
THE LAMP

A CATHOLIC JOURNAL OF LITERATURE, SCIENCE, THE FINE ARTS, ETC.



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See how from far upon the eastern road
The star-led wizards haste with odours sweet:
O run, prevent them with thy humble ode,
And lay it lowly at his blessed feet;
Have thou the honour first thy Lord to greet,
And join thy voice unto the angel quire,
From out his secret altar touch'd with hallow'd fire.

Milton



THE PUBLISHER'S DESK

A newborn baby can fall asleep in almost any environment and with no notice. As they grow older and their brains develop, they consolidate their naps into longer stretches of sleep, they begin to need routines to help them get to sleep, and eventually they become like the rest of us, sleeping only with proper preparation, in the right conditions, at the appointed times, and with no interruptions.

Most things in adult life, however, thankfully become easier and more natural the longer we do them. There are exceptions of course: past a certain point, our bodies no longer “bounce back” from injuries and increasing amounts of exercise must be performed in order to “maintain” a physical standard of living we once took for granted. (For Robert Wyllie’s piece on health fanaticism, see page 24.)

But most other things are like learning to ride a bike. At first, while you know what it looks like, you don’t know how to do it at all. Then you try and fail until it suddenly happens; over time you continue to improve until it becomes second nature, something you do by “muscle memory” with no conscious thought. (For Steve Knepper’s thoughts on cycling, see page 22.)

One can accustom oneself to most things—as Edward Feser describes, most people’s first experience of the martini is a bad one, and then it grows on you (read his philosophy of gin on page 42). Even the act of writing, which has always filled me with the most awful dread, is something which can be formed into a habit and made both better and thereby easier (for David Bentley Hart’s rules for writing, see page 34).

The more we do something the less thought it requires from us and the less it can excite us. But for children everything has this quality of thrilling newness. As Chesterton puts it, “Because children have abounding vitality, because they are in spirit fierce and free, therefore they want things repeated and unchanged. They always say, ‘Do it again’; and the grown-up person does it again until he is nearly dead. For grown-up people are not strong enough to exult in monotony.”

Why shouldn’t I quote the rest? It is one of his most enjoyable passages.

“But perhaps God is strong enough to exult in monotony. It is possible that God says every morning, ‘Do it again’ to the sun; and every evening, ‘Do it again’ to the moon. It may not be automatic necessity that makes all daisies alike; it may be that God makes every daisy separately, but has never got tired of making them. It may be that He has the eternal appetite of infancy; for we have sinned and grown old, and our Father is younger than we.”

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CORRESPONDENCE

How intrigued I was to find the article (“Hints of Grandeur,” Issue 12) about my home village, Chislehurst, England. I am a member of the ancient Parish Church of St. Nicholas (Church of England) that is located a short walk across Chislehurst Common from the Roman Catholic Church of St. Mary, where Napoleon III and his son the Prince Imperial were originally laid to rest. I think we must be one of the few villages in England that is home to well-established congregations that worship according to the 1662 Book of Common Prayer and the Tridentine Mass every Sunday.

I would like to add a few observations to Neil Jopson’s well-timed piece—it coming shortly before Chislehurst is about to commemorate the one hundred fiftieth anniversary of the death of the last Emperor of the French on January 9th, 2023, with a series of talks and church services.

Firstly, contrary to Mr. Jopson’s characterisation, Chislehurst had long been a fashionable place to live prior to the arrival of the French Imperial family, evidenced by the fact that the house in which they lived, Camden Place, was named after the great historian William Camden, who lived and died in an early seventeenth century house on the same site.

With regards to the funeral of Napoleon III, the exiled Emperor died without having received absolution from Pope Pius IX, who never forgave him for withdrawing French troops during the Capture of Rome two-and-a-half years earlier. This meant Monsignor Isaac Goddard, the parish priest of St. Mary’s, would not officiate at the Emperor’s funeral, despite being on good terms with the exiled family. The Right Reverend James Danell, second Bishop of Southwark, did so instead but only after seeking approval from the Vatican.

Finally, Mr. Jopson mentions that the remains of Napoleon III and the Prince Imperial were moved from Chislehurst to the purpose-built Abbey of St. Michael in Farnborough, Hampshire. The reason for this is the bereaved Empress Eugenie was prevented from extending the side-chapel at Chislehurst to accommodate the remains of her son after his death in British uniform in Itelezi. The chapel in which Mr. Jopson’s daughter was christened was designed by Henry Clutton to house the sarcophagus of Napoleon III (and dedicated to the Sacred Heart of Jesus) and naturally they had not planned

for any other family members due to their relative ages. After the tragedy in Zululand, the Empress had Hippolyte Destailleur design an ambitious extension that would have transformed not just the chapel but the entire church into an extravagant monastic church, not too dissimilar to the eventual flamboyant gothic edifice at Farnborough. The plans however met firm opposition, firstly in the aforementioned Msgr. Goddard, who was already alarmed by the number of French visitors disturbing the Mass in his church but more importantly in Frederick J. Edlmann, the freeholder of the land surrounding the churchyard, who steadfastly refused to sell to her on account of his Protestant beliefs. Thus, the congregation of St. Mary’s, Chislehurst are now left with this rather curious chapel for the Sacrament of Baptism and Chislehurst itself deprived of its place as the resting place of members of the Bonaparte dynasty.

Yours Faithfully,
Charles Clark, Chislehurst

The author replies:

As with all history, there are many loose ends to tie off and interesting byways to be explored in the story of Empress Eugenie and Chislehurst. The relationship between Father Goddard and the Imperial Family is one particularly interesting area. Father Goddard would often say Mass at Camden Place for Napoleon III and his family, and it was of course Father Goddard who was summoned to administer the Last Rites as the Emperor lay on his deathbed. Yet, after Eugenie moved the bodies of her husband and son from the chapel, she is believed to have never returned to Saint Mary’s, despite repeated requests from Father Goddard for her to do so. Regarding the funeral, Napoleon III was never excommunicated by the Pope, so the story of the politics surrounding the funeral is certainly an interesting one.

It is a delight to hear that Chislehurst is host to not only the ancient form of the Mass which I love so much, but also for the 1662 Book of Common Prayer. This seems a fitting situation for a village that holds fast to its heritage as the modern world ebbs and flows all around it.

Neil Jopson, Chislehurst



FEUILLETON



❖ Around Christmastime, it is our custom to take long walks through cemeteries, which, especially in the older parts of the United States, are filled with the graves of so many whose lives occasion prayers for the dead. So often these tombs are for people whose work was left unfinished and left this world unsatisfied. In Rockville, we find F. Scott Fitzgerald, who died in such a sorry state that his family could not find a priest willing to bury him. In Kalamazoo, we stop by Edward Israel, the astronomer on the disastrous first American polar expedition, who starved to death three weeks before a rescue party found the rest of his crew. We linger the longest not at one particular grave, but a whole cemetery lined with identical markers. These plain, white headstones near the waterfront in Washington, D.C. mark the final resting places of the sisters of the Order of the Visitation of Mary. The uniformity of the stones is a stark reminder that in death we stand before God without any adornments covering our actions or our intentions. That's only fair, as He came into the world—and left it—in much the same way. As we leave the cemetery, we cross an empty meadow. The place is not yet full, and, God willing, many more religious sisters will be laid to rest in it through the years and decades to come.

❖ We should add that just behind this cemetery, Georgetown University provides one of the most valuable services to city: the last Sunday Mass, celebrated at 10:00 P.M. in its campus chapel. As far as we know, it is the latest regularly scheduled public Mass celebrated in any American city. New York's last Mass is at 8:30 P.M. at Holy Family. Chicago's is at 8:00 P.M. at Old Saint Patrick's, which happens to be the oldest standing church building in the city. Los Angeles doesn't seem to have any Masses later than 7:00 P.M. Of course, both in the U.S. and all over the world, many more Masses are celebrated both in public and in private at every hour of the day.

❖ The sale of twelve of Joan Didion's blank notebooks for eleven thousand dollars each reminded us of her own thoughts on keeping one: "The impulse to write things down is a peculiarly

compulsive one, inexplicable to those who do not share it, useful only accidentally, only secondarily, in the way that any compulsion tries to justify it." Something similar could probably be said of the person who bought those blank Moleskines or the person who paid twenty-seven thousand dollars for Didion's Céline sunglasses. Owning the artifact is nothing special, but the rush of feeling when buying it is exquisite. Yet nothing compares to the feeling that fans of Bob Dylan no doubt felt when they learned that the "very special," hand-signed six-hundred-dollar books they purchased were not signed by Dylan at all, but by autopen.

❖ What better place to become addicted to sports gambling than at college? Since 2018, eight universities have partnered with online gambling companies to promote sports betting on campus. And about a dozen college athletic programs have signed deals with casinos, claiming that the partnerships will help recoup losses incurred during shutdowns and contribute "significant resources to support the growing needs of each of our varsity programs." These partnerships have been performing beautifully, especially since half the target audience are still teenagers. In the sweetest deal, the University of Colorado Boulder accepted one and a half million dollars from a betting company to promote gambling on campus. It seems like a small amount, until you factor in that the school receives an additional thirty dollars whenever someone downloads the company's app and uses a school-provided promotional code to place a bet.

❖ We announced the death of our "Correspondence" section in our Christ the King issue. And yet here it is again, back from the dead. Who knows how long it will survive? In any case, we re-invite our readers, especially those concerned about the state of our souls, always to feel free to reach out at editor@thelampmagazine.com.

❖ We would like to thank everyone who contributed to THE LAMP in the past year and especially in the past few weeks. It's through your generosity that we are able to publish this magazine.

BRASS RUBBINGS

GREAT PLAINS BURRITO

BY ASHER GELZER-GOVATOS

Before I can describe Sacred Heart Parish of Saint James, Nebraska, I have to tell you about the runza. A runza is a compact, brick-like foodstuff of Germanic origin, but native in its current form to Nebraska. It's a sort of Great Plains burrito, filled with ground beef, spices, and chopped cabbage (cheese optional). Its appeal to Midwestern farmers is perhaps obvious: it's a warm, portable meal with the caloric value of a plate loaded high at the buffet. A runza is not much to look at, but it fills you to the brim. The same could be said of Sacred Heart Parish.

The first white person born in Nebraska (according to some reports at least), Victor Vifquain, is buried in the Sacred Heart cemetery, and his name adorns a stained glass window in the church. The initial white settlers, who arrived just before the outbreak of the Civil War, were primarily of German extraction. Though this of course meant plenty of Lutherans, there were enough Catholics that by 1873, Crete, a town twenty-five miles southwest of Lincoln, needed a permanent church to house them. On Christmas Day that year, the first Mass was offered in Saint James church, Crete, presumably by Father Ferdinand Leichleitner, who had been acting as priest for the Catholics in Crete since 1871. In addition to serving Crete, many of the early priests would ride the newly laid railroad west, ministering to the various "alphabet towns" along the route—Dorchester, Exeter, Fairmont, and down the line.

Not long after the Germans, a wave of farmers from Bohemia left their mark on the landscape of southeast Nebraska. Wilber, one town over from

Crete, bills itself as "Czech Capital U.S.A.," and you can still buy kolache at every farmer's market and find bottles of Becherovka, a Czech herbal liqueur, nestled on the shelves of local liquor stores alongside Jägermeister. Less numerous than the German Catholics in town, the Czechs nevertheless kept petitioning for their own church building, and by 1890 they had it: Saint Ludmilla, in honor of the Bohemian saint and grandmother of Good King Wenceslas. After years of either holding their nose and attending a church staffed by German speakers, or else holding out for the occasional visits made by Czech priests meandering down from Omaha or up from Rulo, the Czech Catholics could worship in their own building at Masses offered by priests who spoke their language.

Even though the Bohemians broke off into their own congregation, the town had grown enough since Saint James's founding twenty years earlier that by 1893 a new building was needed to replace the original tiny country church. Thus was born the present building, christened in 1893 with the rather confusing name of Sacred Heart Church of the Saint James Parish. I have not been able to find an explanation for why the church changed its name, nor why the old name lingered on like a palimpsest. (Our school is to this day called Saint James.) Because of the relative poverty and smaller population of the Czech Catholics in Crete, Saint Ludmilla's could not stay financially solvent after a lightning strike scarred the church building, and in 1915, less than thirty years after the split, the two congregations were forced to re-integrate at Sacred Heart. According to parish reports, though, this

admixture came more smoothly than the first, old prejudices having been largely forgotten thanks to time, intermarriage, and assimilation into the broader American culture. Harder to heal were the wounds brought about by the dismantling of Saint Ludmilla's, which was shipped outside of town and reassembled as a farm building.

Still, the two groups did co-exist in peace, and the parish histories paint a fairly sedate picture of the next half century. Even through two world wars, the parishioners of Sacred Heart fell in love, gave birth, and died, with the requisite number of baptisms, marriages, and funeral Masses along the way. Only a handful of priests served the parish during this time—two for over twenty years each—a stability that no doubt contributed to the parish's equanimity.

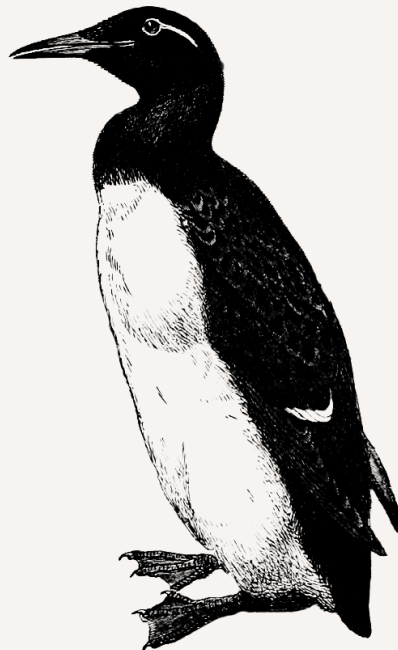
Like many churches, Sacred Heart found itself swept up into the energy surrounding the Second Vatican Council, which seems to have reinvigorated the parish somewhat as it headed into its one hundredth anniversary in the early 1970s. Unfortunately that reforming zeal also led to the gutting of the church's interior. Gone were the ornate altarpiece and side altars, perhaps unimpressive by big city standards, but at least redolent of the congregation's German origins. In came sleek furniture, bare walls, and the antiseptic feeling of an empty movie set. Worst of all, someone decided to install carpet in the chancel area. Comparing photos taken just before and just after the remodel is an exercise in frustration for those, like me, who happen to like their churches to feel alive. Thankfully, at some point the lush foliage of congregational devotion began to creep back into the building, and in its current form the church's interior has a simplicity that feels charming rather than deadening.

In contrast to many small Midwestern towns, Crete has never experienced massive population decline, and in fact has grown modestly but steadily since its founding. Starting in the 1990s, though, growth accelerated as factories sprouted up to supplement the farming economy and the local liberal arts college, such that the town's population is greater now than at any point in the past. This growth came through a new wave of immigration, largely from Central America.

Fittingly, roughly a century after the Czechs broke off to form Saint Ludmilla's, Sacred Heart Church of Saint James Parish found itself with another cultural divide to bridge, as more and more Catholics reached Crete from Guatemala, El Salvador, and Mexico. The Great Plains burrito has come to co-exist with, well, the original burrito, quite literally. (Whenever I mention to a stranger

that I live in Crete, he or she is likely to respond that we have the best Mexican food in the area.) This time around there has been no talk of a second church, and as a result Sacred Heart now has the largest bilingual congregation in the Diocese of Lincoln.

My family and I are newcomers to Sacred Heart, so we have missed the thirty years of growing pains that have certainly accompanied this new integration. Cretins are a friendly and welcoming folk, by and large, but surely the community has experienced its fair share of ugliness as the Hispanic population has grown to comprise nearly forty percent of the town's residents. Though we might wish it otherwise, no doubt Sacred Heart has felt these same tensions in miniature, just as the Czechs and Germans once eyed each other warily across the pews and across town. But the parish, the priests, and the diocese have worked hard to ease the transition, and from where I stand the prospect of increased unity looks promising.



True, at all church social gatherings the two groups still tend to separate out, and the language barrier feels especially wide in those moments. But at other times there is real unity. Certain important Masses—Confirmation, Christmas, Easter Vigil—are celebrated bilingually, with the readings alternating between Spanish and English and our pastor giving his homily twice. Likewise, our Corpus Christi procession and other important devotional gatherings feature prayers in both languages.

Nearly as important for parish unity as the sacrifice of the Mass are the times when we gather for communal meals in the parish hall. We annually host a kermes, a food festival celebrating Hispanic heritage. This year the mother of our Vietnamese-American associate priest has added a fusion element to the festival by making six thousand egg rolls (What is an egg roll if not a sort of mini burrito?). The Germans and Czechs do their part as well, especially at the annual fall dinner, where enough roast pork with fixings is served to keep the surrounding community fueled during the near-hibernation state brought about by Nebraska winters. As we serve each other, both in food and acts of generosity, we craft those little links that make it harder to break apart.

Recently, our priests were finally able to raise the money to replace the carpet in the chancel area with wood, or at least some wood approximation. They asked for volunteers to help move the altar and other mobile objects in the chancel to ease the work of the contractors. So, on a Sunday afternoon, about two dozen men of the parish gathered, split roughly half and half between English-speaking and Spanish-speaking congregants. We moved the altar, the chairs, and other assorted items in a matter of minutes, and our work should have been done.

