessly Rocking," "Ode to a Nightingale": these poems have taken on life for Bloom, and he's lived and talked with them for years. Say what you will about Harold Bloom. He has loved literature deeply—and that love is, even in the face of death, a life-giving force. ■

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Sarah Ruden

Untranslatable or Unrelatable?

The Art of Bible Translation

Robert Alter
Princeton University Press, $24.95, 127 pp.

As I made my way through the first chapter ("The Eclipse of Bible Translation") of Robert Alter's new book, I kept falling into excitedly twitching agreement—which was embarrassing, because I was on a plane at the time. Alter, famous for his own renderings of Classical Hebrew in English, laments that "attention to the literary aspects of the Bible, which are essential to understanding it, plays no role at all in [modern biblical scholars'] training," and that "the translators consequently proceed as if the Bible had no style at all...."

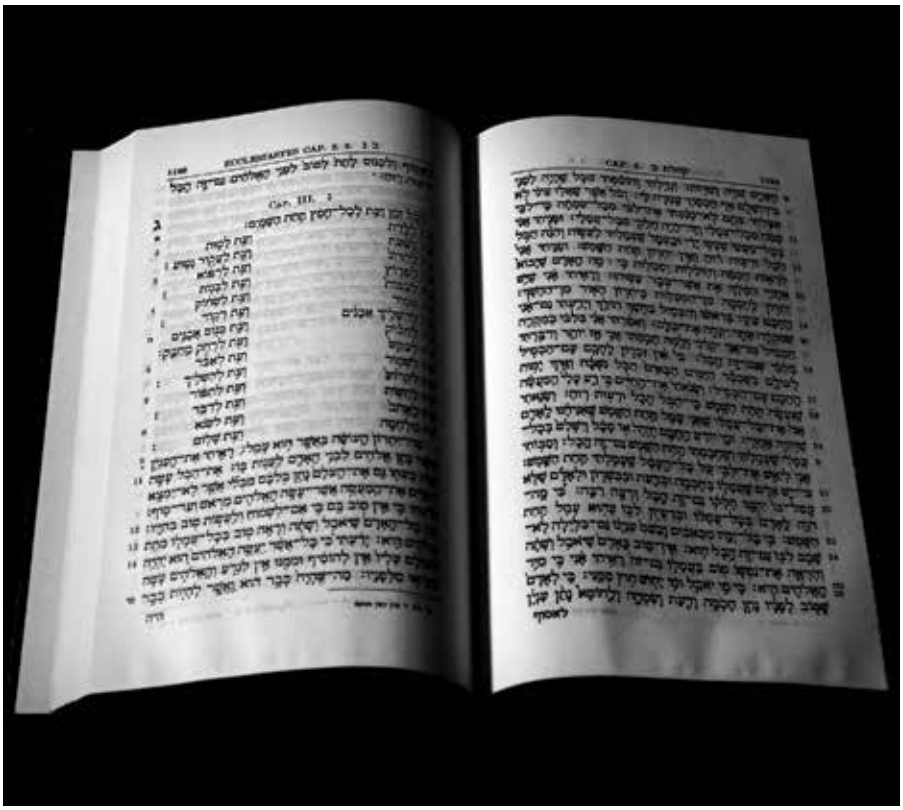
That repeated "at all" suggests an endearing despair. Alter's chief complaint should be sympathetic to everyone familiar with the original languages, as well as to any thoughtful and curious reader of translations. In Britain and America, the Bible has not been cogently translated so much as wantonly Englished. I can hear the very offenders agreeing in part but pleading that they did their best: English is a strange, almost incomparable language, and any kind of artistic bridging over to it is going to be unsatisfactory.

Though readily acknowledging this fact, Alter lays out a program for improvement. He gives clear, well-selected explanations of how the Hebrew Bible works, from phrase to phrase, as a performative means of communication. His subsequent chapter titles neatly set up the topics: "Syntax," "Word Choice," "Sound Play and Word Play," "Rhythm," and "The Language of Dialogue." His policies are, on their face, unexceptionable. Linguistic phenomena *should* be replicated in the target language to the extent possible. The resonant expressiveness of modern English authors brought up to the sounds of traditional, poetic Bible translations *is* a good guide for further translation.

But as I surveyed Alter's actual demonstrations, his persuasiveness dimmed. I don't think the fault is his. My imagination and my memory joined in making me wonder whether American civilization right now actually could foster anything in the spirit of the original Bible. We are utterly unlike defeated Judah under the weird, saving sponsorship of the Persians, and even more unlike the early Christians in the shadow—whether sheltering or threatening—of the Roman monolith. We are an absurdly successful, materialistic, late-imperial society, with bright, pixelated luxuries of individual autonomy and self-esteem. How could we think the way the Bible does, or aim where it aims? In particular, what would motivate us to throw ourselves into the arms of an immense Otherness, an act at the heart of both monotheism and supreme artistic creation?

During the first years of post-apartheid South Africa, a time of supreme risk and resounding change, when practical possibilities fell through but spiritual challenges remained, I witnessed breathtaking synthetic art forms, especially dance and music. Performers with a blend of classical, indigenous, and modernist training stunned us with the truth of their message: we were all in peril together and would be saved by love or nothing. Such unity, demonstrating to both artist and audience that they can be—must be—more than their separate selves, or clans, or even nations, is the essence of the Bible. Where do we get that sensibility in the United States now, except by a disaster we must pray to avoid?

Absent that sensibility, our literary culture is mechanical, proprietary, and self-congratulatory—not an all-or-nothing dance before the Lord, but more like



a form to fill out or a cliché drama to download, binge, and imitate. Such a learned and accomplished translator as Alter is not immune from formula. He almost always places the correct values in an equation, but it sometimes seems he has not looked critically at his results. Though Alter's overriding confidence in his professional expertise and judgment are nothing unusual nowadays, the Bible demands more.