Instead, someone—I'm still not quite sure who—got carried away and began tearing up strips of the tattered, tortoise-shell carpet. The whole group soon joined in, caught up in the moment, grabbing and ripping with abandon. It took an hour or so, but we stripped the chancel down to its studs (or, at least, the plywood subflooring). Some of us tore, removing carpet staples as needed. Others came through with scrapers to remove the glue residue that had once affixed the carpet to the wood. Still others manned brooms to sweep away the glue, the staples, and the half century of accumulated dust that lay underneath the surface. All of us, in turn, loaded up big rolls of carpet onto our backs, or split the weight with a partner, and carried our loads to the dumpster, which soon overflowed with the detritus of the sanctuary.

All the while we worked in that pleasant half-silence that attends men concentrating on a manual task. Few words were needed; as I worked the cleanup crew, my compatriot would gesture at a pile of trash and I would swoop in with the dustpan, sweep the pile, and then run over to the man holding open the large black trash bag. Once in a while some obstacle would appear, a stubborn spot of glue, perhaps, and all the men in the area would grin, especially if one of the teens on hand had to tackle the task. The contractors came in the next day to a greatly lightened workload, and each of us who had labored together experienced that brief togetherness fostered by working toward a common goal. It was a small, good thing to work together in that way, and it is through the accumulation of such small moments, I suspect, that the lasting bonds of Christian love will be fastened between the two parts of our congregation.

Due to the impermanent nature of my job, it is likely that my family and I will not be in Crete more than another year, for a total of three spent here. Sacred Heart is, perhaps, the sort of parish that might easily become a blip on the radar of a long life. Certainly, when we moved here we were uncertain what to expect, coming from the relatively bustling Catholic city of St. Louis to a small town in Lutheran country. But I know Sacred Heart will linger in our hearts a long time, and not just because our oldest received confirmation here (extra early in the Diocese of Lincoln), or that our second-oldest had her first communion in the parish. Rather, it is the accumulation of all the small moments—the blunt homilies of our pastor, the more mild exhortations of our gentle associate pastor, the fellowship found over donuts and coffee, words of parenting encouragement from older couples—that will permanently fix Sacred Heart in our memories. Before I joined the Church, I associated Her primarily with grand moments of spectacle, but my actual Catholic life has been buoyed mostly by the small sustaining moments of grace a parish is supposed to provide. Sacred Heart has given my family those moments abundantly, spiritually nourishing us during our stay in Nebraska. For that, and for the many layers and flavors of devotion it has given, I am thankful for our Great Plains burrito of a parish.

Asher Gelzer-Govatos is a Visiting Assistant Professor of English at Doane University and co-host of The Readers Karamazov, a podcast on philosophy and literature.



THE JUNGLE

THE WANDERER

BY RAFAEL ALVAREZ

Arno Hecht is a premier rock-and-roll sax man. He was a founding member of the Uptown Horns, and he has toured with James Brown, Chuck Berry, Tom Waits, and the Rolling Stones, among many others. He blew tenor on “Love Shack,” which hit No. 3 on the U.S. charts in 1989 for the B-52s. And he’s a very nice man. A native of Queens, New York, Hecht, seventy-one, is also the son of Holocaust survivors. He isn’t sure what happens to us after we die—if someone says they know for certain, I’d be wary—but he’s willing to believe it must be *something*.

Dion DiMucci, the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame icon with whom Hecht toured in 2022, says he knows. He not only believes that we’re reunited with those we knew on Earth but offered that comfort to Hecht during one of the horn player’s lowest moments. In January of 2009, Hecht’s fifteen-year-old daughter Ava suddenly died from bacterial meningitis, “sick one day and gone the next,” he said. On the first anniversary of Ava’s death, he was as distraught as the day it happened, perhaps more; hobbled by a wound, he said, “that never heals.”

“I was having a terrible day, sobbing, and I called Dion,” Hecht said. “Even though he’s a different religion, I know he’s sincere. I knew he would speak from the heart.” Hecht asked, “Dion, am I going to see my kid again?” To which Dion, who is best known for “The Wanderer,” one of the greatest tracks in the rock-and-roll canon, the young man whose life was spared in 1959 when he turned down a plane ride with Buddy Holly, replied: “I don’t think so, I *know* so.”

How the eighty-three-year-old teen idol thinks he knows is a long story, one that began with his baptism at Our Lady of Mount Carmel, four blocks from his family’s second-floor apartment on One Hundred Eighty-third Street in the Little Italy of his beloved Bronx. From there, he traveled the

world through fame and fortune, nearly died from the fruits of that success and—by pursuing the mysteries of faith via reading, prayer, and meditation—made it back to the religion of his childhood. He told Hecht: “Keep talking to her, relationships never end. When your time comes you’re going to be with her for eternity. And that’s a long time.” In re-telling the story, Hecht said, “It’s not so much I believe that, but it was something I needed to hear at the time.”

On a visit to Rome a few years ago, a priest told Dion something he needed to hear. It was about his father, Pasquale “Pat” DiMucci, a sculptor of marionettes who died in 2003, a man the singer characterizes as self-centered in the extreme. “He was masterful in carving them and making them move with strings,” said Dion of his father, who, in the Old Country tradition of Gepetto, created people out of wood, making them dance and sing, fight and love. But when it came to gainful employment, he didn’t do much: “My father never had a real job, but could walk a block on his hands and climb trees like Tarzan.” He was, Dion added, “always somewhere else making puppets or down at the local gym lifting weights.”

And his only son, the oldest of three DiMucci siblings, which includes Dion’s sisters Joanie and Donna, all but despised him. Dion shrank from the constant arguments between Pat and his wife, Frances, a seamstress and hatmaker, who, the singer said, “held the family together.” Both Pat and Frances were first-generation Americans. Their fights were about Pat’s frequent absences and money, the lack of which would later figure into a decision that saved the singer’s life. “When they argued, I just went to my room and practiced guitar,” Dion said. “The more they argued, the better guitar player I became.”

If Dion could tell Hecht without reservation



that he would see his daughter again, would he not meet up with his difficult father on the other side as well? The prospect didn't sound like paradise. The priest in Vatican City, Dion said, "was telling me I was going to see my father again. How do you see a guy that you couldn't get along with down here? My old man was selfish, all he had was himself on his mind. How can I hang out with somebody like that?" But, Dion said, the priest replied, "Your father wasn't open to all of God's grace while he was here on Earth but he's closer now to the Beatific Vision." Reminding Dion of the log in his own eye, he added, "You're not open to all of God's grace either. By the time you meet your father again, your relationship will have moved forward."

Despite more than a half-century of sobriety and decades of study, prayer, and listening for the voice of his God in meditation, Dion had never heard that before. In the Book of John, Christ speaks of life beyond the grave as his "father's house," one with "many rooms," or, in certain translations, "many mansions." I like the grandeur of the latter, the *impossibility* of the human mind to conjure a mansion behind every door. An unlikely yet plausible miracle akin to the one where Dion kicked heroin in 1968 and began a long, winding return to the "one, holy, catholic and apostolic Church." The Church, he said, is "supernatural, that's why I love it." Dion maintains that while jogging in Florida in December of 1979—a little more than a decade after he stopped using drugs and alcohol and embraced Christ as his savior—he saw God. In his autobiography, he recounts the experience as a

simple request: "I wanted to be closer to Jesus. So I did what I had learned to do back in '68. On December 14, 1979, I *asked* for it."

"I was out jogging, like every morning," he wrote. "As I went along, I prayed, 'God, it would be nice to be closer to you.' Suddenly I was flooded with white light. It was everywhere, inside me, outside me—everywhere."

"Ahead of me, I saw a man with his arms outstretched. 'I love you,' he said. 'Don't you know that? I'm your friend. I laid down my life for you. I'm here for you now.' That moment changed me every bit as much as the first time I dropped to my knees. Yet here's something mysterious: the more I changed, the more I became myself. God was, and still is, finishing up his creation." What was left behind was "some part of me," he said, "that I no longer wanted."

Many years ago, I told that story to a fellow writer and Christian, George Minot of Iowa City. When I said that Dion was jogging when God appeared in a blaze of light, Minot replied, without irony, "Oh, the usual way."

How might a theater director—without the benefit of computer wizardry employed in film or a Pink Floyd light show—portray such an experience? The same way complicated people stay on the right side of a complicated world: by keeping it simple. In the spring of 2022, a play about Dion's life, *The Wanderer*, was staged at the Paper Mill Playhouse in Millburn, New Jersey. In it, Joseph Barbara plays Father Joseph Pernicone, a popular priest at Our Lady of Mount Carmel. The scene where Dion surrenders to the will of something greater than himself—"the conversion," he said—shows the singer falling to his knees below a large stained glass window with the junkie's prayer on his lips: "God help me . . ." (His old doo-wop friend from Harlem, Frankie Lymon of "Why Do Fools Fall in Love" fame, had recently died of a heroin overdose in his grandmother's bathroom at the age of twenty-five.) Rattled by his own close calls, Dion asked his father-in-law to pray for him and got this in response: "Pray for yourself, God loves to hear from strangers."

Dion said he "got on my knees and said a prayer. I haven't been the same since. You could call it my first conscious prayer." Six months later he released "Abraham, Martin and John," a topical folk ballad about the assassination of the American ideal—freedom for all; a million seller several times over that still brings a tear to listeners of a certain age. Dion was back, the road of spiritual discovery laid out before him. That path was something Father Pernicone had tried to interest him in decades

before, asking the restless hotshot, “What would really make you happy?”

Dion’s answer is found in the lyrics of “King of the New York Streets”:

I broke hearts like window panes . . . a local gladiator . . . I stood tall from all this feeling . . . I bumped my head on heaven’s ceiling . . . shooting dice and double-dealing . . . each time I jumped behind the wheel of a pin-striped custom Oldsmobile . . . the guys would bow and the girls would squeal . . .

Only to find out that his answer was lacking in the extreme. The lesson conveyed, he said, is that “success and fulfillment are not the same thing.”

At the time of Father Pernicone’s death, he was an auxiliary bishop of the Archdiocese of New York. He served Mount Carmel from 1944, when Dion was about five, through 1966, by which time the singer had long been famous (thirty-nine Top 40 hits), was horribly hooked on dope, and, like most street-corner vocalists of the late 1950s, relegated by the British Invasion to L7 status, which is to say, his style of music was considered “square.” But the truth is that Dion, who was one of the most popular recording artists of the 1950s, has never been a square, even if the new generation didn’t realize it as pompadours gave way to Beatle bangs.

“I’m a die-hard,” he said. “I’ve always kept rock and roll as my music because a lot of the guys my age flipped off into the Tony Bennetts and the Robert Goulets. Not the kid.”

Like Dion, Joseph Barbara is a practicing cradle Catholic, and he was born the year Dion got sober. He said that during rehearsals for *The Wanderer*, Dion didn’t exactly give notes for the show. “At this point in his life, Dion’s a philosopher,” he said. “Any notes he gives are through the way he looks at the world. We’ve talked about going to Mass, about faith. In this business you don’t have those conversations with many people.”

The conversation Dion had with Buddy Holly in February of 1959 on “the day the music died” was anything but philosophical. “I’m not going,” Dion told him. The decision was rooted in his parents’ money woes. At that time, a series of buses carrying some of music’s biggest stars—Holly and the Crickets, the Big Bopper, Richie Valens, and Dion—kept breaking down in the brutal cold of a Midwest winter. Holly’s drummer, Carl Bunch, had to leave the tour when his toes became frostbitten. Buddy Holly was the headliner and the boss, “a little older than us,” Dion said, “an old soul, he knew his stuff.” He decided to hire a plane to take the marquee names to the next show on the “Winter Dance Party” tour. The cost: thirty-six dollars

per person—the exact amount Dion’s mother paid for rent each month back in the Bronx; money earned by working her fingers day and night with needle and thread. It wasn’t the amount that annoyed Dion. (He could well afford it, having scored a pair of top five hits in ’59.) But the juxtaposition of his own position with that of his mother didn’t sit well with him. “Are you kidding? I wasn’t going to spend that in one night.” The decision saved his life.

Dion had no problem, however, spending that much money and more on narcotics. Heroin anesthetized the once curious kid; booze and cocaine riled him up. Still, God intrigued him. He once told Cardinal Timothy Dolan that he was reading Thomas Aquinas as a kid. “I wanted to know who God was,” he said. But it was music—always music, “that moved me.” He absorbed every sound he could—from a fork banging the side of a bowl while his maternal grandfather whipped eggs for *zabaglione* to the voice of a cantor booming from a synagogue. “His delivery was so exotic and so haunting that it stopped me in my tracks. It was like nothing I’d ever heard before,” Dion said. “I stood there outside in the heat, soaking it in, wondering how I could do what that guy was doing.” In the Bronx, he encountered the city’s music everywhere: outside of Jewish *shuls*, Caruso on his parents’ radio, and created it anew on the street corner: “Black music filtered through an Italian neighborhood,” he said. “It comes out with attitude.”

And he was encouraged by a black guitarist on the stoop in the person of Willie Green, the superintendent of a nearby tenement who told Dion to “be yourself,” when he went to auditions. It was Green who taught Dion the rudiments of the blues through John Lee Hooker riffs and songs such as Sonny Boy Williamson’s 1955 hit “Don’t Start Me Talking.” It was a genre the spiritually awakened Dion would come to identify with the Old Testament. He said recently in an interview that “if you had to retitile the Psalms, the songs King David wrote, you’d call them the blues. It’s like the naked cry of the human heart longing to be in union with God.” For Dion, that longing has been satisfied for half a century, quenched again and again, day by day. “I don’t live my life on my terms anymore,” he said. “I just look up in the morning, ask for some guidance, say an ‘Our Father’ and go on my way.”

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HISTORIA ECCLESIASTICA

FONTS OF SALVATION

BY SEAN PILCHER

The veneration of relics is a part of our human nature. It reaches to the deepest part of our longing for physical connection on this earth, even though we know the vale of tears is not our final home. Grandmother's pearls, Dad's leather jacket—one can mention any number of treasured family heirlooms, and nearly everyone has some inclination to hold onto the belongings of a lost loved one or of a dear friend. To one unaware, these things are old, tired objects, but they take on a meaning and a history for those who know them. And the respect paid to the bodies and possessions of great men stretches back centuries. The Greeks went to the tombs of Theseus and Œdipus. Buddhist shrines house the relics of the Enlightened. Americans venerate the guitar used by Hendrix or the clothes worn by Elvis, the suit worn to the moon, a piece of the Berlin Wall. The Tomb of the Unknown Soldier—let us not forget—houses the *bones* of the honored fallen, and forms part of perhaps the most sacralized civil liturgy in the United States.

Holy Mother Church, in her wisdom, provides for this deep longing and elevates it. We are immortal souls, but we are also flesh and bone, and the sacramental economy of our Divine Savior permeates all created things. What is left behind (*reliquia*) by those we love gives us solace. And the things we hold onto tell us who we are. Let us not mistake the veneration of relics as mere sentimentalism; their veneration is, at its center, a biblical practice. The bones of the righteous and all that was theirs were means of grace even for the Jews. A dead man was hastily cast into the sepulcher of Saint Eliseus the Prophet and “when it had touched the bones of Eliseus, the man came to life, and stood upon his feet.” The contents of the Ark, physical proof

of all God had done for the Israelites, were always carried as they made their camp or marched into battle. These were not mere tokens or mementos; they carried with them the vim and holiness of the Living God.

In the New Testament, the faithful brought cloth to touch Saint Paul to take to the ailing. Saint Peter's mere shadow cured the sick. Since the earliest days of persecution, Christians risked their own safety to recover the bones of the martyrs. The inhabitants of Smyrna, in a letter from the year 156, describe the martyrdom of the Apostolic Father Saint Polycarp: “We took up his bones, which are more valuable to us than precious stones and finer than refined gold. We laid them in a suitable place, where the Lord will permit us to gather ourselves together, as we are able, in gladness and joy, and to celebrate the birthday of his martyrdom.” This tradition continues even now. The Church envisions altars to contain the relics of the saints, ideally the martyrs, in a stone. This stone is anointed with sacred chrism by the bishop who consecrates it and seals in the relics. This is one reason that, even if the Blessed Sacrament is not reserved on an altar, one should bow in reverence to the relics housed there. Relics constitute a holy inheritance, like the rest of Tradition, which we treasure, venerate, and lovingly preserve for future generations to share.

But what of venerating relics? As with much of modern catechesis, there is much explanation of theory, and little physical praxis. Our modern attitude toward worship carries some of the pride of the Enlightenment; religion is more a thing to *think* than a thing to *do*. We would learn much from simply watching how our ancestors in the faith acted in church. Relics are a physical thing, so is

our veneration of them. To venerate a relic one can bow, cross oneself, or kiss the relic or its reliquary. We kneel when a priest blesses us with a relic, since we kneel whenever Christ's own anointed call down the power of the Most High. Bowing and even prostrations to pay reverence to relics are common in the Christian East. Genuflecting is reserved for the relics of the Passion, such as the True Cross.

While relics are a fleshy, tangible part of our practice of the Faith, they nevertheless play an important role in the spiritual order. Saint Thomas Aquinas (who always wore a relic of Saint Agnes round his neck) reminds us that, while a soul in Heaven enjoys the beatific vision, some essential part of the whole, *viz.*, the body, is lacking until the final judgement. When we say, "Saint Peter is in Heaven," we really mean "The *soul* of Saint Peter is in Heaven." The flipside of this truth is that while that person is present in Heaven, he is also still very truly connected to his body on Earth. Man is not a soul alone; the body is not simply the shell of the soul; it is really you. The work of the saints done in Heaven, then, is also wrought here on Earth. This connection is one well known to exorcists, who use relics in their treatment of the spiritually oppressed; relics are not simply holy souvenirs or reminders. Saint John of Damascus puts it beautifully: "Christ the Lord granted us the relics of the Saints as fountains of salvation, from which very many benefits come to us."

Relics are officially recognized during the canonization process. After the cause for canonization is opened, the local bishop or superior may authorize the distribution of devotional materials and prayers for the intercession of the holy man or woman in question. The penultimate step in the canonization process, the declaration as Blessed, is usually accompanied by a canonical *recognitio*. The local ordinary (usually bishop), the postulator (leader of the cause for sainthood), and a medical team examine the body, and often move it from a crypt or cemetery to a more prominent place for veneration. During this *recognitio* a postulator or his delegate may take relics from the blessed's tomb to prepare in reliquaries for distribution to churches for public veneration. Relics of the bones, skin, hair, etc., are normally called "first-class relics," while things owned by the saint, their clothing, Rosary beads, breviaries, are called "second-class" relics. These, strictly speaking, are the only classes or kinds of relics. Cloth, however, is sometimes touched to these two classes of relics and distributed for aid in devotion; these are the so-called "third-class" relics. The faithful, too, will often touch sacramentals of their own (rosaries,

medals, etc.) to the relics of the saints for their devotion. Since there are virtually no first-class relics of the Lord, the relics associated with the Passion, such as the True Cross, are considered first-class.

Presentation of relics has varied considerably through the centuries, but standard practice now is to place a relic inside a small, round (usually metal) reliquary case called a *theca*, which is sealed with red threads and the wax seal of the authority who prepared the relic. Next to the relic is enclosed a label, normally in Latin, indicating what the relic is. These abbreviations are a learned shorthand of their own, and can often pose difficulties to beginners. (For example, *Ex Oss. S. Bernardi, E.D.* means "from the bones of Saint Bernard, Doctor of the Church.") The wax seal with its threads holds the relic in place and ensures that the relic has not been altered or removed. Sometimes age and travel can break these threads or make a seal difficult to read. Much of my work with relics includes the identification and repair of these elements.

I should note that the distribution of relics is fundamentally different from cremation and the scattering of ashes, even though they bear some superficial similarities. Cremation is a pagan practice; it was practiced by the ancients, who had no anticipation of the resurrection; the body was rarely regarded with the reverence it now garners in our day. It would be burned and even scattered; no one any longer had need or use for lifeless flesh. (For a taste of the kind of bleak outlook the ancients had on the afterlife, simply read half a dozen Roman headstones.) We, however, have hope in the resurrection, and knowledge that our bodies are temples



of the living God. Again, the Damascene explains: “In the old law, whoever touched a dead person was deemed unclean, but the Saints are not to be reckoned among the dead. For from that time when He who is Life itself, and the Author of life, was reckoned among the dead, we do not call them dead who have fallen asleep in Him with the hope and faith of the resurrection.” The bodies of the baptized are sacred, to be cherished and revered with care even after the soul has departed. Only during the appropriate time in the process of canonization does the Church allow, under certain norms, that relics of holy men and women be distributed for veneration. This practice, then, of making more relics available for the cult of the saints, stands to affirm the resurrection of the dead, not deny it. The saints in Heaven are alive and at work among us, as it is written in Sirach, “that their memory might be blessed, and their bones spring up out of their place.” God wants to glorify His saints and He is glorified in them. When we honor the saints, we also honor Him who made them. Saint Jerome testifies to this: “We honor the relics of the martyrs, so that we may adore Him whose martyrs they are. We honor the servants, so that the honor of the servants might redound to their Lord.”

The removal of so-called “accretions” in the practice of the faith in the latter half of the last century saw a jettison of holy relics from parishes and religious communities. Horror stories are told of prominent university churches “disposing” of these now unnecessary treasures in bonfires outside the church. Hoards of relics were thrown out or sold (something never allowed) from convents during the commotion. Religious and laity with the wherewithal scooped them up for safekeeping until a better day. An American cardinal recently remarked to me that Europe especially has been “hemorrhaging relics,” a sign of the times and a true indicator of the level of catechesis in our time. Nevertheless, magisterial teaching on sacred relics has never changed; the Council of Trent offers its characteristic, refreshing clarity: “those who hold that veneration and honor is not due to the relics of the saints; are to be wholly condemned, just as the Church condemned them before.”

Despite all this, I find no cause for despair. Faithful Christians have an earnest desire to preserve the bones of the saints, they are eager to spread devotion. I trained with one of only a handful of experts who still work on preparing relics, a now almost defunct craft, and, through the generosity and interest of so many faithful, we founded the apostolate Sacra: Relics of the Saints. Sacra works with religious superiors, pastors, and postulato-

to return relics to places of honor, and to ensure reverential treatment. This apostolate prepares and identifies relics, as well as providing repairs, authentication, and documentation. The process is an involved one, but is not immune to daydreams of Indiana Jones in faraway oratories saving relics from the hands of the godless. The work requires a (rather niche) combination of relic knowledge, Latin, paleography, artifact restoration, Church history, and heraldry. There is no school for it, and most of its traditions and conventions are passed down orally. Part of the goal of Sacra is to make some more general information about relics more readily available and put parishes, clergy, and layfolk into contact with our experts.

I remember once, in a dimly lit chapel where monks chant their office, approaching a relic of Saint John of Damascus beneath the icons he so ferociously defended. Censer bells clinked and the gold leaf faces of the saints looked soberly down on the wax candles that illuminated them. Behind a veil of incense sat a folded parchment in a brass reliquary with a faded wax seal. I stepped closer to the glass as the frankincense filled my nose, read *San Giovanni Damasceno*, and saw the coat of arms of an Italian prelate. Later, Father Abbot agreed to let me examine this mysterious sealed parchment. I had seen paquets like it before, and they are generally rare. I thought that parchment probably contained bones of Saint John of Damascus, destined to be placed in an altar stone, and therefore not placed in a more visible reliquary. After carefully documenting the seal and opening the parchment with the team at Sacra, we discovered a relic of the flesh of Saint John. It bore the seal of the bishop who had custody of the Damascene’s relics, and was carefully wrapped to preserve it. We set this precious relic into a gold reliquary, sealed it, and documented it to tell its millennium’s worth of history. It now sits, more visible and adorned, again among the icons in church for the veneration of the faithful.

This kind of authentication is a large part of our work. Documentation becomes lost, relics are borrowed (and sometimes never returned), people die, and anything with glue eventually needs repair. Our apostolate has custody of numerous relics, and an even larger library of references, resources, and contacts. It is often possible to use these to reissue documentation or evaluate a relic’s pedigree of ownership, preparation, and authenticity. Parishes, religious communities, diocesan archives, and individuals have been sending their relics for evaluation and repair for years. The work is meticulous and extraordinarily detail-focused. A

small fragment of Saint Philip the Apostle is being housed in a new, more elaborate reliquary for parish veneration. A piece of Cardinal Newman's vestments set into gold and enamel for a local shrine. These are precious treasures which cannot be lightly dealt with, and cannot be replaced. There is no such thing as *more* relics of a saint, so they cannot be allowed to be discarded or lost.

The recent renewed interest in relics has unfortunately also meant more forgeries. Relics are holy objects, and sale of relics is absolutely forbidden in the law of the Church. Still, eBay is replete with chicken bones and aged gauze housed behind glass and watered silk, waiting to abuse the piety of well-meaning faithful. Of course, there are some authentic relics on eBay, but it requires the utmost expertise to scout them out. Pastors and religious superiors should consult experts before taking up arms on a digital bidding crusade. Forgers can amass enormous sums as Catholics bid against one another in a fight for a very well-done fake. Recently, a purported relic of Saint Pius of Pietralcina sold for thousands, even boasting paperwork and a seal—and yet it was undoubtedly a phony. Meanwhile, an unassuming, yet doubtless authentic relic of an obscure Roman martyr being sold by an unknowing dealer was donated, after our team

explained the delicate situation, for merely the price of shipping.

The business of relics is a tricky one. While it is absolutely forbidden to sell a relic, we may take the example of Saint Louis of France, who rescued the Crown of Thorns from Muslim hands. When relics are in the hands of secular dealers or unknowing antiquarians, it is licit to make some financial contribution in order to return them to Catholic ownership. The relics acquired are always donated to parishes or religious houses associated with the saint whose relics are rescued, to faithful who will cherish them. This kind of work requires certainty about the relics' origins and much experience and familiarity with other relics.

The study and veneration of sacred relics is much needed, especially now. It gets us out of our heads and into our bodies, and shows their place as temples of the Most High. Its link to sacred tradition necessarily connects us to our holy forebears, and gives us strength and grace to follow in the footsteps of the saints. Relics root us firmly on the earth, while fixing our eyes on Heaven.

Sean Pilcher is a Latinist and director of Sacra: Relics of the Saints.

APOLOGIA

HE'S HERE

BY DANNY DUNCAN COLLUM

I was confirmed in 1989 at the Easter Vigil Mass at St. Ann's Church of Somerville, Massachusetts. It was my first Easter Vigil; it included all the readings and ended around midnight. When the time finally came for my confirmation, I was stunned and exhausted and glad that all I had to do was read the words from an index card saying that I affirmed as true all that the Church affirms to be true. That's when I came into full communion with the Roman Catholic Church, but my Catholic

conversion started twenty-one years earlier, in my hometown of Greenwood, Mississippi.

If you've heard of Greenwood, it may be because it was the childhood home of Morgan Freeman and the burial place of Robert Johnson. Also, the alleged incident that led to Emmett Till's murder took place just outside Greenwood. But my hometown's greatest historic significance probably comes from its role as one of the major battlegrounds selected by the Student Nonviolent Coordinating

Committee (SNCC) in 1962 in its campaign for black voting rights. The SNCC philosophy was to go to the toughest places first. When those cracked, the rest would surely follow—hence the focus on Mississippi, and Greenwood in particular.

The White Citizens Council, the organization that led the massive resistance to the 1954 Supreme Court school desegregation decision, had its headquarters in Greenwood. Byron De La Beckwith, the man who murdered the civil rights leader Medgar Evers, was from Greenwood. When Beckwith returned home after being acquitted by an all-white jury in Jackson, he was greeted with a welcome home banner hung above the main highway into town. My white working-class family left our small farm and moved to town the same year that SNCC arrived in Greenwood, so some of the most dramatic events of the Civil Rights movement were the backdrop to my childhood. Of course, I didn't know much about that at the time. My life centered on sports and the First Baptist Church, which we attended twice on Sundays and sometimes on Wednesdays, too. There I grew, at least in stature, learned the Bible, and, during one of our regular summer revivals, even gave my life to Christ and was dunked beneath the waters of baptism by our kindly, hip-booted pastor.

My adolescence began during the late 1960s, and, as I started to discover the world around me and to think my own thoughts, I ran head-on into a brick wall of cognitive dissonance about race and religion. First Baptist had taught me to sing, "Red and yellow, black and white, they are precious in his sight, Jesus loves the little children of the world." However, during Freedom Summer in 1964, when mixed groups of black and white Christian activists were occasionally showing up for worship at all-white congregations, our church in Greenwood posted ushers outside the doors, throughout the entire service, to turn away any unwelcome guests. We took up collections for missionaries in black Africa. But we rarely lifted a finger for the descendants of enslaved Africans who lived a few blocks away. When I was in middle school, the first few black students came to our all-white school. One of them was a boy in my grade who had the misfortune not only to be the only black kid in the class but also to be named Marcel. He suffered the torments of Hell that year, especially in the locker room before and after gym class. I knew what my white classmates were doing to that boy was wrong, and I never joined in. But I never said or did a thing to stop it.

The Immaculate Heart of Mary Catholic Church in Greenwood was right across the street



from First Baptist. I remember seeing their pastor walking back and forth in front of the church, in a cassock, reading his little black prayer book. In my adolescent awakening, I learned that there was another Catholic church, with a school, out at the edge of town. It was called Saint Francis and was staffed by Franciscan missionaries who'd come down from the North to serve Greenwood's black community.

In 1968, I was fourteen years old. After the passage of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and the Voting Rights Act of 1965, the civil rights movement began to falter in the Deep South. The national organizations had all left Greenwood and taken the national news media with them, but, aside from the minimally token integration of the white schools, very little had changed. For example, whites-only restaurants just re-organized themselves as private clubs and handed out membership cards to all their white customers. There were still no black elected officials, or black police officers, or black clerks or salespeople in any of the stores. Throughout the spring of 1968, Martin Luther King, Jr. was in and out of Memphis, just ninety miles north of us, to support the sanitation workers union, and on one of those visits he made a side trip to Greenwood to promote the Poor People's Campaign. Then, a few weeks later, he was assassinated. Black people in Greenwood realized then that nothing would ever change unless they took responsibility for making the change. Three local ministers of black churches formed the leadership team for an organization simply *v. Board of Education* Movement. One of

those ministers was a white Franciscan priest from Wisconsin named Father Nathaniel Machesky.

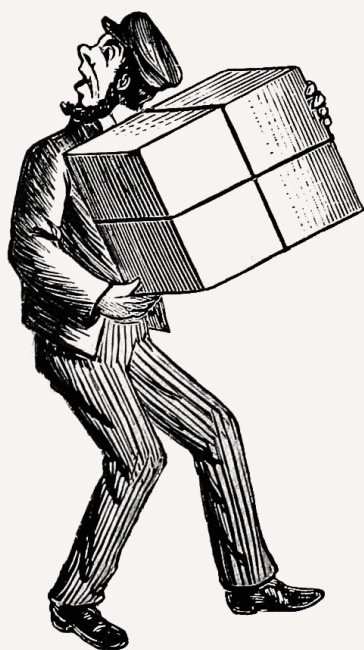
Soon after its establishment, the Greenwood Movement called for a boycott of white-owned businesses until their demands for basic human rights were met. The Movement kept a picket line in front of targeted businesses and helped people make arrangements to get their necessities in neighboring towns. My junior high school was just a few blocks from the downtown business district, and I was in the habit of wandering there after school to read comics and magazines at Barrett's Drugstore or listen to whatever was new at Joe's Record Shop. One day, as I was approaching Howard Street, the main business thoroughfare, I stood on a corner and saw the picket line right across the street. The people were all carrying hand-lettered signs that said things like, "Justice for All," "Green Power," and "I Want to Be Free." There were several young black people, some not much older than me, and a few older black women. There was a black man in a suit, probably one of the ministers. And there were white people—a man in a clerical collar and two sisters in nun's habits. When I saw them, something became crystal clear in my muddled young mind and heart. There was another way to be a Christian. I wouldn't have to abandon Jesus to stand for justice. My conversion to Catholicism took a couple of decades more, but I was lost to the Baptists from that moment on.

When I was in tenth grade, almost sixteen years after *Brown vs. Board of Education*, a federal court order finally forced the combination of Greenwood's two separate and unequal public school systems into one. It happened during Christmas break. In December, we left a high school that was ninety percent white. In January we returned to one that was, like our town, roughly half and half. Mobile classrooms (converted house trailers) filled the spaces around the school building, and a new world began. In Greenwood the transition was peaceful, and, to my way of thinking, entirely positive. Of course, the whites most resistant to integration had removed themselves to a new "segregation academy" at the edge of town. As the months went by and students sorted themselves into cliques and clusters as kids do, I noticed that the black students who were most self-confident and unafraid to speak up for themselves were often ones who had attended Saint Francis School through eighth grade. Meanwhile, among the few white friends I found who shared my enthusiasm for integration, three were Catholic. They were the ones who were with me one afternoon when we handed out anti-Vietnam war leaflets at the federal

building downtown. One of those Catholic friends also somehow knew one of the nuns at Saint Francis, and she let him use her address so we could receive bundles of *The Kudzu* the underground newspaper published in Jackson.

It was also during this time that a mass market paperback of *The Trial of the Catonsville Nine* by Daniel Berrigan, S.J., appeared alongside the Westerns and romances on the book rack at the Gibson's Discount Store in town. As the title indicates, Berrigan's book was a dramatization of his trial (along with his brother Phillip and seven others) for destroying draft records as an act of resistance to the Vietnam War. A little later, in that same Gibson's store, I found cheap editions of *On Pilgrimage: The Sixties*, a collection of Dorothy Day's Columns in the Catholic Worker, and Day's earlier books, *The Long Loneliness* and *Loaves and Fishes*, reissued to mark the author's seventy-fifth birthday. I bought them all. Of course, I didn't understand everything I read back then, but I could certainly tell that both of these authors and activists wrote what they wrote and did what they did because of Jesus. And they seemed to see Jesus in a way that had never occurred to me before. They saw him in the burning flesh of Vietnamese napalm victims, in the faces of the homeless men on a soup line, or among the workers on a picket line. To them being Christian seemed to mean joining Jesus in his suffering here and now, which is where you find the hope of new life. In *On Pilgrimage*, I also learned that Dorothy Day had visited the Saint Francis Center in Greenwood in 1968. This other way to be a Christian just wouldn't leave me alone.