He goes so far as to dismiss a well-established means of linking worlds, namely the "dynamic equivalence" by which missionary translators adapt their purposes to the alien cultures in which they labor. A famous instance: a certain African audience would understand the palm branches placed on the road as an insult to Jesus, not as a tribute to him. The translated text therefore needs to state that branches were *removed* from the road. The cultural gap may seldom be so dramatic, but in the domain of humor it is constant, and one cost among many of skimming over it instead of accommodating it is flat characterization: speakers who are warm and funny in the original text are dull and pompous in translations. More sweepingly, to read such a text, no matter how much fun it was to the original audience, is a chore.

The problem comes to a head when Alter has wordplay to deal with. The Bible contains a great many instances, most of them key to the initial vividness of narratives and teachings, and hardly any of them honored by standard translations, except by explanations in footnotes. But to reproduce the word-play requires strain and ingenuity, and often a departure from the inherent qualities of the Hebrew. Because Alter maintains as a sort of checklist certain rhythms and word orders, a pristine simplicity and physicality of expression, and other characteristic modes of Hebrew, he is remarkably quick—for a literary translator—to dismiss the jokes as "untranslatable."

Going through his long series of word-play problems, again and again I found myself disputing his verdict of untranslatability. For example, Alter writes:

> Here are two lines of double word play from Zephaniah (2:4) that altogether resist transference to English. The literal sense of the line is "For Gaza shall be abandoned / and Ashkelon a desolation. // Ashdod at noon shall be banished / and Ekron be uprooted." The dire fate of these Philistine cities is clear enough in the English, but what is not visible is how this prophecy is reinforced by a kind of fusion of words. The Hebrew for "Gaza shall be abandoned is '*azah 'azuvah* and for "Ekron be uprooted" is '*eqron te'aqer*…. It is hard to imagine how this could possibly be conveyed in English.

In fact, these lines are even more intricate than Alter shows (not that he can be blamed for failing to show everything—that job would be endless): there is plenty of alliteration and other sound play binding the second and third geographical elements into the grand poetic scheme, so that the translation problem is even harder than he suggests. But why leave the problem abandoned like these cities? What about this little experiment?

> For Gaza shall be abandoned land,
> And Ashkelon a town thrown down;
> Ashdod at noonday a displaced place,
> And Ekron torn entirely from the ground.

Alter would no doubt object that this is too unlike Hebrew literary language, whose power subsists in a few spare syllables, and whose very nature eschews wordy elaboration. He may be right, but even if he is, this wouldn't strike me as a reason to give up on the search for a properly synthetic, beautiful, persuasive new version of the lines. What I'm less sure about is whether it's still in our culture to make the passionate longing for a God of everyone intelligible. That is where the Bible as a great book, and subsequent great versions of the Bible, came from. ■

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Felix Robertson

The Other Place

Hell and Damnation

A Sinner's Guide to Eternal Torment

Marq de Villiers

University of Regina Press, $18.95, 351 pp.

The Basilique Cathédrale Sainte-Cécile d'Albi is a terrifying place, even before you get to the Doom painting. Situated in the otherwise charmingly quaint medieval town of Albi, about fifty miles west of Toulouse, the cathedral is something of an aesthetic slap in the face—an eight-cylinder engine dropped in the middle of a Playmobil set. This is partly due to its size. Despite being more than five hundred years old, Albi Cathedral remains to this day quite possibly the largest brick building in the world, nearly 260 feet tall and 115 feet wide and holding the largest Gothic nave in the whole of France. It's an intimidating presence.

Its history doesn't help either. Built between 1282 and 1480, it stands as a grim monument to the butchery that was the Albigensian Crusade, the merciless persecution of the Cathar heresy (named for the large number of Cathars who resided in Albi) by Pope Innocent III in the twelfth century. The war left bloody scars across southern France—most notably in the siege of Béziers, where nearly twenty thousand people were killed—and all but extinguished Catharism in France. Albi Cathedral itself was built partly at the instigation of Bernard de Castanet, inquisitor of the Languedoc, as a testimony to the church's dominance. This explains its brutal, warlike design. Stephen O'Shea, in *The Perfect Heresy*, describes it as the architectural equivalent of a "bellow," echoing down over seven hundred years, still quite audible today.

And then, of course, there's the Doom painting. Situated below the organ, the fresco, once at least two hundred meters square, reveals all too clearly what was on the minds of those who built this great monument to institutional power. It depicts the Last Judgment, the coming of Christ in glory to judge the living and the dead—and judge he does. True, there is salvation and joy, but it's distant and inaccessible, way up in the heights of the cathedral. What's really on show here, of course, is what the poor viewer can see at ground level. Hell is depicted in all its fiery glory: miserable sinners are tormented by ghoulish contraptions, while demons pull and tear. It's almost funny in its dreadful cartoon style, but it's also completely terrifying.

When we think of hell now, it tends to be in a rather abstract or historical sense. Hell as a physical place is largely relegated to the realm of fundamentalist sects—a threat printed on a sign by the Westboro Baptist Church. It is ripe for parody (one is reminded of *Cold Comfort Farm*'s Amos Starkadder declaring to the Church of the Quivering Brethren, "There is no butter in Hell!") but of limited theological weight in the present age. At any rate, there's little mention of hell in most Catholic churches today. Last year it was widely reported that Pope Francis had expressed doubt about the very existence of hell (Vatican officials quickly denied this). Many Christians seem willing to accept an abstract conception of hell—of being without God, of rejecting love and happiness. But as the Albigensian Doom painting clearly shows, this wasn't always the way most Christians thought of hell. It's fair to say that for most of the church's history, most be-

HEMIS / ALAMY STOCK PHOTO

Detail from the Doom painting in the Basilique Cathédrale Sainte-Cécile d'Albi

lievers understood hell to be not just a condition but a *place* threatening all too physical pains.