My halfway house between the Baptists and Rome turned out to be Sojourners Fellowship, an intentional Christian community that had grown up around the work of *Sojourners* magazine, an ecumenical monthly with roots in evangelicalism that focused mainly on social justice and peace issues. When I joined, there were about forty community members living in four large households. We were all white, but we lived clustered within a few blocks of each other in a low-income, almost all black inner-city neighborhood in Washington, D.C. Some of us worked at the magazine and others worked in a neighborhood ministry that included a day care center, a food co-op, and a tenant-organizing project. Others worked at a variety of regular jobs in the city. All of us turned all our income over to a common treasury and received a household budget for necessities and a very small personal stipend for very small luxuries. The idea was to translate the life of the first-century Church into the last quarter of the twentieth. Every Sunday



we gathered for a worship service that was a sort of bootleg version of the Episcopal liturgy. Every Wednesday we had community meetings for discussion or teaching, and every Monday household meetings to deal with logistics, iron out personality conflicts, and share personal struggles.

We did a lot of good things in those days. The magazine, and its related organizing efforts, played a part in mobilizing Christian opposition to the nuclear arms race and to repression and war in Central America. We also did our bit to keep the priority of the poor front and center during the onset of Reaganomics. However, we also did some really stupid things. For example, we thought that moving into a low-income, black neighborhood would demonstrate our solidarity with the poor and root our life and work in their experience. In reality, we mainly served as urban pioneers for the real estate industry, opening new territory for the massive gentrification that would soon drive the poor people out of that neighborhood.

But the stupid thing we did that is relevant to my story here happened at one of our community meetings. When the community started, the members were mostly young and single, but as the years rolled by, marriages happened, then children. With children came the question of whether they would be baptized as infants, or later if or when they made a personal profession of faith. We were an ecumenical community, unaffiliated with any institutional church. We had members from Catholic, Episcopal, and mainline Protestant traditions who

wanted their babies baptized, and we had people from various evangelical and Anabaptist traditions for whom infant baptism was mere hocus pocus.

So one Wednesday night, we all crammed into the basement of one of our community houses for what became an interminable and utterly unproductive discussion of child baptism. The idea that we were going to settle a question that had divided Christians for five hundred years was patently absurd. And, despite all the talk, we didn't settle it. Instead, we opted for a compromise in which each family would follow its own inclination, which, in practice, meant that we really believed nothing at all about the significance of the sacrament, if it was, in fact, a sacrament at all.

That was when I lost whatever interest I may have ever had in re-inventing the ecclesial wheel. The vague Catholic inclination that had dogged me for fifteen years began to take a more definite shape. Not long after, I began dating Polly Duncan, who was to become my wife. She had come from Cleveland to join the *Sojourners* staff. In Cleveland, she had already gone through R.C.I.A., twice, but had not yet made the leap to confirmation. Within three years, we were both Roman Catholics.

We started by attending Mass together at Saint Aloysius Gonzaga Church, a Jesuit parish on North Capitol Street (since closed). Despite all my reading of Catholic authors and relationships with Catholic friends and colleagues, I had still never gone to a Catholic Mass. Saint. Al's, as everyone called it, was a historically black parish, so the music was familiar to me. They even sang some of the same Baptist hymns with which I'd grown up. In addition, some of the liturgy was familiar from our quasi-Anglican *Sojourners* services. However, nothing could have prepared me for what I experienced at the consecration of the Eucharist. I didn't know the vocabulary at the time, but I was simply overwhelmed by the fact of Christ's real presence. Something inside me said, "He's here." And he was; Jesus was there—right there in that room. The Jesus that I'd heard preached about and had accepted as my Savior. The Jesus that I read about and tried to follow. He was there—really and truly and completely. And he had been there for almost two thousand years. I was a Catholic Christian from then on. The rest was just logistics.

Ever since I officially converted, I have occasionally been asked, "But what *kind* of Catholic are you?" The implication being, what theological/political camp are you in—progressive or orthodox? My answer is always, "I'm a Dorothy Day Catholic, or at least I try to be." Dorothy Day satisfied no faction, political or ecclesial. She was, from

her teen years, a woman of the Left, a socialist, an anti-imperialist, eventually some sort of anarcho-syndicalist. She never renounced or abandoned any of those inclinations. After her baptism and until her death, however, she was also a faithful daughter of the Church, obedient to all the Church's teachings and devoted to all Her sacramental and devotional practices. She had no patience for the great cultural revolution of the 1960s and tried her best to keep its influence away from the *Catholic Worker*. She'd had an abortion during her own wandering youth and so knew firsthand what a grave evil that was. She didn't join the Church to critique or reform it; she joined the Church to find the peace and serenity that she saw her working class Catholic neighbors find by surrendering to God's will as it was made visible through the Church.

When I was confirmed in the Church, we were in the Boston area for Polly to get her master's degree at what was then Weston Jesuit School of Theology. We lived in an apartment building near Harvard Square that the school had bought to house its lay students. Still, at that very beginning of our Catholic life, Polly and I knew that we didn't want to cast our lot solely with the intelligentsia of the Church. We chose Saint Ann's, in the next township over, because it was an ordinary parish of mostly Italian and Portuguese middle and working class Catholics. We chose not to be in a self-selected bubble of "people like us"—Sojourners had shown us what a dead end that could be. Instead, we wanted to join the "Here comes everybody" mainstream of the Church and be held up and carried along by its current.

For myself, I knew that I needed most of all to not have to be right all the time. I needed to surrender my critical faculties and my God Almighty intellect to something larger than myself. When I read my profession of faith off that index card at Easter, I still had some doubts about a few Catholic beliefs, but when I affirmed what the Church affirms, I surrendered my need to understand or to be right. I became willing to accept leadership, direction, and, yes, even authority. There's a saying in twelve-step groups that it is easier to act your way into right thinking than it is to think your way into right action. I've found that to be true whenever I've tried it. Certainly, living as a Catholic from week to week and year to year has, slowly but surely, made me into more of a Catholic. Any doubts that I may have had in Easter 1989 have either been resolved or just don't matter very much because I trust that the Holy Spirit guides the Church.

My wife and I have lived our Catholic lives ever since. Providence, and our distaste for the East

Coast bubble, would eventually take us back to the South, where we've been for the past twenty-five years. Here we have lived and worked and raised our four Catholic children in the ambivalent embrace of a culture that, if not exactly Christian, is certainly, as Flannery O'Connor put it, "Christ-haunted." Polly works for the Church, and I teach at a historically black college.

As I look back now, I can see that my two conversion epiphanies—on the streets of Greenwood, Mississippi and in Saint Al's church—are inextricably connected. The power that I witnessed at work on that picket line and that I dimly grasped in the writings of Berrigan and Day was the same one that I encountered in the Mass. It was the Paschal Mystery—the divine life offered as sacrifice and resurrected among us. And that isn't an abstract theological proposition; it is a living and breathing reality that the Church offers every day in the celebration of the Eucharist. I think that's what allowed the priest and nuns I saw in Greenwood to step out and do something that could easily get them killed. It's what allowed Daniel Berrigan to face years in prison and inspired Dorothy Day to live almost fifty years among the poorest of America's poor and go to jail repeatedly for causes such as peace and workers' rights. That power equips each of us, in our own little ways, to offer ourselves for others and for a greater good in our families, communities, and workplaces. And it was there all along, waiting for me.

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MAMA SHOT THE DEER!

BY RYAN T. ANDERSON



When my wife and I were completing marriage prep, there was only one area in which we had a major disagreement: she loved animals and I did not. My reasons were rooted in my childhood, when a neighbor's dog in Baltimore bit me and I never got over it. So were hers, since she grew up on a farm in Illinois. The brilliant and blunt (and holy) priest preparing us for marriage asked how we would reconcile our difference in opinion. Six years later, we're raising our own children with a dog, two cats, four pigs, five ducks, six goats, two dozen sheep, and a couple dozen rabbits. Oh, and my wife just got me a cow for my birthday.

Our homesteading experience began when we had two hours to kill between the nuptial Mass of two friends and their wedding reception. We headed to Home Depot, and loaded the car up with four hundred feet of fencing and T-posts. The next day this became our first one hundred foot by one hundred foot goat pen, and a few weeks later we brought home several goats inside my Honda Element. About a month after that, my father-in-law transformed an old firewood shed into a chicken coop. Meanwhile, I lay in bed recovering from an infection that didn't respond to normal antibiotics. It was my first lesson in my own inadequacies as a homesteader. When I recovered, we moved the chicks from our basement to what is more rightly called a chicken mansion. (This was pre-plague, when lumber was cheap. Now we mill our own wood.)

Some time later, when our daughter was born, a home birth a few weeks into the pandemic planned because of onerous hospital restrictions, I remember being surprised that our son, not quite two at the time and rambunctious even for a

toddler boy, was remarkably gentle with her. I had worried about sibling rivalry, especially since he'd been isolated at home during the statewide lockdown. Instead, he seemed to apply the same lessons he had learned with the puppy and baby chicks to his baby sister. He knew how to treat a smaller and more fragile life. My wife and I witnessed the same thing a year and half later when a baby brother arrived—another home birth, this time because of the beauty and naturalness of the first experience—and both older siblings handled him with care and marveled at his existence. Both younger siblings were born at night, which meant the next morning when the older kids awoke, they were surprised to see their mother's belly a little less full—and even more surprised to see a new baby in our bed. I often see them wondering at many things: walks in the woods, chores with the animals, crawdad hunts in our streams, fishing with Grampy and Poppy in our pond, steps on the same pond when it freezes over, late-night star gazing. But their wonder at a new birth is precious.

Our children know quite a bit about the miracle of life, actually. They've witnessed goat labor, and it looks exactly as you might expect. They were in the pasture with my wife and me as one mama goat gave birth to three kids, one of which came out with the sac fully intact, spraying amniotic fluid and breaking only upon hitting the ground. They know the entity growing in a womb is a baby: a baby goat when in a goat womb, a baby human when in a human womb. They both kissed their mother's belly once it started showing that their baby brother was inside. They also know that not all newborns make it. One of our lambs was born with the sheep equivalent of cleft palate, making him unable to nurse at his mother's teat. We hadn't built our barn yet, so we brought him into the

house to bottle-feed. Shortly before dinnertime, he died on the dining room floor. We didn't talk too much about it, but also didn't downplay it. We hoped the experience would convey something of the goodness and the fragility of life. The children knew that we had done what we could to help that lamb, but also that there are limits to what any of us can do. Many people fear and deny death (and, in a different way, birth), but for now our kids seem unfazed by both. They have seen more birth and death than I did in my first few decades.

They also have seen both birth and death within a natural order. For example, mama and dada pig are named Bella and Gordo, but their children are named Scrapple and Ginger Bacon (the latter being a redhead, or red-belly). Our kids look forward to one day eating the scrapple and bacon produced by their namesakes. This isn't weird to them. They know that food doesn't come from the store, it comes from the field. When they get older, I'll share Roger Scruton's essays on that subject, but for now they don't need philosophy to understand it. When we slaughtered our lambs the first year, our son and daughter gave them hugs and kisses goodbye, thanked them for being their friends, and then, in a matter-of-fact way, our son said, "I can't wait to eat you." They aren't weirded out by death, or blood, or guts, as the rest of my family from Baltimore is. In fact, they are fearless, sometimes in frightening ways. We've seen adults shriek and run from our livestock, but our two-year-old daughter charges in with hugs and kisses, even as she knows to beware "the mean ram" that once headbutted her big brother and the cow that stomped at her mother and (slightly) gored her with a horn. And both of the older children love helping their mother gut and field dress the deer that she bags. They take real pride in her handiwork: "Mama shot the deer!"

Everything on the farm contributes to its order in some way. The rabbits and pigs are for meat. The sheep are for meat, wool, and milk. The ducks and chickens are for eggs and eat insects in the gardens. The goats and cow are for milk, and to keep them lactating we breed them. (We sell off the baby goats and eventually eat the baby cows.) The cats eat the mice. The guineas eat ticks. Meanwhile, everything produces poop, which nourishes the soil. (Spreading manure is oddly satisfying.) We've had to explain to our son that we don't eat horses (the neighbor's horses, more specifically), that they contribute in a different way to the life of a farm. Likewise, we don't eat ewes (they have the babies after all), and only keep one ram (he can do the deed, and we can eat the ram lambs). We have to keep the males and females separated during

certain months and bring them together during others. Unto everything there is a season and a role. Moms and dads differ, sex reproduces, death is natural. And the other animals naturally differ from people. We treat farm animals with dignity and give them a humane death, but their purpose is to nourish our bodies, or be our companions, or help us in our work—setting them dramatically apart from siblings and neighbors and guests and grandparents. Every person has something to contribute too, but not according to a utilitarian calculus. The gift of presence is a contribution.

The cultivation of this way of life takes time. It is the work of generations. My grandparents grew up in Sicily, so naturally they had a fig tree in the backyard of their Baltimore rowhouse. When they died, my father took a cutting from their tree and planted it in his front yard. Some twenty years later, he took cuttings from his fig tree and, with the help of me and his grandson, planted them in our orchard. The fig trees didn't make it through the first winter here—we must not have wrapped them properly—but the roots stayed alive and resprouted an entire branch system from the ground up. Still, even though they took the most work, the fig trees haven't produced any fruit. Nor have our apple trees or pear trees. Our blueberry bushes have produced a small handful of berries. Meanwhile, we have more wild berries growing on the edges of where pasture turns to woods than we know what to do with. These are palpably unmerited gifts, reminding us about the true status of all creation. Then there is God's mercy, reviving our failing tomato vines after we forget to water them, and the superabundance of His grace in the "volunteer" plants that sprout from the seeds of half-eaten fruit left on the ground by our children. The volunteer tomato plants always make me chuckle, as our intended tomato plants take a lot of work: to start the seeds, prep the garden, transfer the seedlings, water and mulch, weed and prune, wait, and then harvest. But at a certain point other things require more time, and the tomatoes are forgotten. Until July, when suddenly there is a marvelous explosion of plants to reap, even where we did not sow.

That said, human effort makes a difference—if not to the outcome, then to our reception of it. When our four-year-old son went on a breakfast strike, spurning the eggs we'd prepare every morning, my wife started taking him to the coop. He'd go see the eggs laid overnight, pick out the color egg he wanted to eat, go inside, wash it, and then crack it on the counter, and together they'd put it right into the pan—and he ate with gusto. The value of co-creation is a deep truth about the human

condition. If creation is beautiful, co-creation appropriates and deepens the beauty. Food is meant not just to sustain the body but also to nourish the soul—through the preparation and sharing of a meal with friends and family, and the tasting and seeing of its beauty. The crops have a natural beauty; and so do the harvest, meal, and fellowship.



That fellowship has a different flavor in a log house in rural Virginia than it did at our alley house in Washington, D.C. We had wanted our move to the country to expand our opportunities to provide hospitality, and the pandemic helped, as people sought respite from city life. What we hadn't expected was the character of the sacrifice needed. We love stewarding the land and preserving the food with canning and jarring and freezing. We love having friends over for a real farm-to-table meal. But as my wife once put it to me, growing and harvesting all of this food is "a shit ton of work." It can be more sacrificial than I would have expected to spend the time and work growing something, to then take the choicest potatoes out of the few we managed to grow, or the rosiest tomatoes, or the fattest rabbit, knowing how much time and work went into producing that thing, and cook it up for friends—or the friends of friends we barely know. But it's a healthy reminder that none of this is truly ours, that it's unmerited gift from God, and that tithing isn't just about your I.R.S.-documented income. One way to give back is to present the tithe to someone as a form of hospitality.

Why do *any* of this? When we first moved out here, we didn't have this all in mind—or I didn't. I can never quite get a straight answer from my wife on exactly how much of this she envisioned. But we got started little by little—putting up fencing,

building a chicken coop, creating a Victory Garden, installing waterers, getting new species and breeds of animals, building a barn—and just kept going. While this certainly isn't for everyone (I'm not even sure it's for me), we do think it's one way of responding to the unique challenges of raising children in twenty-first-century America. We want our kids to have not just an intellectual understanding of the goodness, givenness, and meaning of creation—the natural teleology of created order—but a feel for it in their bones. Not just head knowledge, but gut instincts and emotions and passions and natural intuitive reactions that align with reality. We think the farm can help with this. We don't plant our crops in fall, and we don't harvest in winter. There's a season for sowing seed, a season for weeding and watering, a season for harvesting and canning. Internalizing these natural rhythms, and the meaning of the rhythms, we hope will translate to dealing with other cultural challenges later on. Cultures cultivate, and that's true of horticulture and agriculture just as much as it is of human culture. Good cultures cultivate natural capacities to their proper ends.

And what I said about not planting in fall or harvesting in winter isn't quite true. Last year we planted a winter garden, creating more or less rows of little greenhouses using clear plastic tarps. Which is just to say that there's a way to co-operate with nature, to harness nature—to cultivate creation, to co-create—that enhances rather than distorts. We use technology—a well pump, a hose, a sprinkler, a tractor—to make fruits spring from the earth more abundantly. For the same reason, we pull weeds, we cut back and trim and prune our roses and grape vines and berry bushes. Creation is good but needs tending, even more so in our post-lapsarian condition. How we ourselves on the farm navigate the use of technology and the proper cultivation of mother nature we hope will shape our kids' attitudes toward technology and the proper cultivation of human nature—neither luddite nor transhumanist—as they grow. Given the areas my professional work has taken me, it's understandable why we wouldn't want to run this race only to have our children fail to win the prize.

You could say that my wife won the debate over animals, but that's not the whole story. I haven't become affectionate to animals, but I have grown to love raising my kids around them. Especially now, a time generally marked by unreality, farm life provides seemingly endless opportunities for children to grow up grounded in reality: of male and female forms, of birth and death, or breeding and slaughtering, of life cycles, seasons, planting,

and harvesting. We also hope they learn something from watching their mother and father work together to cultivate a farm, as Adam and Eve did to cultivate Eden. We don't quite fit all the various stereotypes—my wife is the hunter, and she slaughters and butchers the rabbits—but there are complementary roles. For most of human history, households were about production, not just consumption. We want to foster a home where we do more than just sleep under the same roof. We want common activities to do together. Right now, having our kids help with the various farm work normally slows us down. But efficiency was never the reason to do it together anyhow.

Cultivation of a family culture is a long-term process. It's cyclical, generational, and hopefully generative. Each season can bring new forms of common action, enlisting children and grandparents, aunts, uncles, and cousins in the activities of family life. We've made, and are making, our fair

share of mistakes. Some things are beyond our control—droughts, disease, cleft palates. Some are a matter of a learning curve. (It's been two years since my last chainsaw-related ER visit!) Some just take time before we'll even know if we did it right or wrong—which can be unnerving, putting in continued care without knowing the outcome. A bit like raising kids. Who knows if any of this will pay off for them—like our crops and livestock, children are recalcitrant to some forms of control, but unlike them they're endowed with free will. Like all of creation, our children and their choices and characters are all themselves gifts from God, and so we do what we can, hope and pray, and ultimately let go. And, as my wife reminds me, “mistakes make good compost.”

Ryan T. Anderson is president of the Ethics and Public Policy Center.

THANK THEM NOW

BY STEVE KNEPPER



Bob looked like Clint Eastwood. He could match Dirty Harry's scowl and snarl-grunt. But he was not the strong, silent type. With Bob, the pronouncements were frequent and frank, unvarnished thoughts straight out over his teeth. When I shook his hand for the first time, he remarked vulgarly on my handshake's inadequacies and prescribed a workout regimen to stiffen it up.

I set myself up for this gruff introduction. Bob was one of two serious cyclists in my corner of rural Pennsylvania—as in, he was one of the only two we ever saw on the local roads. I had recently become hooked on the sport. I spent June riding my department-store Roadmaster ten miles each

way to watch my crush play softball games. The bike rattled apart in July, just as I discovered Lance Armstrong and the Tour de France. My parents bought me a Trek mountain bike for my birthday that month, and I set out to find a riding partner. So I stood by the magazine rack in the grocery store where Bob stocked shelves part-time, conspicuously reading a copy of *Bicycling*. The stakeout was a success. I left the grocery store with some grip strength tips and a rendezvous.

My parents had reason to be a little wary of my new riding partner. Bob retired to our area in his early fifties after a career as a D.C. policeman and a secret service agent. That was enough to start rumors in a sleepy small town. Much more than enough. Was he undercover? Was the secret

service bit even true? Why would he come here of all places? For a while, Bob ran a gym at the edge of town. After that closed, he filled the time between workouts and bike rides with a variety of part-time jobs, including the gig at the grocery store. These jobs were not usually customer-facing. Bob tended to stomp—not step—on the toes of unsuspecting townspeople. If a car rode up on him aggressively, he would move his bike squarely into the middle of the lane. If a young man had a limp fish handshake, he cussed at him a little. Bob did not back down. This fanned the fire of myth.

Thankfully, my parents let me meet up with Bob for that first ride. It was a brisk twenty-mile loop. He dusted me. Bob repeatedly pulled ahead and then circled back to bark me along. He enjoyed this. Amidst the suffering and humiliation, I did too, somehow. Weekly rides turned into bi-weekly rides. I started to keep up, most of the time. We pedaled up the ridges of three counties and came careening down again. We hummed along flat river roads and broad valleys lined by fields full of stubble and round bales. One time a doe jumped out of the morning fog and ran alongside us for fifty yards or so. I took pride in climbing local “mountains” that would throw cars into a low gear. This was just what an anxious, bookish farm boy needed.

Sometimes we were joined by the area’s other cyclist, a barber who rode an old steel frame road bike—think *Breaking Away*—with an oversized leather seat pack in which he kept a pack of cigarettes and dog bones to slow up menacing hounds. He was jocular, kind, and wise in the ways barbers tend to be wise. He loved to tell stories. Bob loved to rib him. He loved to lure Bob into arguments, which was easy. We must have looked strange in an area where bikers of the Harley-Davidson variety were common enough but cyclists were rare. We must have been a sight to passersby, bizarre and archetypal at the same time: a lycra-clad minstrel, knight, and squire silhouetted against the Alleghenies.

You don’t have to be a barber-bard to see where this is heading. Bob had a great heart underneath the gruff exterior. But I wouldn’t call it a softer side. He was an abrasive dude. Some of the choicest things he said to me over the years (none of them fit to print) are seared into my memory. He was also stubborn. I figured the ride was off one rainy morning and didn’t show up. When I next saw him, he gave me the Dirty Harry scowl and asked me where I was. My excuse did not impress. On future occasions, we rode through rain and snow. When the lightning strikes got too close to ignore, we took shelter in sagging tractor sheds or

underneath bridges. He only turned back one time, when we set out from my family’s farm in the wake of an ice storm. We made it almost a mile, skittering and sliding and crashing, before he yowled an exasperated obscenity at the sky gods and turned around.

But the great heart was there. For all his feigned impatience, Bob actually was patient and generous with me. I especially see that in hindsight, when I think about how he allowed a teenager to tag along on his training rides, how he often picked me and my bike up in his truck, met me halfway, or launched out from my farm. Every teenager needs positive attention from an adult outside of the family. He gave me that. Bob had worked as a fitness trainer, and he coached me up with high expectations, technical guidance, and just enough encouragement and affirmation to keep me going. I remember the first time I dropped him on a climb. He scowled when he caught up to me on the descent, cursed (of course), and then gave me one of the biggest and most genuine smiles I ever saw cross his face. His mentorship was especially important given my struggles with depression. He pried me out of melancholy for a few hours by getting me on the bike and out of my head. At times he did this in the truck on the way to the route, blasting B.B. King and Eric Clapton’s *Riding with the King* and singing along at the top of his lungs. I wasn’t his first project kid in town (and I wouldn’t be the last either). He helped another local become a powerlifting contender a few years earlier. I didn’t have that kind of talent—as my few forays into bike racing revealed—but it didn’t matter to him.

Bob also gave me sound advice. Some of it you would expect: persist, don’t complain, follow through, work hard, stay humble and hungry. Some of it less so: appreciate your parents, where you live, the good things in your life. Some of it ironic: don’t be an asshole. I rode with Bob for the better part of a decade, from junior high through college. When I called him to say that I had been admitted to graduate school in Virginia, I expected him to be excited for me. He was, but he also issued stern warnings. Don’t lose touch with your parents. Don’t lose touch with your friends. Don’t forget your home.

Bob preached toughness. He had his reasons. For someone who talked so much, Bob was reticent about his own past. I got it in bits and pieces over the years: the rough childhood in Irish Baltimore, the teenage tour in Vietnam that ended with a decimated platoon and a Purple Heart, the years on the beat as a cop and then as secret service protection for two presidents, the Eighties spent

bodybuilding and dabbling in arcane supplements, the failed marriage and strained relationships with his kids. He had an adventurous but hard life, and I sensed that his lessons about maintaining relationships were ones he learned the hard way.

I learned the hard way too. A different sort of hard way. I stayed in touch with Bob during the first years of graduate school. He was a groomsman at my wedding. These were good times for Bob. He met someone and got married too, and he flourished, spending part of the year in Florida, where he missed the hills but liked the coastal headwinds. Always something of a skeptic, he found the Lord, if not the Catholicism of his youth. What I had suspected turned out to be true. His was a gospel of tough *love*. But I became less responsive. I let a few, increasingly insistent, e-mails go unanswered for too long. I was busy with school. But this is a weak excuse, the kind at which Bob would snarl-grunt. Rather than e-mailing him back or trying to track

down his new number, I sat down and wrote him a letter. In it, I thanked him for being such a good friend over the years, for being a mentor when I needed one. I sent the letter. A few days later my mother called. Bob had collapsed while working security at a stadium in Florida. He was dead. Not long afterward, his widow sent a kind note: my letter arrived too late.

I was stunned. I still feel the blow from the hard end of this moral fable come true. I pray for Bob often, thanking God for sending him to me in the days of my youth. I pray for the peace of his bristly soul. And while I hope that the contents of that letter reached him on the other side, I also strongly recommend that you thank your mentors on this side of the grave, that you thank them now.

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THE LAST GOD

BY ROBERT WYLLIE



Today we respect the great goddess health. Health-care spending as a percentage of gross domestic product has more than doubled in the past fifty years. The health food industry has grown apace; David Brooks at the turn of the millennium already noted that selection of organic foods in the grocery store is a “barometer of virtue.” A visible class-based geographic separation emerges based on how much surplus wealth can be spent propitiating the vague sense of living a healthier lifestyle. A Pret A Manger sandwich, perhaps twelve dollars, “prices in” natural ingredients and an employee who exhibits Pret Behaviors such as being “happy to be themselves.” Across Middle America, up goes the “Breadmother” who personifies the proprietary sourdough starter used in Panera’s baked goods, and who symbolizes the company’s mission to make a healthier and happier world. A friend enjoys relating the part of his

training video that describes Panera’s corporate employees performing a “bread homage,” where they share a baguette and wipe tears from their eyes describing what they love about bread. Then, unto this already health-worshipping society and especially its aging founders, came COVID-19.

When the virus came, survival became the only imperative. Giorgio Agamben calls this bare life. (Readers of *THE LAMP* will be familiar with his testimony, written at that time, that we are witnessing the apogee of a medical religion.) Hospitals forbade priests from performing the last rites, valuing the health of bodies absolutely above the consolation of the dying and aggrieved, even above the salvation of the soul. I expect every Catholic has heard these painful stories. *Gesundheit* is a jealous goddess. Churches were shuttered. When they reopened, masks and bottles of hand sanitizer took the place of hymns and holy water. Occasionally, Church leaders protested that churches remained shuttered while shopping malls were allowed to

open, as in the case of the bishops of Minnesota. Often, however, the ministers of the Church were only virtually present when they were needed most. In a moving homily that laid bare his prayerfulness and moral seriousness, our pastor apologized. I wonder if he should have. Where is the ever-shifting line between right reason and the fanaticism of fear as our modern society faces a novel epidemic?

The very ancient Roman goddess whose name means both salvation and health, *Salus*, was invoked at the birth of modern democracy. Salvation is reduced to self-preservation and good health. Everyone can agree that self-preservation is a great good, and in the seventeenth century this became the first principle of modern arguments for democracy. Men should only risk their lives fighting for *salus*, Spinoza thinks, though they are tricked by false ideas of salvation into fighting for servitude. *Salus* is the patron deity of democracy. Spinoza, Nietzsche, Foucault, and Agamben all suggest that the egalitarian and compassionate doctrines of Christianity are intermixed with the cult of health. Nietzsche imagines that ascetic priests, concerned with the *salus* of the “sick herd” of slaves who internalize deep resentments, and who wish to concoct ways for them to vent their hatreds, give them hope for a world to come where their masters will burn in hell. Foucault imagines that the Christian pastorate, surveilling souls in the confessional, are the forerunners of modern biopolitics. Agamben imagines that the Christian idea of the end times becomes the medical religion’s state of permanent crisis.

Nietzsche was a sick man. Chronic headaches, eye trouble, intestinal pain, and viral infections plagued his entire life. Yet Nietzsche tried to find meaning in pain. He saw sickness as a stimulus to a higher life and a higher health. Nietzsche’s higher health and happiness are aristocratic ideas, and he looks with unparalleled contempt at those who only seek release from their sickness and pain. The all-too-common democratic desire for health is beneath him—such people cannot embrace life, its sufferings, its sacrifices, and so forth. Only through pain, he insisted, can the artist create some higher happiness. Nietzsche’s illnesses led him to spurn the consolations of Christianity and the ordinary, democratic desire for self-preservation. He enrolls himself in the history of thought as the implacable critic of the great goddess *Gesundheit*, the anti-prophet of *Salus*.

How did Nietzsche, of all thinkers, come to inspire the Left? The short story is that in the late 1950s, Nietzsche began to appear on the reading

lists for the *agrégation*, the national written and oral exams that qualify one to teach philosophy in a French university. The newly minted post-structuralists of that generation, such as Gilles Deleuze, Jacques Derrida, and Foucault, found themselves teaching their most motivated students works such as *The Genealogy of Morals*. This was the seminary of what is indiscriminately called post-modernism. In a longer story, the starring role is played by the seminarian-turned-pornographer Georges Bataille, and his secret society that talked a lot about human sacrifice but never practiced it. I shall spare the reader its telling. Allan Bloom tells yet another story about the Nietzscheanization of the Left and vice versa, worth mentioning only because Americans’ goofy agreeableness is largely to blame for the enthusiastic reception of postmodernism in American universities.



It is worth dwelling, however, on Foucault, who is perennially the most cited scholar in the humanities. A history professor of mine, who seemed to deserve his no-nonsense reputation, told us that Foucault was the only man whom he had ever met who had an aura. Politics majors certainly read the haloed one. *Discipline and Punish* was assigned in four of my classes—the old Vintage edition adorned with colorful implements for execution, imprisonment, and torture. Since then, Alan Sheridan’s translation has been more handsomely jacketed with a ruler on the front. The new cover better reflects Foucault’s idea that power operates as normalization. (If the stories about the sisters are true, Catholics of an older vintage will detect the double entendre of the ruler.) Authority and judgement are replaced by a system of averages, norms, and rules that influences our behavior.

Examinations in schools and hospitals measure deviations from a norm. We worked hard for good grades and now we work to get our blood pressure to 120/80 mmHg. Foucault studies prisons, hospitals, and schools that secure our compliance not by twisting our bodies, the wont of medieval torture, but bending our minds towards a norm.



The most famous chapter of this most-assigned book by this most-cited author, “Panopticism,” begins with a description of a seventeenth-century plague town. The town is quarantined, “everyone locked up in his cage.” Only people “of little substance” are permitted to be in contact with plague-ridden bodies. Inspections are ceaseless. “The magistrates have complete control over medical treatment.” Confronted with plague, “discipline brings its power, which is one of analysis.” The plague town is Foucault’s seminal moment in the history of disciplinary power. He emphasizes how power operates more efficiently in this new configuration. During a series of lectures at the Collège de France, Foucault described this regime of public hygiene, imposed upon a population to monitor mortality rates and improve measures of public health, as “biopolitics.” In a famous debate with Noam Chomsky five years earlier, Foucault declared that the “real political task” was to unmask how power works in institutions that appear to be neutral and independent.

I read Foucault with interest in a Charlottesville

house across Fourteenth Street from Venable Elementary School, where Carrie Buck’s daughter made the honor roll in 1931. Carrie Buck was sentenced to the state mental hospital for the “crime” of having been raped by her foster parents’ nephew and surgically sterilized on the basis of her supposed promiscuity and imbecility. This was not the work of a rogue clinician, like the so-called “uterus collector” alleged to have performed hysterectomies on women detained in an I.C.E. facility in Georgia without their consent a couple of years ago. Carrie Buck was sterilized to test the constitutionality of Virginia’s compulsory sterilization law. Eugenicist research concluded that imbecility and criminality were hereditary, and the one-tenth of Americans deemed socially inadequate ought to be sterilized. When *Buck v. Bell* reached the Supreme Court, eight justices agreed with Oliver Wendell Holmes that three generations of imbeciles were enough. The lone dissent came from Pierce Butler, the court’s only Catholic justice. In his concurrence to *Box v. Planned Parenthood*, Clarence Thomas connects abortion and the political abuse of obstetrics to the Court’s dark history promoting eugenics.

It is well known that American eugenics laws became models for Nazi Germany, where the most unspeakable tyranny wore the white coat. More than half of German physicians were N.S.D.A.P. members, and they joined at a faster rate and in greater numbers than in other professions. They fabricated a murderous hoax about a crisis of racial hygiene, and collaborated in a eugenic mandate to secure the health of the future members of their race, at an unimaginable cost of lives. *Buck v. Bell* is still the law of our land, though the Supreme Court has since ruled that habitual white-collar criminals cannot be exempted from laws that sterilize repeat offenders. Forced sterilization is on the books in thirty-one states plus the District of Columbia. Carrie Buck’s daughter’s academic record at Venable Elementary School challenges the notion that hereditary imbecility plagued public education in the commonwealth. On the other hand, most Thursday and Saturday nights, Fourteenth Street testifies to the fact that criminal imbecility can be passed down no less as a legacy of the well-educated.

Psychiatry is particularly prone to political abuse, against which the American Constitution is a dubious shield. Foucault’s *Madness and Civilization* proposes that madness is diagnosed in order to maintain hierarchies. There are spectacular examples. According to an article published in the *New Orleans Medical and Surgical Journal* in 1851, courageous fugitives from slavery might suffer from

drapetomania—from the Greek *drapetēs*, “runaway.” Jonathan Metzl in *The Protest Psychosis* describes how the demographics of Michigan’s Ionia State Hospital for the Criminally Insane changed during the years of the civil rights movement, when African-American men were more likely to be perceived as aggressive, and therefore more likely to be diagnosed with schizophrenia. The political abuse of the “sluggish schizophrenia” diagnosis in the Soviet Union, which psychiatrists developed at the behest of the K.G.B., is well documented. Regimes may pathologize their enemies in more subtle ways as well. The Associated Press stylebook cautions against describing political opponents of L.G.B.T. entitlements as homophobes or transphobes, for example, since the suffix phobia suggests a clinical disorder.