The exact details remained pretty sketchy. The nature, location, and contents of hell all varied significantly across different periods and religions. Most people would place hell somewhere below their feet, but this wasn't always a given. In 1729, Tobias Swinden, in his memorably titled *An enquiry into the nature and place of hell*, placed it in the middle of the sun, since this was the hottest and most remote place that could be imagined. Hell, it seems, is full of surprises.

Nowhere is this made clearer than in Marq de Villiers's new book *Hell and Damnation: A Sinner's Guide to Eternal Torment*. He discusses in meticulous detail everything that one could plausibly wish to know about hell, and quite a lot one couldn't. De Villiers opens with a brief discussion of where the idea of hell originated, but quickly plunges into the real business of Dis, replete with fire, brimstone, boiling oil, chains, bodily effluent, and, if you're unlucky enough to end up in the Zoroastrian hell, hedgehogs inserted into some very undesirable places. The senior management team is also discussed, who does what to whom, and when. It turns out some hells have much better management hierarchies than others. While the Hindu hell is "largely self-governed," in the Roman underworld you are neatly allocated to the proper region, and in the Chinese Buddhist hell there's even a registrar to file your paperwork, though you can expect to wait in line for a very, very long time.

De Villiers also provides a deeply entertaining compendium of "eyewitness accounts," and it's here that the impressive scope of his research shines through. While the expected cast of Dante, Apollo, and Hercules are all present and correct, de Villiers also introduces us to a magnificent range of lesser-known hellgoers, often as weird and wonderful as the hells they visit. We journey with Governor Kwoh, the seventeenth-century governor of the Sichuan province, on his personal tour of all ten circles of Buddhist hell (tea included), and enjoy a merry romp through the bloody, divine intrigue of *The Epic of Gilgamesh*. We even make a brief detour to heaven, which, it turns out, is rather dull as far as descriptions go, and, as de Villiers suggests, displays a certain "poverty of invention," especially compared to the lurid depictions of hell.

There is certainly much to enjoy in this book. Despite being relatively short, it is impressively researched, making a conscious effort to discuss not only Christian ideas of hell, but also Muslim, Buddhist, Hindu, and Classical depictions. Attention is also paid to the near absence of hell in some religions, most notably Judaism. The prose itself is sparkling and light, bouncing ably through continents and centuries. De Villiers is also a very funny tour guide, and his wry, sardonic quips certainly make for an entertaining read. Who knew that reading about torture by "sword-leaf tree" could be such good fun?

Still, one might reasonably hope for something more than good fun in a book about hell; if so, one will likely be disappointed by *Hell and Damnation*. De Villiers is certainly successful in cramming in a dizzying range of hellish ideas and interpretations, but he moves at such a breakneck speed that you've barely covered one topic before being whisked away to the next. This severely limits the depth of analysis. It is fascinating to be reminded, for example, just how lavish the Book of Revelation's description of heaven is, but De Villiers neatly sidesteps even a cursory discussion of the rich theology and instead rushes on to Judaism. Admittedly, the theology of Revelation doesn't lend itself to succinct summarization, but it is strange to be given so many descriptions and yet be told virtually nothing about what they might mean. As we proceed through an endless battery of texts, the book starts to feel like a compendium of (surprisingly anachronistic) translations rather than a thorough discussion of hell. Entertaining, yes, but also intellectually unsatisfying.

Even the epilogue, where De Villiers attempts a more discursive style, raises more problems than it solves. It tries to cover far too many issues in too little time, dealing not only with the modern concept of hell, but also attempting a discussion of theodicies and even arguments for the existence of God. These issues are relevant, of course, but it's a pity they've all been shoehorned into the last few pages rather than integrated in the main body of the book. Trying to distill the entire history of theodicies into two pages of bullet points feels, well, just a bit silly. Here the author reminds one of a student racing against the clock to cram a few extra points into a half-baked exam essay. The epilogue also shifts the tone from healthily irreverent and skeptical to aggressively anti-religious. By the end, De Villiers seems determined to prove that all religious faith is irrational, not just a belief in hell. He blithely dismisses grossly simplified arguments for the existence of God (the entire argument from design gets barely a paragraph). After the sweeping scope of historical and theological research on display in the rest of the book, the epilogue feels like a real letdown.

Still, there's a lot to enjoy here. *Hell and Damnation* is entertaining, broad, and engrossing. Despite De Villiers's rather crude religion-bashing, he ends on a salient point. Historical evidence, from the misery of the Albigensian Crusade to the horrors of the Holocaust, suggests that humanity is capable of wreaking just as much torment as any demon or vengeful deity. Pope Francis has said that "hell is wanting to be distant from God's love." If this is true, hell is surely more to be seen in the actions of the Albigensian inquisitors—as far removed from the love of God as it is possible to be—than in the didactically horrifying Doom painting they commissioned. ■

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Katherine Lucky

Gather 'Round

Orange World and Other Stories
Karen Russell
Knopf, $25.95, 288 pp.

Any review of Karen Russell's new story collection, *Orange World*, has to begin with its wildly imaginative premises. Two runaway friends take a ski lift to a lodge populated by gold-eyed ghosts. A woman is infected by a Joshua tree. An island surgeon who operates on the dead is accused of malfeasance by his upper-class apprentice. A farmer breeds and sells tornadoes. A boy falls in love with a mummy unearthed from boggy peat. A family of sisters paddle through post-apocalyptic New Florida in gondolas. Creatures are everywhere: Madame Bovary's greyhound; a demon in a gutter, suckling a young mother's milk in exchange for the protection of her infant. But maybe by now we shouldn't be surprised. Russell's 2011 novel *Swamplandia*, which was nominated for a Pulitzer Prize, follows a family of alligator wrestlers. Her debut collection contains the story of *St. Lucy's Home for Girls Raised by Wolves* (2006); another collection puts *Vampires in the Lemon Grove* (2013).