Foucault practiced what he preached with respect to his suspicion of the medical profession. His distrust of medicine may have stemmed from his appointment with Jean Delay, the psychopharmacological pioneer, who told an undergraduate Foucault that his obsession with self-harm and suicide was rooted in the distress he felt about his homosexuality. After publishing *Discipline and Punish*, he took L.S.D. in Death Valley with a historian at Claremont Men’s College and his boyfriend, tearing up to Richard Strauss’s *Vier letzte Lieder*, in what he called a life-changing experience. Foucault’s remaining years were dedicated to a series of volumes on the relationship between sex and truth. He used the library resources of Le Saulchoir, the Dominican school of theology in Paris’s thirteenth arrondissement, to which he donated undisclosed sums of money. Anyone who has read the second, third, and unfinished fourth volumes of *The History of Sexuality* must imagine Foucault composing them in a 1970s-style building alongside the whispered labors of priests and religious sisters. (As he told Claude Mauriac, he would have been a good monk but for his atheism.) The truth was that sex killed him. Foucault died in the early days of the last epidemic, A.I.D.S., which was then still widely described as Gay-Related Immune Deficiency syndrome (G.R.I.D.S.). In an interview with the *Nation*, Edmund White recalls Foucault’s skepticism in 1981 that any such virus existed, preferring to see it as a technique for disciplining sexual and racial minorities in the U.S.: “This is some new piece of American Puritanism. You’ve dreamed up a disease that punishes only gays and blacks? Why don’t you throw in child molesters too?”

Why, then, was there no academic anti-lockdown left in the United States? Even if one grants that the public health response to COVID-19

has been reasonable, or allows a charitable margin of error for an easily communicable novel virus, one must admit it is remarkable that there has been little or no resistance to lockdowns and vaccine mandates in left-wing academia. Two generations of teachers and students of the academic humanities primed by the critique in *Discipline and Punish*; zero emerge as critics of public health officials. As far as I can tell, nobody on the academic left in the United States emerged as a skeptic of the virus’s lethality, a detractor of the medical field’s analysis of the disease, or a protestor against masking and other lockdown measures. In May 1968, Trotskyite students shouting anti-psychiatric slogans attacked Delay’s offices and eventually forced him into retirement. To my knowledge, however, there were no student protests against university closures in March 2020, even though many students were left paying tens of thousands of dollars in tuition and fees for services that could not be rendered. Nor were there significant student protests when many universities did not re-open. For two years the mostly young and (physically) healthy community of student activists neither challenged the rule of the old, the frightened Baby Boomer gerontocracy, nor protested rules made in deference to the sick or immunocompromised. To the contrary, even now many college students appear to be willing to wear face masks longer and observe public-health recommendations more stringently than the general public. It is a cautionary tale for intellectual history, or anyone who expects academic scribblers to influence practical politics in proportion to their citation index.

People interested in this puzzle tend to agree that Foucault has been co-opted by the political right. This would be a coming-home of sorts for anti-psychiatry politics. In one early example, anti-communists feared that the Alaska Mental Health Enabling Act of 1956 would create a domestic Siberia-style gulag for Americans. Stephanie Williams and her organization of approximately one hundred Catholic housewives in California, the American Public Relations Forum, sounded the alarm. The A.P.R.F. published *Brain-Washing: A Synthesis of the Russian Textbook on Psychopolitics*, ostensibly the work of one Lavrentiy Beria but probably in fact written by L. Ron Hubbard. Senators were mystified by the groundswell of opposition to a federal land-grant for a psychiatric hospital in the Alaska Territory. This alliance of conservative Catholic mothers and Scientologists, united by a distrust of psychiatry, successfully pressured Barry Goldwater to sponsor an amendment which clarified that non-residents of Alaska could not

be transferred for psychiatric confinement in the Great North. *Plandemic: Indoctrination* is part of a storied tradition.

As the medical establishment and the scientific community in general is perceived to support the left in the culture wars, the critical Foucauldian posture is increasingly taken up by the right. Perhaps A.I.D.S. changed everything, and the Foucault I read in the late 2000s was already a dead letter. The medical establishment is no longer perceived as a conservative establishment, in no small part due to the rise of the gay pride movement in the early 1970s. Homosexuality was no longer listed as a mental disorder after the seventh printing of the DSM-II in 1974, and distress over one's sexual orientation—Foucault's diagnosis from Delay—disappeared from the DSM-V in 2013.

One could argue that Foucault does not belong to the left any more than he does to the right. Foucault's general left-wing bona fides have always been questionable: Sartre called *The Order of Things* the "last barricade" of the bourgeoisie, and Marshall Berman, a rare American leftist not smitten with Foucault, said his freedom-less world offered Sixties radicals a "world-historical alibi" for their failures in the Seventies.

Yet Foucault valorizes speaking one's mind, even if the Internet and our constant auto-surveillance on social media makes toeing the party line more important than ever. This is *parrhesia*, the cliché of speaking truth to power in the face of danger. It is one mark of a Christian, also. In Acts, Saint Peter and Saint John speak boldly, with *parrhesia*, before Annas, Caiaphas, and the rest of the Sanhedrin. This boldness reveals both that they are ordinary and uneducated men, and companions of the great parrhesiast, Our Lord. Since they have been primed for *parrhesia* for so long, it is surprising that there are no schismatic Foucauldians in American universities criticizing our public health regime. There are many campus causes célèbres that are presumptuous and strategically stupid in the extreme. Why nothing about the disproportionate harms of vaccine passports inflict upon communities of color? Community leaders even lobby for medical paternalism, as when the president of the N.A.A.C.P., Derrick Johnson, cheers on the F.D.A. for proposing a ban on menthol cigarettes that is expressly aimed at black smokers.

Either Foucault was nonsense and bluster all along, or he was correct—indeed, so deeply insightful that even students and teachers armed with Foucauldian critique cannot but Follow the Science.

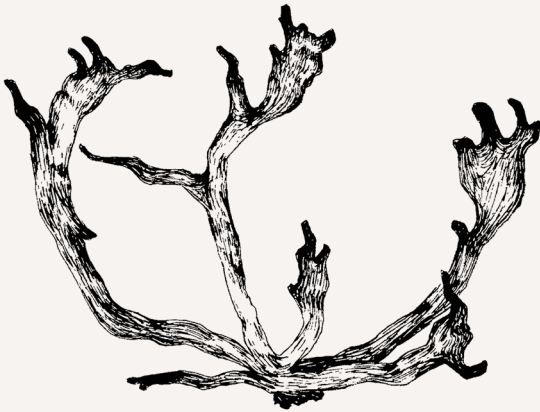
In other words, either the post-modern humanities are humbug, or *Discipline and Punish* is

an absolute humdinger that lays bare the carceral texture of school and society. The former possibility concerns me deeply as a symptom of the much-touted "death of the humanities." Humbug is pretentious carrying-on or performative speech. To spout humbug (or its more vulgar synonym described with exactitude by Harry Frankfurt) is to exempt oneself quietly from the old norms of academic conversation. The speaker merely aims to make an impression on the listener, perhaps that she is learned or politically radical, so that the truth becomes irrelevant. The instructor opens *Discipline and Punish* and reads about the drawing-and-quartering of the regicide Damiens only to titillate students. Humbug is a professional hazard of teaching and politics. I have been accused of it, even.

The puzzling absence of the campus anti-lockdown activist concerns me as an indictment of humbug. Does anything we teach in the humanities really matter in the rare moments when the chips are down? Hannah Arendt poses this question sharply, and it orients her approach to teaching. How do you teach someone to think for himself in times of political crisis, when the stakes of independent thinking seem too high? I worry that for all our lip-service to transformative education, critical thinking, and character, humanities classes are often simply zombie-like performances. We shrink from constructive public engagement with common questions in order to advance cynical, corrosive critiques. Our inquiry remains undead but not quite alive, reproducing knowledge without any purpose outside of impressing others in our tiny theaters. Here are a few Foucauldian bon mots. The punk kids have their law-school applications in already. The soul remains the prison of the body.

The second possibility is that Foucault is a Cassandra, who speaks the truth about the medical regime, and yet who is powerless to inoculate his students against its power. To examine this possibility, we can think of Foucault as an anti-prophet. He foretells the future coming of a god, not with eager expectation, but rather to poison the well. He prepares the way for the atheist of the future. In Foucault's day, the cult of health was still in its infancy. *The Order of Things* came out in 1966, after the peak of cigarette consumption in the United States, and the same year that *Jogging* convinced Americans that it is a perfectly normal activity to run out of their homes and then run back again, for the sake of a normal amount of exercise. Casualwear was then distinct from sportswear. Today the ritual practices and attire of the cult of health are everywhere.

Despite his prescience, writing on the cusp of the health-care revolution, Foucault can only be counted among the latter anti-prophets of the goddess of health. Ultimately, he repeats the earlier warnings of Nietzsche. A further history might follow Nietzsche's obsession with Plato, and follow the brilliant Father Justin Brophy, O.P., back to the shortcomings of the physician Erixymachus's medical perspective in the *Symposium*. However, fundamentally, it is Nietzsche who notices that the nineteenth-century work ethic no longer respects the "great goddess *Gesundheit*," though he predicts she will come again in the mouth of Zarathustra. The small-minded Last Men will have their little pleasures for the day and their little pleasures for the night, but above all, they will respect health. This is the concluding flourish of Zarathustra's first discourse: the last men will honor this last goddess. Since Nietzsche's influence on the academic humanities is profound, the mystery of the missing anti-lockdown student protest deepens.



No Nietzsche- or Foucault-inspired activist protests our public health authorities, I would guess, because they are only ever taken half seriously. They fit the hyperbolic, hyperventilating style of the contemporary academic critique of society. They are taught so long as they seem to make students more compassionate to those who suffer subtle anguish, or whom subtle power dynamics marginalize. In other words, Americans turn to Nietzsche and Foucault to reawaken our commitments to equality. As soon as they challenge our common-sense democratic commitments to ordinary health, and they do, we suddenly wonder why we have tolerated these perverts so long. Ever thus do the philosophers wear out their welcome in the city, when they mock or even threaten its survival.

If we dare to question the gods, or at least if we are to avoid so much humbug, then we should think seriously about what health is. Foucault credits his advisor, Georges Canguilhem, for bringing the history of science down from its heights. He challenges the ontological picture of disease, where the researcher isolates the pathogen that is the essence of disease, and attempts to return the body to a fixed statistical norm of health. Louis Pasteur and his disciples who dreamed of a completely anti-septic world grant prestige to this view, where medicine is a branch of biology and ultimately of set physical laws. Influenced by phenomenology, Canguilhem points out that medicine begins when we feel unwell. He quotes the surgeon René Leriche: health is life in the silence of our organs. Canguilhem opens up the way we think about health in *The Normal and the Pathological*. He proposes that health is our ability to survive diseases that transform our bodies and establish a new equilibrium between the body and the environment. At stake is a debate with obvious political importance: who knows when we are sick and when we are healthy, the experts, or ourselves?

We can also think seriously about the role that disease, pain, and infirmity play in our lives. The normal increasingly rules these out. We increasingly live in Paul Valéry's world where pain has no meaning. The *norma* of the world is not the T-square of the divine carpenter. Take for example the apostate friend of the narrator in *The Diary of a Country Priest*, l'abbé Dupréty, who defrocks himself because, he declares, "A busy, healthy life, *normal* in every way (the word *normal* underlined three times) should contain no mysteries." We know how to be well. In *The Palliative Society*, Byung-Chul Han argues that the meaninglessness of pain makes the experience of any pain unbearable. Rather than expect to live and grow through infirmity and disease, we come to expect medicine to help us avoid pain. The pain-averse palliative society we live in seems to have more chronic pain than ever. Han is Catholic, but he points to Nietzsche's dictum that pain and pleasure are twins who either grow together or remain small together. Han is a cultural and media theorist, so characteristically, he thinks that the increasing amount of time we spend in digital life is a further way of isolating ourselves from pain. But we also increasingly isolate ourselves from one another, from others who might cause us pain, from the risk of loving and losing.

These questions may reveal a hidden new normal. Our society seems to be increasingly intolerant to pain. Han calls this algophobia. Perhaps we can increasingly expect to live without enduring a

serious disease. These are the last goddess's promises of salvation, which is only salvation from temporal afflictions. I would add that pain is seen as fetishistic and even creepy: a good example is the morbid fascination with the cilice worn by the "Opus Dei monk" in *The Da Vinci Code*. Another is how Christopher Hitchens's exposé of Mother Theresa fixated upon how her clinics in Calcutta lacked analgesics beyond aspirin, and how she consoled her patients by uniting their sufferings to Christ crucified. Those of us who gather each week to worship before an image of the tortured God need an answer. There are so many good Catholic nurses and physicians, faithful to Christ and His vocation as a healer, who are both learned professionals and thoughtful about the role of pain in God's providence for the human race.

Those of us who are shyer of hospitals, especially, must wonder if algophobia will prevent us from becoming saints. Saint Lidwina and Saint Ignatius

grew in holiness through their afflictions, much like the many afflicted persons of the Gospels who come to Christ for healing. Saint Charles Borromeo and Saint Marianne Cope fearlessly tended those afflicted by infectious diseases. There are many other examples. Does the promise of a pain-free life incline us to be risk-averse, shying away from painful but transformative experiences? Perhaps this is even true for those of us who can dare to be vulnerable, or indeed are tempted not to be. Do we make an idol out of our health? If the anti-prophet Nietzsche is correct, we risk clinging to our prophylactics and analgesics so tightly that we shall never experience life. This would be a strange echo of the true Omega, "the only Christian" as he calls Him: whoever will save his life shall lose it.

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MCCAREY'S CREED

BY PETER TONGUETTE



It is a curious thing to be a cinephile before you are a grownup. The temptation to emulate what you see on screen is always immense, and, in my case, so was the urge to take on the characteristics of those great men behind the camera who called "action" and "cut." For me, discovering a new director was a bit like trying on a new coat. With or without the new garment, you were still you, but when you had it on, you carried yourself differently: a red jacket made you feel like James Dean, a Burberry raincoat, a bit like Lane Coutell in *Franny and Zooey*. So, when I watched a director's work for the first time, it was natural to adopt their attitude towards the world: John Ford's irascible cussedness or Howard Hawks's nonchalant ease.

When I was an adolescent, I was drawn mainly to these manly, mercurial types as my directorial heroes. If I could have hung any movie poster in my bedroom when I was a teenager, it would have been the one for Hawks's final Western with John Wayne, the tough, sinewy, invigoratingly unembellished *Rio Lobo*. On the poster, the following text appears above a silhouetted image of Wayne bearing a gun: "Give 'Em Hell, John." What American male between the ages of thirteen and twenty could resist those words as an anthem?

It's easy to imagine oneself a member of the raucous, back-slapping boys' club of Ford, Hawks, and others, but far harder to commit oneself to the virtues that come through in the work of Leo McCarey, a Catholic, an Oscar winner, and the man responsible for such great films as *The Awful Truth*

(1937), *The Bells of St. Mary's* (1945), and *An Affair to Remember* (1957). Knowing that an encounter with McCarey's films would mean an embrace of their qualities—warmth, humility, fidelity, reverence, deference, piety—I spent much of my adolescence saving them for a rainy day, or, at least, a more mature point in my cinematic development. How can you believe in McCarey's talent without believing in, or accepting, or at least acknowledging the merits of, McCarey's creed?

Of course, I was familiar with McCarey by reputation—he was among the sixteen Golden Age filmmakers profiled in what was my bible, Peter Bogdanovich's interview collection *Who the Devil Made It*, and he was said, by no less than Jean Renoir, to be the Hollywood director who best understood people—but something in me resisted him. I knew that to watch a Hawks Western was to learn how to have a good time, to sing along with Dean Martin and Ricky Nelson, but to watch a McCarey comedy-drama—his preferred genre—would be to learn, in the words of E.T., how to be good. And who wants to watch a movie to learn that?

The first McCarey film I ever saw was the one that I assumed would be the easiest to swallow—the least moralistic, the most innocuous, I reckoned. The screwball comedy *The Awful Truth*, for which McCarey won the first of his two Best Director Oscars, stars Irene Dunne and Cary Grant as Lucy and Jerry Warriner, a couple whose marriage is less a commitment to each other than a promise each has made to ignore the indiscretions of the other. As the film opens, we learn that Lucy spends too much time in the company of a lustful music teacher (Alexander D'Arcy) and Jerry goes to great lengths to convince his wife that he has been vacationing when he has, in fact, been doing God knows what and with whom. This arrangement is too flimsy to last, and when Lucy and Jerry conclude divorce proceedings, both fling themselves into the arms of potential mates: Lucy to proud Oklahoman Dan Leeson (Ralph Bellamy), who is so right (he is rich), but so, so wrong (he travels with his henpecking mother, warbles “Home on the Range,” and says “metchya” rather than “met you”); and Jerry to Dixie Belle Lee (Joyce Compton), a less-than-genteel wannabe singer.

Of course, any watcher of classic screwball comedy can see from a mile away that Lucy and Jerry are not destined to be with others but with each other. Yet I still remember being startled by the seriousness and sincerity with which McCarey depicts Lucy and Jerry's tentative, hesitant, lurching reunion. This was no rollicking farce on the order of *Twentieth Century* or *His Girl Friday* or *Nothing*

Sacred but a brief in support of tolerating a spouse's flaws and excesses. Marriage, McCarey is telling us, is more important than its mere participants. If you find yourself in one, stay in it; if you find yourself having left one, get back in it. We are sure that Lucy regrets losing Jerry because, late into the film, she still laughs at his pratfalls; she wants him back not because she wants to be married to a goof but because this is the goof she was married to. There is comfort in constancy.

Despite its screwball patina, I found that *The Awful Truth* demanded as much of its viewers as I imagined (or feared): If you truly became absorbed in Lucy and Jerry's story, and truly took the message of the movie to be the promise of the marriage vows (“What God hath joined together, let no man put asunder”), how could you turn it off and ever think casually again about the relations between men and women? One cannot simply admire McCarey; one must take what he says as seriously as he does. Nearly six decades before the Defense of Marriage Act, McCarey had made a Defense of Marriage Movie. Emulating the too-cool-for-school heroes of the Hawks movies was one thing, but here was virtue incarnated by players as elegant as Cary Grant and Irene Dunne.

Thomas Leo McCarey was born in Los Angeles in 1898. In time, he became that rarest of things: a Los Angeleno who entered the movie industry. (Then and now, most successful directors are transplants from faraway places like Cape Elizabeth, Maine, or Goshen, Indiana.) But, in his early days, he had no thought of getting mixed up with show people. As he explained to Bogdanovich in an interview, McCarey intended to make the law his life's work, but his youth made him unattractive to prospective clients. “Besides that,” he said, “a discouraging factor in my legal career is that I lost every case.”

When a friend found him a paying job in the movies—“I was a script girl and didn't know it,” McCarey told Bogdanovich—he had found his calling. In short order, McCarey progressed from an apprenticeship with the great horror director Tod Browning to overseeing silent comedies starring, among others, Laurel and Hardy, a pairing McCarey originated. (When he began directing, Bogdanovich took the basic contours of McCarey's early years as raw material for his great comedy-drama about early moviemaking, 1976's *Nickelodeon*—starring Ryan O'Neal as a lawyer who becomes a director named Leo.)

Much is made of McCarey's roots in baggy pants comedy, and we can see traces of it in his mature work: He is always ready to deposit a gag into an

otherwise serious scene, and he has a tolerance for his actors' personalities, a feeling of indulgence about their quirks, that stems from his silent training. And, in his biography of Bing Crosby, with whom McCarey worked on *Going My Way* (1944) and its sequel *The Bells of St. Mary's*, Gary Giddins reports that McCarey adopted loosey-goosey working habits that sound better suited to the ragtag silent days than the more professional, regimented sound era: Seated at a piano on the set, Giddins writes, "he would play and sing a rag, a pop song, or a ditty of his own—he composed countless songs, most unpublished or forgotten, and one minor hit—to create a mood as he kibitzed with his cast and considered what to shoot."

All the same, McCarey's early feature films evince a restlessness with pure comedy. McCarey was saddled with Eddie Cantor on *The Kid from Spain* (1932), the Marx Brothers on *Duck Soup* (1933), and, of all people, Mae West on *Belle of the Nineties* (1934), but in each of these films, McCarey seems to have functioned more as a presenter than a creator: We sense that he is happy to oversee vehicles for these irrepressible comic talents—none of which he wrote—but itching to tell us something of what he thinks about life.

After I saw *The Awful Truth*, I sought out the earliest McCarey film that revealed the deeper currents within him: the 1937 masterpiece *Make Way for Tomorrow*, starring Beulah Bondi and Victor Moore as Lucy and Bark Cooper, an aging, penurious married couple whose separation occurs for entirely different reasons than that of Lucy and Jerry Warriner in *The Awful Truth*. When their financial straits force them from their home, each takes up residence with one of their adult children, an arrangement that can only end in frustration and unhappiness.

McCarey may have been a moralist but the relentlessly bleak *Make Way for Tomorrow* demonstrated that he was no Pollyanna. Far from a heartwarming depiction of hearth and home on the order of Vincente Minnelli's *Meet Me in St. Louis*, the film could be considered a feature-length demonstration of how not to fulfill the commandment "Honor Thy Father and Thy Mother" (which McCarey includes in the picture as a title card).

In fact, numerous McCarey films illustrate the challenges faced by, or abuse directed towards, secular candidates for canonization like Lucy and Bark. In the masterly *Good Sam* (1948), Gary Cooper plays Sam Clayton, a family man whose belief in the Golden Rule leads him to eagerly offer assistance to strangers and acquaintances, but he is shown to be as much Poor Sap as Good Samaritan

when, for example, his car is totaled by one recipient of his beneficence and his dining table is invaded by guests who bark orders at his hapless wife, Lu (Ann Sheridan). Here, McCarey justifies the praise given to him by Renoir: We empathize with the well-intentioned Sam, but we also feel for the taken-for-granted Lu, whose dream of a new house is deferred by her husband's free spending on others. "If this keeps up, we won't be able to buy a tent," Lu says, wearily. "Sam, when are you going to learn that there are some people in this world who don't deserve your help?"

In McCarey's world, there are even sons underserving of a mother's love. The filmmaker's controversial drama *My Son John* (1952) stars Robert Walker as a young man who renounces his all-American upbringing for the intellectual fashion of the time, communism. The film has long been tarred by its association with the Red Scare in Hollywood, but anyone who sees it today will understand that what rankles McCarey is John's bad behavior towards his kith and kin, especially his gentle, gallant mother, Lucille (Helen Hayes)—yes, another variation on McCarey's favorite name for his heroines. This man-child, so sure of his intellectual superiority and so proud of speaking in "two dollar words," condescends towards his mother, sneers at his father, and has fun at the expense of the family priest—that, less than Marxism per se, is his offense.

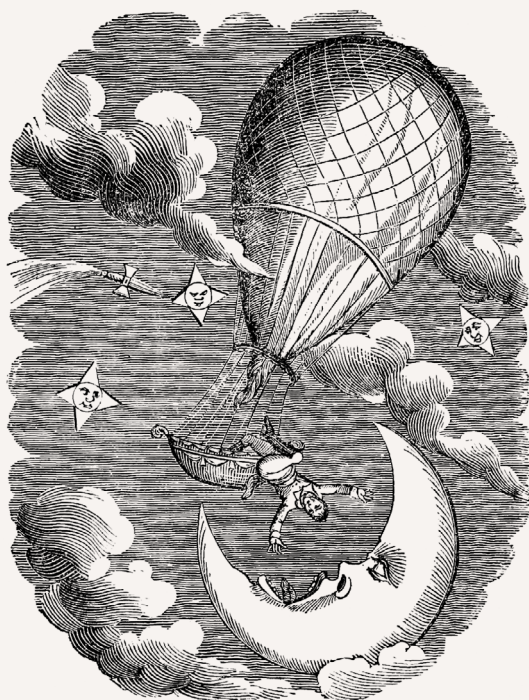
"I was trying to give a very authentic portrayal of a father who worked and slaved to make enough money to send his son through college," McCarey told Bogdanovich. "And consequently, Walker, his son, was ashamed of him. The father educated the son and the son was ashamed of the father." This, for McCarey, is a tragedy; he is not blind to John's good qualities—he has a sense of humor, albeit cruelly misdirected—but his disdainful manner offends the filmmaker's sense of harmony. A family ought to be able to get along.

We are asked to take sides in some of these films—with the old people in *Make Way*, with the wonderful mother in *My Son John*—but in McCarey's greatest body of work, his explicitly Catholic films, we find that the filmmaker's natural inclination is merely to sit back and appreciate the human parade. As Giddins wrote, "Leo saw life and his place in it as a sequence of anecdotes—vignettes he twisted, coddled, and improved for a laugh, whether to make a point or to hold his audience's attention, much as he did in his episodic films."

In *Going My Way* and its sequel, *The Bells of St. Mary's*, Bing Crosby starred as a puckish, musical, sensible priest, Father Chuck O'Malley. It's

impossible to imagine two films about members of the clergy that are less self-serious; they have none of the overdone piousness of *The Bishop's Wife*, let alone the religious zeal of *A Man for All Seasons*. *The Bells of St. Mary's* accommodates countless memorable, human-scale digressions, including Father O'Malley beset by a bunch of kittens while introducing himself to the nuns working in the school he has been tapped to run; Ingrid Bergman, as Sister Mary Benedict, consulting a manual to instruct a bullied schoolboy on "the manly art of self-defense"—because, as a woman and a member of a religious community, she would know little about such things *herself*; and a glorious Nativity scene enacted by, and using the language of, schoolchildren. "This is Mary and I'm Joseph, and we're going to Bethlehem to see if we can find some place to stay," says one of the kids, in setting up the story of Christ's birth. "And that's all you have to know, really." What a beautifully succinct illustration of the way a cosmic event, about which millions of words have been expended, can be retold, simply and beautifully, out of the mouths of babes.

"There never would have been a Nativity scene, but a nun who worked very hard on the picture said she saw some children put on a Nativity play in their own words in Pasadena and she said, 'If you could only have seen it,'" McCarey told Bogdanovich. "She tried to describe it to me and I thought I'd put it in the picture."



McCarey's classic romance *Love Affair* (1939)—starring Irene Dunne and Charles Boyer as lovers who improbably come together, stray from each other after a tragedy leads to a misunderstanding, and who, equally improbably, come together again—deserves to be counted among the filmmaker's Catholic corpus, too. Yes, there are the scenes of devotion and prayer, but the story itself tells us that the faithful will be rewarded: If we can believe that Terry and Michel can resume their affair, perhaps we can believe, too, in the life of the world to come. "If you can paint, I can walk," Terry says at the end, referring to Michel's unlikely painting career and her own prospects for recovery following an accident. "Anything can happen, don't you think?"

Among all of the Golden Age directors, McCarey is perhaps the least visible today. Some directors of his generation worked into the 1970s; he scarcely worked beyond the mid-1950s. After directing his majestic remake of *Love Affair*, *An Affair to Remember*, starring Deborah Kerr and Cary Grant in the Dunne/Boyer parts, McCarey made the peppy political satire *Rally 'Round the Flag, Boys!* (1958) and then the flawed, rather strained *Satan Never Sleeps* (1962). Laid low by emphysema—Bogdanovich's interview with him took place in a hospital—McCarey had no opportunity to write a memoir or do the talk-show circuit—or even be given an Honorary Oscar. He died in 1969. Today, he lacks the name recognition of Ford or Capra or Hitchcock, and given the fact that he had a very small immediate family—like William F. Buckley, he was a Catholic who had just a single child, a daughter named Mary—and that most of his stars are long deceased, there are few to speak up for him, other than cinephiles like Bogdanovich or Giddins. Or, I suppose, me.

In the end, my embrace of the films of Leo McCarey was a matter of putting aside childish things; the model of Bing Crosby's transcendent patience in *The Bells of St. Mary's* really is superior to that of John Wayne's untamed brutishness in *Donovan's Reef* (though I still love that film dearly). It was not only my cinematic education that was enriched when I discovered him but my spiritual education, too. The catechism of Leo McCarey is as good as any I know.

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HOW TO WRITE ENGLISH PROSE

BY DAVID BENTLEY HART

THE IDEALS



here are few if any passages in the works of Sir Thomas Browne that I do not find thoroughly delightful; but two afford me particularly intense pleasure. One is the opening paragraph from his essay “On Dreams”:

Half our dayes wee passe in the shadowe of the earth, and the brother of death exacteth a third part of our lives. A good part of our sleepes is peeced out with visions, and phantasticall objects wherin wee are confessedly deceived. The day supplyeth us with truths, the night with fictions and falsehoods, which uncomfortably divide the natural account of our beings. And therefore having passed the day in sober labours and rationall enquiries of truth, wee are fayne to betake ourselves unto such a state of being, wherin the soberest heads have acted all the monstrosities of melancholy, and which unto open eyes are no better then folly and madnesse.

And the other is the final paragraph from the second chapter of the fifth book of the immense, glorious, and shamefully neglected miscellany *Pseudodoxia Epidemica*, entitled “Of the Picture of Dolphins”:

And thus also must that picture be taken of a Dolphin clasping an Anchor: that is, not really, as is by most conceived out of affection unto man, conveyeing the Anchor unto the ground: but emblematically, according as *Pierius* hath expressed it, The swiftest animal conjoynd with that heavy body, implying that common moral, *Festina lentè*: and that celerity should always be contempered with cunctation.

To my mind, each is in its own way a perfect, exquisitely faceted gem of English prose from an especially glorious literary epoch. The music of the

one has haunted me for most of my life; the gleeful perversity of the other has lost none of its power to make me laugh in nearly four decades. And, however great the joy I take in either of these passages in isolation, it is as nothing compared to the idiot bliss I derive from their juxtaposition. Taken together, they ideally illustrate the two extremes of the great man’s voice: on the one hand, its glowing beauty and spacious sonority; on the other, its anfractuous density and heedless flamboyance.

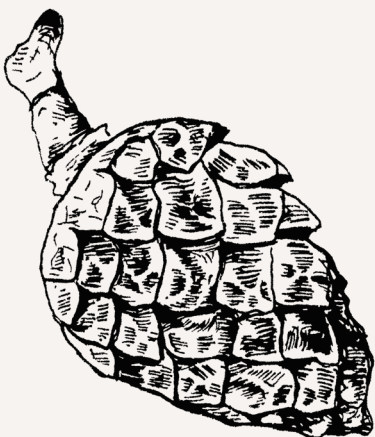
One really would have to have a miserly spirit not to love both. Browne’s prose is a magnificent Baroque palace, by dizzying turns grandiose or lyrical, opulent or elegant, monstrous or precious, inordinate or harmonious, carelessly vast or pedantically exact—and always magnificent. All its outlandish and scintillating mannerisms are just so many volutes and modillions, Solomonic columns and gilded cornices, *quadrature* and mirrored halls. And all of it is a monument to a brief enchanted period in the seventeenth century when English had achieved the whole range of its expressive powers, and when its greatest writers were not yet burdened by any bad conscience about employing those powers to their fullest. Never again would English letters enjoy such a state of innocent sophistication (or sophisticated innocence).

And yet, of course, it was also the age of the King James Bible, which is so often praised for exhibiting precisely the opposite virtues: simplicity, clarity, plain diction. All of which is true enough, admittedly: the King James is perhaps the greatest feat of pellucid phrasing in the history of English letters. But is that the whole story?

Remember now thy Creator in the days of thy youth, while the evil days come not, nor the years draw nigh, when thou shalt say, I have no pleasure in them; While the sun, or the light, or the moon, or the stars, be not darkened, nor the clouds return

after the rain: In the day when the keepers of the house shall tremble, and the strong men shall bow themselves, and the grinders cease because they are few, and those that look out of the windows be darkened, And the doors shall be shut in the streets, when the sound of the grinding is low, and he shall rise up at the voice of the bird, and all the daughters of musick shall be brought low; Also when they shall be afraid of that which is high, and fears shall be in the way, and the almond tree shall flourish, and the grasshopper shall be a burden, and desire shall fail: because man goeth to his long home, and the mourners go about the streets: Or ever the silver cord be loosed, or the golden bowl be broken, or the pitcher be broken at the fountain, or the wheel broken at the cistern. Then shall the dust return to the earth as it was: and the spirit shall return unto God who gave it. Vanity of vanities, saith the preacher; all is vanity.

This, from Ecclesiastes, is definitely a grand and gradual music, luminously clear in many respects; but it is not exactly austere; it is also quite complex in its cadences and syntax. True, its gleaming paratactic flow contrasts strikingly with Browne's massy hypotactic architectonics. And yet the difference is nowhere near so absolute as one might initially be tempted to think. Read once again the first few sentences of the passage from "On Dreams" above. When one places the King James alongside the prose not only of Browne but of all the great English writers of the period, over a period of a few generations—John Florio (1552–1625), Lancelot Andrewes (1555–1626), John Donne (1572–1631), Robert Burton (1577–1640), Thomas Hobbes (1588–1679), Izaak Walton (1593–1683), John Dryden (1631–1700), Thomas Traherne (c.1636–1674), Joseph Addison (1672–1719), and so on—one cannot



help but feel that one is moving back and forth along a single continuum: running not, as we tend to think of it today, from the gaudily ostentatious to the unpretentiously plain, but rather from the beautiful to the sublime, in the classical, pre-Kantian sense of those terms. Taken in that way, the "beautiful" is a style that abounds in sparkling ornamentation while the "sublime" is a style of majestic restraint, pitched "below the threshold" (*sub limine*) of the temple, a plangent bareness whose rhetorical power somehow exceeds that of the most spectacular oratorical adornments.

Every great national prose, in just about any tongue, reaches its high meridian only by way of a prolonged and constant negotiation of just this tension between beauty and sublimity—between the decorative and the august, or between the splendid and the lucid. And this comes only at the end of long epochs of development. To be able to balance expressiveness and reticence, or to know when to cast that balance away, requires tact and ingenuity and taste on the part of writers; but it also requires a language of sufficient maturity. This is why prose of any consequence invariably arrives far later in a culture's history than does great poetry. Poetry entered the world almost as early as words did; it is the first flowering of language's intrinsic magic—its powers of invocation and apostrophe, of making the absent present and the present mysterious, of opening one mind to another. It comes most naturally to languages in their first dawn, when something elemental—something somehow pre-linguistic and not quite conscious—is still audible in them. Prose, however, evolves only when that force has been subdued by centuries upon centuries of refinement, after unconscious enchantment has been largely mastered by conscious artistry, and when the language has acquired a vocabulary of sufficient richness and a syntax of sufficient subtlety, and has fully discovered its native cadences. In English, as in French, this happened in the early modern period, beginning in the late fifteenth century and reaching an unsurpassable zenith in the seventeenth.