What also distinguishes the tales in *Orange World* is their refreshingly slow pace. Each of these rather long short stories—only eight in almost three-hundred pages—takes its time, allowing those strange ideas to unfold and assume a discernible logic. We learn in "The Tornado Auction" that tornadoes are sold as demolition tools or amusement park rides. They are housed in "incubators"; a detailed explanation of tornado breeding includes "condensation," "two vortices," a "mesocyclone." In "The Gondoliers," the girls navigate via echolocation because "satellites have been down for half a century." Algae blooms around "bald mangroves" and "two-headed manatee calves." In "Bog Girl: A Romance," we discover that "sphagnum mosses wrap around fur, wood, skin, casting their spell of chemical protection." "The Bad Graft" is set in a "season of wild ferment," with blossoms that "detonate" and "syringe-thin leaves" and pollen that "heaves." Russell's precise observation makes the implausible plausible: the Joshua tree's "spirit is absorbed into the migrating consciousness" of animals or hikers who walk on a "fushia ledge of limestone," while tarantulas and lizards watch with "gluey eyes." Even the strangest stories work; they aren't weird just for the sake of being weird. In "Black Corfu," the surgeon-to-the-dead makes sure to sever each cadaver's hamstring, "the umbilicus that tethers a corpse to our spinning world"—this crucial step keeps a body from becoming a wandering zombie. We sense an eager author who's diligent about finding and marshalling just the right details, who's actually interested in medicine, history, and botany. Her research authenticates her voice and the worlds she conjures.

But Russell is also a master of pacing, and so she pulls back when she needs to, never providing *too* much information all at once. In "Bog Girl," the mother of Cillian, the teenage protagonist, is worried. Is her son getting intimate with his dead girlfriend behind the closed door of his bedroom? There's a general unease, a creepiness, that Russell lets linger. The haunted lodge in "The Prospectors" is "another New Deal Miracle," made of ponderosa pine; we know why it was built and by whom, as we know of its "calliope" of flavored liquors and "edelweiss white" quilts. But the big mystery—these ghosts might not know that they're dead—doesn't quite get solved: "So they knew, or almost knew; or they'd buried the knowledge.... Who can say what the dead do and do not know?" In "The Gondoliers," it's not clear when or how the big storm occurred. The girls' echolocation (they sing eerie songs that bounce off debris) doesn't seem as if it could be an effective navigational tool, so Russell relies on the painstaking beauty of her prose to win readers' trust. The girls "navigate the margins with breath and bones... absorb the echoes into our skeletons." What exactly does that mean? We don't

DAN HAWK

Karen Russell

care. Russell senses that explanation would slow her narrative. And narrative is always central. These are tingling ghost stories, shivering with suspense. Will the farmer get his crop? Will the baby survive? Will the woman beat the virus?

Russell knows how to generate suspense from emotional tension as well. In "Madame Bovary's Greyhound," she draws Flaubert's familiar heroine into fresh drama. While her pet dog sniffs and eats, Emma is "drinking vinegar in black stockings" and "checking her gaunt face in mirrors," shopping and flower-arranging and cheating. The story advances not toward a new conclusion, but toward a new emotional truth about self-absorption and loss. Even after Emma and her dog "had forgotten entirely about the other...they retained the same peculiar vacancies within their bodies and suffered the same dread-filled dreams. Love...went spoiling through them with no outlet." We read to know what happens to the dog, but also to discover something fresh about Emma's psychology—how she loves this pet might tell us about how she loves Charles. How Karen Russell interprets *Madame Bovary* is itself reason enough to turn pages.

Russell makes her stories yet more engrossing, and accessible, by playing them out as archetypal dramas: first love, teenage rebellion, friends in conflict, the grief and the restlessness that follows retirement. There's the unknowability of a partner, the desperate adoration of new motherhood, and women judging other women. These are recognizable dynamics, and Russell traces them delicately, like a meteorologist tracking a shifting storm. Indeed, she often uses the term "weathers"; internal and external climes—influenced by history, hormones, and yes, actual climate—are always in flux and exerting influence. She tracks patterns of jealousy, panic, madness, doubt, selfishness. In "Orange World," a mother makes a deal with the devil because "she was a terrible negotiator...one had to earn one's keep here on planet Earth." As a child, the mother "soundlessly absorbed" abuse: "she didn't seem to have a gag reflex." Now, she'll suckle in the gutter to protect her own baby from harm. Cillian loves the bog girl because he imagines "the narrow life they would lead...no children, no sex, no messy nights vomiting outside bars...no betrayals, no surprises, no broken promises, no promises"—a clean-lined fantasy for an immature teenager. A gondolier swims in toxic sludge to escape her older sisters: "Their entire life before my birth is a secret to me. Whereas everything I've ever done has been visible to them." With all the pressure systems explained, readers somehow *get* why Cillian loves the bog girl; why the surgical apprentice betrays his master; why the farmer wants one last tornado to spin; why the gondolier dives into waste.

Russell is committed to telling others' stories in a way that makes their otherness less jarring or foreign. Her narrative sensibility is almost nurturing, and her narrators are diverse: men and women, old and young, prehistoric and contemporary, from coasts, suburbs, and prairies. Russell writes in the voice of a black male doctor, who lives on an island in a long-ago era and speaks another language. In the title story, we're presented with a character who could be Russell herself: a new mother, married; living in Portland, Oregon; a member of the parenting club at the Milk and Honey Co-op. Still, this mother is different from Russell. We learn that the woman's sick grandmother lives on "the other side of the globe"; we infer that she has recent immigrant roots, but this is conveyed subtly, convincingly.

If the stories in *Orange World* were novels instead, they might lose their magic—enchantment resides in their transient settings, quickly cultivated trust, scarcity filled with rich, perfect language. And yes: those premises. Thrilling enough to be told around campfires, Karen Russell's stories are also like fables that teach us how to approach life's vicissitudes: with curious compassion, even delight. ■

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Ingrid Rowland

The Critic as Photobomber

Heaven on Earth
Painting and the Life to Come
T. J. Clark
Thames & Hudson, $34.95, 256 pp.

T. J. Clark's latest book, *Heaven on Earth: Painting and the Life to Come*, attempts to understand the troubling present by examining works of art from the past. The authors of these paintings range from Giotto in the early fourteenth century to Picasso in the mid-twentieth, passing through two near-contemporaries from the latter half of the sixteenth century, the Flemish master Pieter Bruegel and the Venetian Paolo Veronese, and the seventeenth-century Frenchman Nicolas Poussin, who spent much of his career in Rome. Clark, a professor emeritus of art history at the University of California, Berkeley, brings to his latest study a penetrating eye for detail and a formidable level of culture. The book also benefits greatly from its generous complement of high-quality color illustrations. What it really needs, however, is editing, both of content and of execution, the kind of editing the author admires, and analyzes so perceptively, in the Italian painter Giotto and in the Baroque master Nicolas Poussin.

Thoroughly capable of painting elaborate surfaces in meticulous detail, Giotto stripped his landscapes, his architecture, and his figures to the essentials he needed to communicate—not his own virtuosity, but a story, or sometimes simply a state of being. As Clark observes, Giotto's figure of Despair, a woman hanging herself, plumbs the depths of psychic desolation. In one of the most compelling passages of the book, he examines the landscape in which Giotto's fresco for the Arena Chapel in Padua has set the agonized exile Joachim, father of the Virgin Mary, calling attention to the warmth of the gray that colors this desert's pale, spiky crags, and how movingly they contrast with an intense but cool azure sky. Nature itself thus seems to add to Joachim's isolation and despair with all that bare expanse of rock and chill air, just at the moment when an angel materializes out of a smudge of nebulous pigment to bring the old man the "comfortable words" that will bring him home again.

Poussin, as Clark demonstrates, also stripped down his paintings to austere essentials, albeit amid a welter of visual citations from classical statues, ancient architecture, contemporary historical research, and fellow painters like Raphael. Clark lingers on the way the veiled half-figure of a woman hidden behind a column at the far left of Poussin's *Sacrament of Marriage* brings the whole picture to life with its mysterious presence, not to mention the shimmering intensity of the light that falls on her clothing. Here, he argues, Poussin uses the sparest of means, a half-figure and a column, to achieve spectacular effects not only with the visual impact of the painting, but also with its symbolism. Clark rightly points out that classical columns often stand in for the human figure in Renaissance and Baroque art, so that the half-image of the veiled woman is, in a sense, completed by her architectural counterpart. No photograph of Poussin's work, however, can capture one of the most surprising aspects of his paintings: all those columns, temples, and walls have been conjured up in brushstrokes that almost never hew to a straight line. What looks sharp-edged and severe from a distance transforms up close into

Giotto di Bondone, Scenes from the Life of Joachim: 5. Joachim's Dream, *circa 1303–1305*

soft dabs of paint. This refusal to take the easy way out of depicting a plane surface is another kind of editing on Poussin's part, or at least a deliberate, fascinating artistic choice.

Clark also admires the power of restraint that Pieter Bruegel can command when he wants to. Best known for his crowded, riotous portrayals of life's pains and pleasures (from his joyously ribald *Peasant Wedding* to the shocking *Triumph of Death*), the Fleming could also sharpen his focus to acutely observed vignettes: five blind men following one another dutifully into a ditch; a group of lame men; a black-clad misanthrope being pickpocketed by a jolly thief; three gluttons sleeping off their excess on a hill of porridge in the Land of Cockaigne (see the cover of this issue), to whom Clark devotes particular and jovial attention. He argues, against some interpreters of Breugel, that the artist portrays the group of lame beggars with compassion rather than ridicule, and this seems right. Breugel's durable appeal lies precisely in the affectionate indulgence he shows his fellow creatures, especially when they are misbehaving, and in his outrage at the cruelty that struck so often, and with such savagery, in early modern lives. Clark compares the cycle of life for these peasants with the rounds of work and rest in the current Western world, contrasting the frenetic pace of contemporary consumption and recreation with the slower rhythms of a life linked closely to nature.

The discussion of four allegories of love by Paolo Veronese remains, by its author's admission, a series of detached individual observations, many of them made with a copy of John Ruskin in hand, who brings his untrammeled enthusiasms—for him, Veronese is "this man whose finger is as fire and whose eye is like the morning"—along with his peculiar points of view. Neither of them, however, gets anywhere near the heart of this painter, who told the Venetian Inquisition in 1572 that painters, like poets and madmen, should be granted a certain license. (He had put two drunken Germans and a dog in a painting of the Last Supper, and finally resolved the problem by writing "Banquet in the House of Levi" across the tablecloth.) Clark does not quite know where he wants to go with his discussion of crazy perspectives, jutting angles, and enigmatic human relations, except in one respect: his opposition to some of his colleagues in the art-historical world. One short rant ends with the confession, "I am being unkind."

In this remark and several others, as well as the final chapter in the book, about Picasso's *Fall of Icarus* at UNESCO headquarters in Brussels, Clark seems to be reaching for wise conclusions to this collection of essays. But the enterprise is inconclusive. The whole is less than the sum of its parts. He is too seasoned a polemicist to take a detached view, much as he admires that detachment in artists who have achieved pictorial wisdom, irrespective of what wisdom they might have achieved in daily life.

Despite his capacity to recognize and explicate the power of restraint in the Old Masters, Clark has not yet achieved Giotto's skill at paring down his own efforts, removing himself from the front and center of every discussion, channeling his displays of expertise. This *protagonismo*, as the Italians call it, is especially evident in his introduction and final chapter. Like the late Umberto Eco, who headed the chapters of his novels, ostentatiously, with polyglot epigraphs (ostentatiously, because he poached at least one of them from the Talmud without truly knowing Aramaic), Clark conveys an implicit assumption that no one who reads *Heaven on Earth* will really catch all the references to Bach, Proust, Ruskin, Beckett, Eliot, and Walter Burkert, just to name a few among the clouds of witnesses. If these references were truly meant to illuminate the reader rather than to cast a spotlight on the author, then he would have pruned their vast number and paused to explain the points of connection that suggested such references in the first place. In the process of weeding out and crafting explanations, Clark might also have reached a clearer understanding of his own intentions in drafting what remains an earnest but slightly bewildered text.

Walter Burkert provides an instructive example. Clark's final chapter, "For a Left with No Future," a confusing presence in itself for a book ostensibly about *Painting and the Life to Come*, contains the following paragraph:

That is: the various unlikely and no doubt dangerous voices I find myself drawing on in these notes—Nietzsche in spite of everything, Bradley on tragedy, Burkert's terrifying *Homo Necans*, Hazlitt and Bruegel at their most implacable, Moses Wall in the darkness of 1659, Benjamin in 1940—come up as resources for the Left only at a moment of true historical failure.

Taken as it is, the passage is about as clear as the Delphic oracle—that is, totally ambiguous. What "everything" is Nietzsche being absolved of this time around—something he wrote, or National Socialism, or the evolution of the Übermensch? A few pages later, Clark provides some citations from Nietzsche, A. C. Bradley (1851–1935), William Hazlitt (1778–1830), and John Milton's friend Moses Wall (1562–1623) to provide a few clues to why these authors in particular should be the ones to guide the Left through historical failure; and we have the chapter on Breugel to clue

Paolo Veronese, Happy Union*, circa 1575*

us in to why a painter would appear in a list among all these critics and philosophers. The meaning of "Benjamin in 1940" is clarified in the footnotes as having to do with that writer's massive *Arcades Project*.

But *Homo Necans* is an outlier, and clearly intended to be an outlier, the work of an eminent German classicist who combined anthropological research with close examination of ancient Greek literature to produce strikingly original theories about human society in general and the ancient Greeks and their rituals, including tragedy, in particular. First published in 1972, translated into English in 1983, *Homo Necans* is a spellbinding study about sacrifice, with tantalizing chapter headings like "Fish Advent," "Werewolves around the Tripod," and "The Comedy of Innocence." Clark's characterization of the work as "terrifying" draws upon the implications of Burkert's title, not Homo *sapiens*, the "wise" species of the genus "human," but Homo *necans*, "the killer."

Walter Burkert, however, was not only a scholar of profound learning (which he wore lightly) and infinite curiosity; he was also a man who could change his mind if the evidence so demanded, and by the 1990s he had changed his mind about his own masterwork. The anthropological studies he had found so fascinating as a young man, he realized, had been inspired to a disconcerting extent by National Socialist ideology, and thus he came to regard his own werewolves around the tripod with outright amusement. In what sense, then, are we to understand Clark's reference to *Homo Necans* as a resource for the Left? Or are we simply to marvel that an art historian has read *Homo Necans* at all? (Burkert was a visiting professor at Berkeley in 1988, when Clark first joined the faculty.) We are certainly meant to marvel that a single person can bring so many readings to bear on a single problem—but what is that problem exactly, the Left and its historical failings, or T. J. Clark's current dark night of the soul? The run-on sentence fails to specify, leaping from personal despair to a larger state of things. And that continuing lack of focus between individual and universal concerns is what gives rise to the chief confusions of *Heaven on Earth*. That, and the choice to ignore the existence of El Greco, who did paint Heaven as Heaven, phantasmagorically, in a fantastic new kind of topological space.

Walter Burkert was a scholar who could look at his own research with so relentlessly critical an eye (and generous a spirit) that he could finally set its various stages in their own time and place, looking back at the vagaries of his own trajectory with a twinkle in his eye. Clark has not yet reached that point with his own "radical" Marxist past, which has been accompanied all along by every comfort of high-end academe rather than proletarian struggle. It is this ambivalence about personal history that so consistently muddies the waters of *Heaven on Earth*, but there is another confusion working against its coherence as well. The book's basic premise is that Giotto, Veronese, Poussin, and Bruegel depicted otherworldly realms and otherworldly events by using down-to-earth imagery because at heart, like Clark himself, they put their faith in the phenomenal world rather than God. Clark returns repeatedly to his own atheism, for which he seeks, and finds, an echo in the painters he examines in *Heaven on Earth*. For all his acuity of vision, he keeps standing in front of the picture, every picture, the inveterate photobomber of his own perceptions. He would see everyone more clearly, himself included, if he would just move out of the way.

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The Problem with Lazarus

Meghan Sullivan

During Lent, Christians are asked to think much more concretely about our short, precarious lives. We swear off chocolate, alcohol, or, in my case, swearing itself. We spend more time in prayer, usually aiming for some divine help in addressing our sins. We try to be a little more mindful of the struggles of others, while reminding ourselves that our puny carbon-based bodies are destined for decay. This is all meant to be a preparation for Easter, when we celebrate the hope that there is a new, permanent life to come.

Even when it's not Lent, we Catholics are meant to be thinking hard about that new life. Every Sunday at Mass we publicly affirm the Nicene Creed, which ends: "I look forward to the resurrection of the dead and the life of the world to come." I feel disingenuous every time we get to these lines, because, frankly, I'm not looking forward to the life of the world to come. I love *this* life. And the more you delve into theology of the afterlife, the weirder and less exciting it seems. Thomas Aquinas says we can look forward to contemplating God forever. The biblical book of Revelation insists we'll get to help build the new Jerusalem with gold and jewels. On many Christian accounts, we will get new, unalterable bodies. We may or may not have free will or families. It is strongly suggested that there will be a lot of hymn singing. I want many things for my future: to take a major bike trip, write more philosophy books, and watch another season of *Game of Thrones*. Singing, city construction, and contemplation? Not currently in my plans. It is unclear that any of the hopes that guide and enrich my life now will be part of this life I am promised.

So is the core commitment of Christianity irrational? Many artistic treatments of the biblical Lazarus wrestle with this question. Lazarus was a friend of Jesus who fell ill suddenly and died. Jesus visited his tomb, wept, and then surprised everyone by bringing Lazarus back. Was Jesus really doing Lazarus a favor? What happened next? In his play *Calvary*, William Butler Yeats has the recently resurrected Lazarus complain to Christ: "Now you will blind with

Francesco Botticini, The Assumption of the Virgin, *1475–1476*

light the solitude that death has made; you will disturb that corner where I thought I might lie safe forever." In "Dig, Lazarus, Dig!" Australian rocker Nick Cave imagines immortal Lazarus aimlessly wandering the streets of present-day New York: "He never asked to be raised up from the tomb...I mean, no one ever actually asked him to forsake his dreams."

What's wrong with not caring about, or even refusing, the prospect of new life?

To think about the Lazarus Question like a philosopher, we have to consider how our present values and preferences *should* shape our hopes for the future. And this isn't just a question for Christians; it's a question all of us must wrestle with when we realize we may face medical crises, permanent shifts in our jobs or family structures, or other dramatic changes in our current lives.

And our attitudes toward change push us to think about how we should value really different lives. Most of us realize we ought to value differences in others, but when we think of ourselves, we tend to be heavily biased toward what is nearby, similar to the status quo, and under our control. These time biases explain why thirty-somethings like me are unmotivated to put money in a Roth IRA and why nearly all of us have a difficult time creating advanced directives. Evolution has wired us emotionally to pay less attention to the distant future, since options then are inherently riskier and because for much of our species's history, the most important options we had to consider were happening really soon (i.e. find food now!).

There are three questions we tend to focus on when we're trying to decide how to value very different futures for ourselves:

1) How different will the new life be from what currently gives your life value? Call this the difference question. You might think that the more intense the permanent change is, the less reason you have to prefer the new life.

2) Would the new life be worthwhile for you while you are in it? Call this the satisfaction question. You might think that your reasons to hope for a new life depend on your confidence that it will be a good one when it happens.

3) Can you accurately imagine now what it will be like in your new life? Call this the imagination question. You might think that you can only reason about the value of a new life if you can adequately envision what it will be like "from the inside."

Like many people, I get hung up on the difference and imagination questions when I try to think about heaven. But, rationally speaking, the only question that really matters is satisfaction. To see why this is, just consider the analogous decisions we have to make when deciding how to value our lives in the face of the more earthly changes. Suppose you develop a spinal tumor. Your options are to have a surgery that will render you quadriplegic or to let the disease end your life. What should you do?

You might get hung up on the difference question—so much of your life would change if you lost the use of your limbs. But then you discover there is excellent evidence that we are biased when it comes to anticipating the effect of disability on our well-being. There has been considerable work in social psychology on the so-called "disability paradox"—non-disabled people predict a significant decline in their quality of life were they to become disabled, but in fact many who are disabled report a quality of life that is comparable with the non-disabled. For instance, able-bodied individuals tend to be willing to pay more to avoid disability than disabled individuals are willing to pay to regain the relevant function. Various factors have been suggested as explaining these attitudes. Nefarious moral and social associations with disability limit our ability to imagine ourselves with disabled bodies. We tend to focus on some features of a changed state while ignoring others that would be relevant. We underestimate our abilities to adapt. Once we learn that individuals with these disabilities report high quality of life, we are rationally pressured to rethink our biases about the value of living with disability.

In disability scenarios we might likewise focus too much on the imagination question—I just can't imagine what it would be like to live a different sort of life, so I can't value that life. As soon as we formulate the principle we realize the trouble. There are all kinds of lives we can't imagine "from the inside" but we are quite confident they are valuable and would be great to have. I can't imagine what it would be like to be a champion rock climber, but I am sure that Alex Honnold's life is valuable. In fact, at many junctures in our own lives we had no idea how it would feel to live in the next chapter (as a married person, as a parent). But we could still tell the next chapter would be valuable, and that value was the basis for our hope.

Admittedly, there is little we can control about whether there is an afterlife. But we should wrestle with the question, and this is a topic where philosophical reasoning can give us back some of our humanity. Having values gives us power: the last shred of agency available to us when faced with catastrophes like death is deciding how we will greet it and why we hope what we do.

Moreover, there is a tendency to think that questions of rational religious belief are in principle unanswerable or significantly more difficult than the planning questions we face on Earth. But the same reasoning that encourages us to overcome our biases and plan better for our lives here also urges us to take an interest in what might come next. ■

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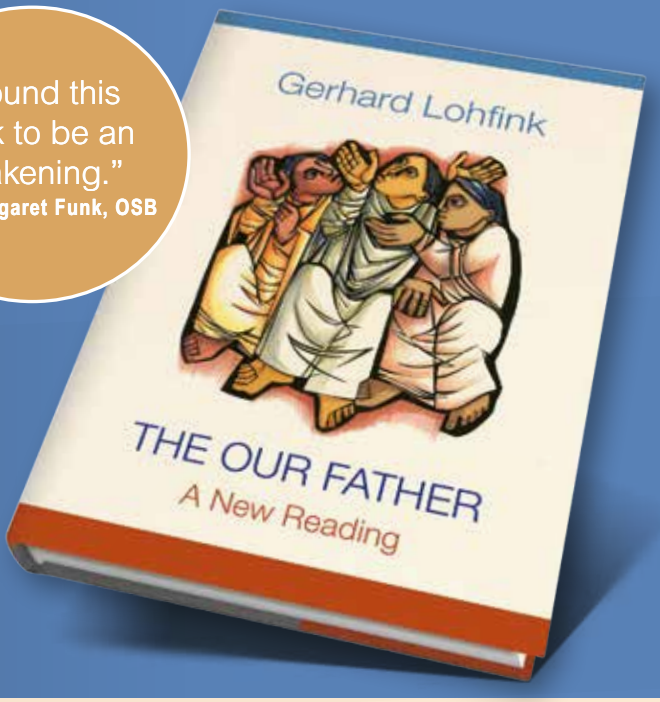

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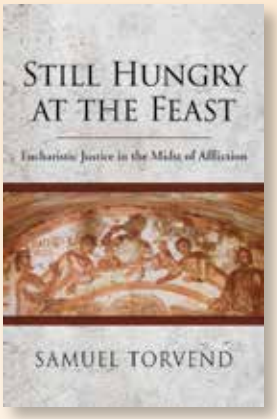

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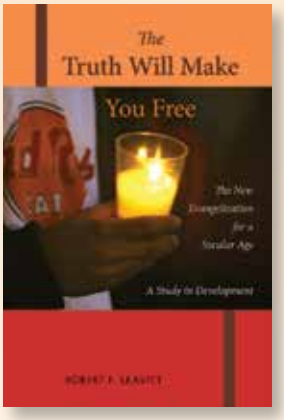

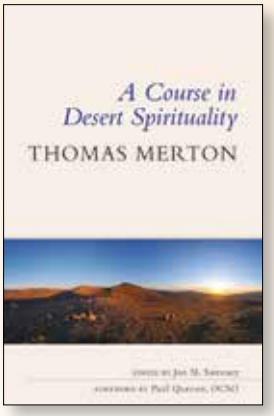

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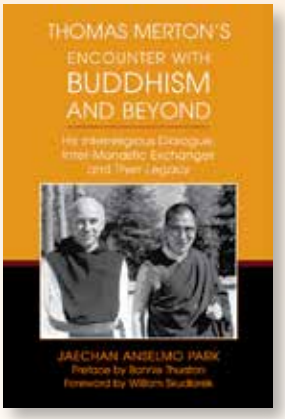

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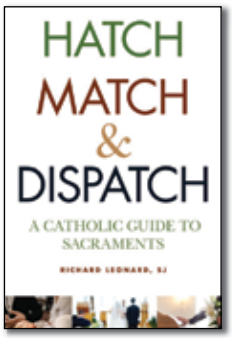

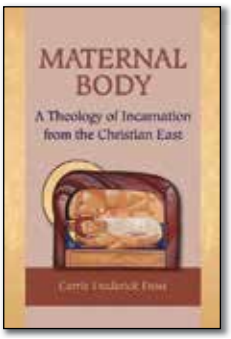

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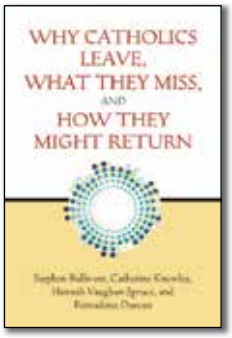

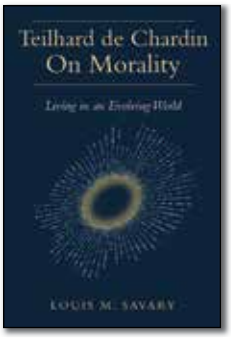

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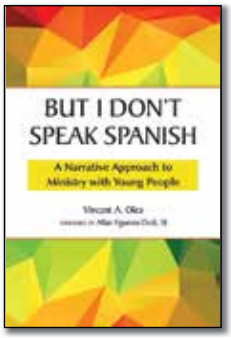

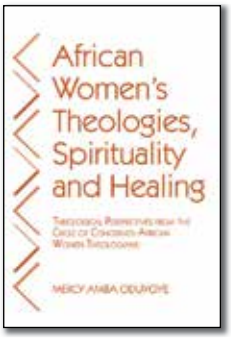

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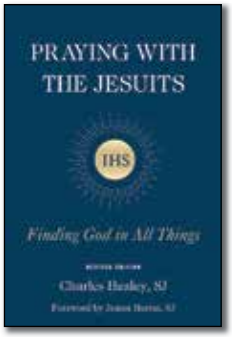

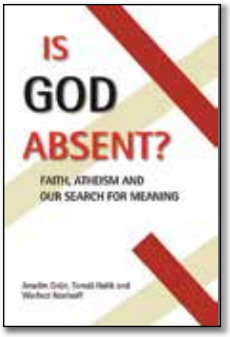

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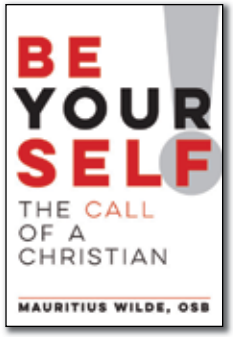

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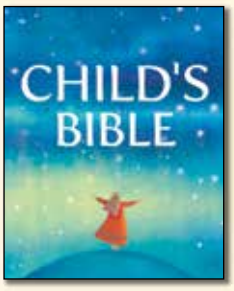

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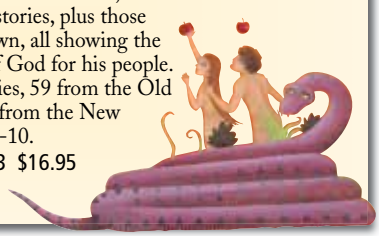

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