By then, moreover, English had amassed the most varied, magnificently farraginous hoard of words in any European tongue, full of Teutonic thunder and purling Latinity, but also enriched with every other verbal plunder it could seize from abroad. No other language could achieve so deep a range of organ-tones, or boast so enormous a collection of pipes and stops, or command so huge an acoustic space. Certainly no other could have produced the sort of wild polyphony and gorgeously wanton dissonances one hears in Macbeth's

Will all great Neptune's ocean wash this blood
Clean from my hand? No; this my hand will rather
The multitudinous seas incarnadine,
Making the green one red.

This is the peculiar genius of the English language: this clash and chaos of radically different tones and textures, and this inexhaustible store of ever more exotic words, with all their ever finer distinctions of association and connotation.

All the great prose stylists of the next couple centuries of English letters would avail themselves freely of this extraordinary instrument's capacities. Fashions would shift over time. The sensibility of the eighteenth century for a time moved more toward the Latinical registers, that of the nineteenth for a time more toward the Anglo-Saxon; but in every generation writers of any significance understood the magnitude of the musical forces at their disposal. And—well, here, take a typical passage from Thomas De Quincey in *Confessions of an English Opium-Eater*:

The ocean, in everlasting but gentle agitation, and brooded over by a dove-like calm, might not unfitly typify the mind and the mood which then swayed it. For it seemed to me as if then first I stood at a distance, and aloof from the uproar of life; as if the tumult, the fever, and the strife, were suspended; a respite granted from the secret burthens of the heart; a sabbath of repose; a resting from human labours. Here were the hopes which blossom in the paths of life, reconciled with the peace which is in the grave; motions of the intellect as unwearied as the heavens, yet for all anxieties a halcyon calm: a tranquillity that seemed no product of inertia, but as if resulting from mighty and equal antagonisms; infinite activities, infinite repose.

I do not know exactly why, in the twentieth century, the dominant fashions in English prose moved relentlessly in the direction of ever greater simplification and aesthetic minimalism. I do not even entirely regret it. Tastes change, and some of the change has been a corrective of certain excesses of the past. But, on the whole, the result has been a kind of official dogma in favor of a prose so denuded of nuance, elegance, intricacy, and originality as to be often little better than infantile, not only in vocabulary but also in artistry and expressive power—a formula, that is, for producing writers whose voices are utterly anonymous in their monotonous ordinariness. Most of the fiction one reads today in literary journals is atrociously written, as are most of the essays, principally because writers have been indoctrinated in a style so rigid, barren, brutal, dry,

and idiotically naïve that the best it can elicit from them is competent dullness. And who can tell one author from another?

Simplicity is difficult, after all, no less than complexity. Both require taste and skill. Neither is less artificial or more natural than the other. Both are necessary for good writing. And when either becomes a forced regimen, exclusive of the other, the results can be only hideous. Good writing is produced not by forsaking the beautiful for the sublime or the exorbitant for the restrained, but by finding new ways of orchestrating the interplay between them. Now, all the authorities of the age seem to concur, the literary performer should treat the organ's console as a collection of decadent temptations to be resisted; he or she should confine the performance to a single manual, played with two fingers, with no stops pulled and the pedals never so much as brushed by an errant shoe-tip.

THE EXEMPLARS

I could, had I but world enough and time, fill volumes with passages from hundreds of masters of English prose to illustrate my notion of what the best writing looks and sounds like. Here, though, I have chosen five authors whose writing I especially love. To keep myself from expressing too much of my own idiosyncratic tastes, however, I have in each case reproduced a passage that I know others have also praised and excerpted in the past. I will add only that, if you wish for an accelerated tutelage in good writing, you could do far worse than to take these five for your teachers.

Robert Louis Stevenson:

It was by this time about nine in the morning, and the first fog of the season. A great chocolate-colored pall lowered over heaven, but the wind was continually charging and routing these embattled vapors; so that as the cab crawled from street to street, Mr. Utterson beheld a marvelous number of degrees and hues of twilight; for here it would be dark like the black end of evening; and there would be a glow of a rich, lurid brown, like the light of some strange conflagration; and here for a moment, the fog would be quite broken up and a haggard shaft of daylight would glance in between the swirling wreaths. The dismal quarter of Soho seen under these changing glimpses, with its muddy ways, and slatternly passengers, and its lamps, which had never been extinguished or had been kindled afresh to combat this mournful reinvasion of darkness, seemed, in the lawyer's eyes, like a district of some city in a nightmare. (*Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde*)

Sylvia Townsend Warner:

It was not beauty at all that she wanted, or depressed though she was, she would have bought a ticket to somewhere or other upon the Metropolitan railway and gone out to see the recumbent autumnal graces of the country-side. Her mind was groping after something that eluded her experience, a something that was shadowy and menacing, and yet in some way congenial; a something that lurked in waste places, that was hinted at by the sound of water gurgling through deep channels and by the voices of birds of ill-omen. Loneliness, dreariness, aptness for arousing a sense of fear, a kind of ungodly hallowedness—these were the things that called her thoughts away from the comfortable fireside. (*Lolly Willowes*)

J.A. Baker:

The valley sinks into mist, and the yellow orbital ring of the horizon closes over the glaring cornea of the sun. The eastern ridge blooms purple, then fades to inimical black. The earth exhales into the cold dusk. Frost forms in hollows shaded from the afterglow. Owls wake and call. The first stars hover and drift down. Like a roosting hawk, I listen to the silence and gaze into the dark. (*The Peregrine*)

Patrick Leigh Fermor:

Scattered with poppies, the golden-green waves of the cornfields faded. The red sun seemed to tip one end of a pair of scales below the horizon, and simultaneously to lift an orange moon at the other. Only two days off the full, it rose behind a wood, swiftly losing its flush as it floated up, until the wheat loomed out of the twilight like a metallic and prickly sea. (*Between the Wood and Water*)

Vladimir Nabokov:

I recall one particular sunset. It lent an ember to my bicycle bell. Overhead, above the black music of telegraph wires, a number of long, dark-violet clouds lined with flamingo pink hung motionless in a fan-shaped arrangement; the whole thing was like some prodigious ovation in terms of color and form! It was dying, however, and everything else was darkening, too; but just above the horizon, in a lucid, turquoise space, beneath a black stratus, the eye found a vista that only a fool could mistake for the square parts of this or any other sunset. It occupied a very small sector of the enormous sky and had the peculiar neatness of something seen through the wrong end of a telescope. There it lay in wait, a family of serene clouds in miniature, an accumulation of brilliant convolutions, anachronistic in their creaminess and extremely remote; remote but perfect in every

detail; fantastically reduced but faultlessly shaped; my marvelous tomorrow ready to be delivered to me. (*Speak, Memory*)

THE RULES

To propose a list of rules for writers is probably a very presumptuous thing to do. The only authority it can possibly have is one's own example, and so offering it to the world is something of a gamble. One has to assume that one's own writing is impressive enough to most readers to provide one with the necessary credentials for the task. If one is wrong on this score, issuing those rules will invite only ridicule. I mean, for goodness' sake, Steven Pinker (of all people) published a book on style. How can anyone take that seriously?

Not that being a good writer is a guarantee that one has any great gift for instructing others in the art. E.B. White was an absolutely splendid stylist; he produced a prose so limpid that he was able to fool even himself that it was a triumph of simple diction rather than of (as was actually the case) very subtle intricacy. But he was also the chief perpetrator of Strunk and White's *Elements of Style*, by far the most influential and most pernicious book of its kind in English: a total congeries of fatuous advice and grammatical ignorance. Similarly, George Orwell was a perfectly competent (if rather boring) stylist; and yet his celebrated essay "Politics and the English Language," which was intended as a rebuke of obscurantist jargon, endures now mostly as a manifesto of literary provincialism. Had either White or Orwell followed his own turgid counsels with any fidelity, neither would be nearly as fondly remembered as he is.

Anyway, taking all things into account, I offer the following only to those who like my writing, or who at least think it accomplished enough to make me a credible authority on these matters. These are, if nothing else, the rules to which I adhere and that best express my literary tastes. The first three arise, in fact, from my own direct encounters with editors and critics.

Vocabulary:

1. Always use the word that most exactly means what you wish to say, in utter indifference to how common or familiar that word happens to be. A writer should never fret over what his or her readers may or may not know, and should worry only about underestimating them. As Nabokov said, a good reader always comes prepared with a dictionary and never resents being introduced to a new term. I call this the "ultracrepidarian rule,"

simply because an editor once tried unsuccessfully to dissuade me from writing about a certain “polemicist who stumbles across unseen disciplinary boundaries in an ultracrepidarian stupor.” The editor lost that argument because there is absolutely no other word in the English language that so exactly means what I wanted to say.

2. Always use the word you judge most suitable for the effect you want to produce, in terms both of imagery and sound, as well as of the range of connotations and associations you want to evoke. This I call the “hyaline rule” on account of a sentence that appeared in a book of mine entitled *The Doors of the Sea*: “At the shorelines, the lovely glistening hyaline waters were all at once polluted with the silt and débris and murk of the ocean’s bed, and rose with such terrifying suddenness that very few—even as far away as Sri Lanka—had sufficient time to flee.” An indignant reader complained that I might just as easily have used the word “glassy” instead, as any decent unpretentious soul would have done. But I had chosen “hyaline” for very particular reasons: it is a precise word, meaning “glassy” in the sense principally of crystalline translucency; it had exactly the right sound for the sentence—three syllables, the lovely long-i vowel sounds, the equally lovely liquid “l” and smoothly glistening “n,” all of which gave it a glassy and watery feel on the tongue; and it was the perfect word in the context of that book because it echoes the book of Revelation’s *thalassa hyalinē*, “the sea of glass like unto crystal” before God’s throne, as well as Milton’s “On the clear hyaline, the glassy sea . . .” Perhaps no reader is likely to be aware of all of that; but I knew what I was doing, and so any other word would have been a craven capitulation to the ordinary.

3. When the occasion presents itself for using an outlandishly obscure but absolutely precise and appropriate word, use it. I call this the “pogonotrophy rule,” because I once wrote a review in the *Times Literary Supplement* of a book by Rowan Williams, at that time Archbishop of Canterbury, after a dreadfully stupid journalist had suggested that his reputation as an intellectual was a consequence only of his lavish beard. This gave me an opportunity to use that wonderful word, which I had long been holding in reserve for just the proper moment. Such an opportunity would certainly have never come again; if I had let it pass unexploited, I should have carried the grief of it to my grave.

4. Never use a word *simply* because it is obscure, but never hesitate to use a word on account of its

obscurity either. If you show off by being punctiliously precise, as per rule one above, all the grand rococo ornamentation you could ever wish for your prose will spring up all on its own.

5. Do not use a thesaurus. Lists of putative synonyms do not give you a sense of any word’s most proper meaning and use. If you are trying to recall a word you know that inexplicably refuses to surface in your memory, maybe you will find it in such a volume; and perhaps, if you happen to be writing humorous verse and have come up against an intractable problem of scansion, you might find something suitable there. Otherwise, learn the meanings and uses of words by reading widely (with that dictionary that Nabokov recommends within reach).

6. The exotic is usually more delightful than the familiar. Be kind to your readers and give them exotic things when you can. In general, life is rather boring, and a writer should try to mitigate that boredom rather than contribute to it.



Style:

7. Sometimes less is more. More often, more is more and less is less. Sometimes more is the very least one can do for one’s readers.

8. If you must choose between elegance and *perfect* clarity, allow yourself a period of decorously agonized indecision, and then always choose elegance.

9. Never squander an opportunity for verbal cleverness. I once related in print the notorious tale of Schopenhauer throwing an old washerwoman down a flight of stairs, describing him at one point as seizing her by her “wizened weasand.” Self-indulgent, no doubt, but such moments as those make one feel that one has lived to a purpose.

10. In "Politics and the English Language," George Orwell proposes six rules, the first of which is a sound admonition against using hackneyed metaphors, but the second of which is "Never use a long word when a short one will do." This is an idiotic maxim, one that concentrates almost every kind of philistinism in itself. What he should have written was "Never prefer a short word because it is short or a long word because it is long, but always use the word that to your mind best combines sense, felicity, connotation, wit, and sound, without worrying about whether your readers are likely to recognize it."
11. Orwell also decrees: "If it is possible to cut a word out, always cut it out." No great writer in the history of any tongue has ever observed this rule, and no aspiring writer should follow it. The correct counsel would be "If a word is so excessive as to mar the effect of a sentence, remove it; but never remove a word simply because it is possible to do so."
12. Orwell then commands: "Never use the passive where you can use the active." This is perhaps the worst rule of style ever proposed by anyone. All of literary history proclaims its imbecility. Instead: "Avoid the passive voice when the active works better and vice versa." After all, in life we sometimes act and sometimes are acted upon. The causal dialectic between agency and patience, to use the scholastic terms, is intrinsic to finitude.
13. Orwell's next dictate is "Never use a foreign phrase, a scientific word, or a jargon word if you can think of an everyday English equivalent." All that can be salvaged from this trite and parochial balderdash is "Avoid jargon." Feel free to use a foreign phrase when it is apt or pleasing to do so, and always do so when it expresses an idea with greater elegance or aphoristic economy than any English equivalent could (for instance, the phrase *l'esprit d'escalier*). English is a gloriously mongrel tongue, and it has always pillaged other languages for glittering trinkets. Moreover, always—always—employ precise scientific terms in contexts where they are germane.
14. Orwell's final injunction is "Break any of these rules sooner than say anything outright barbarous." Since, however, following his rules would produce barbarous prose roughly half the time, he ought instead to have written, "Ignore these rules, except for the one about hackneyed metaphors and the bit about jargon."
15. Strunk and White's *Elements of Style* decrees: "Keep related words together." This is vacuous. Awkward ruptures of sense are obviously to be avoided. Taken as a principle, however, this little axiom is not only bad advice; it is a renunciation of language as such. As any decent student of linguistics knows, one of the chief differences between actual linguistic meaning (on the one hand) and mere ostensive noises and gestures (on the other) is its reliance upon structural rather than spatial proximities. The capacity to qualify a predicative phrase by the interpolation of a subordinate clause (for example) is one of those precious attainments that distinguish us from baboons.
16. The same book advises: "Write with nouns and verbs, not with adjectives and adverbs." That is moronic. Better not to write at all than attempt to heed so obscene a piece of puritanical nonsense. Write with every kind of word that serves your ends.
17. In fact, if you own a copy of *The Elements of Style*, just destroy the damned thing. It is a pestilential presence in your library. Most of the rules of style it contains are vacuous, arbitrary, or impossible to obey, and you are better off without them in your life. And the materials on grammar and usage are frequently something worse. Some of them are simply inherited fake rubrics—"however" must always be a postpositive, "which" must not be used for a restrictive relative clause, and other nonsense of that kind—all of which are belied by the whole canon of English literature. Others, however, are evidence of surprising ignorance. It is bad enough that the manual insists that one must on principle prefer the passive to the active voice; but it is far worse that it then adduces several supposed examples of sentences in the passive voice that are in fact nothing of the sort. One of them—"There were a great number of dead leaves lying on the ground"—seems to have been chosen simply because "lying" about sounds like a passive sort of thing to do. That neither Strunk nor White knew the difference between a passive construction and an active intransitive verb in the imperfect past tense—or, as the book also demonstrates, the difference between the passive and an active past perfect, or the difference between the passive and an adjectival past participle without an auxiliary verb—is genuinely shocking. It does, however, impart a useful lesson: never mistake a tone of authority for evidence of actual expertise.

18. All these vapidly doctrinaire injunctions—urging you to write only plain declarative sentences stripped of modifiers and composed solely of words familiar to the average ten-year-old and demanding that you always prefer charcoal-gray to sumptuous purple—are expressions of everything spiritually deadening about late modernity and its banal values. They reflect an epoch in which the mysterious, the evocative, and the beautifully elliptical have been systematically suppressed and nearly extinguished in the name of the efficient, the practical, the mechanical, and the starkly unambiguous—in short, in the name of everything that makes existence uninviting and life boring. They are reflections of an age of bloodless capitalist economism, the reign of brutally common sense, the barbarian triumph of function over form, a spare, Spartan civic architecture of featureless glass and steel and plastic, a consumerist society that lives on the ceaseless production and disposal of intrinsically graceless conveniences. Learn to detest all of these things and you will be a better writer for having done so.

19. Always read what you have written aloud. No matter how elaborate your prose, it must flow; it must feel genuinely continuous. This is not to say one must imitate natural speech; it is only to say that one must try to capture its rhythms. If what you have written is awkward on your tongue, then it is awkward on the page.

Models:

20. Bad writing is rarely mistaken for good by the discerning, but it can often be mistaken for great. Keep this in mind when considering the work of authors you are tempted to emulate.

21. Truly great writing is often inimitable, simply because the better a writer is, the more distinctive his or her voice tends to be. Keep this also in mind when considering the work of authors you are tempted to emulate.

22. If you have ever taken a course in “creative writing,” try to remember as vividly as possible the kind of prose you were encouraged by your teacher to write, and then do your very best to avoid writing that way.

23. If you were told in school that Hemingway’s *Old Man and the Sea* is a specimen of good writing, disabuse yourself of this folly. It is in fact an excruciating specimen of bad schoolboy prose, written by a man who by that point had, alas, been too often drunk, too often concussed, and too often praised.

24. *For American writers in particular, and especially young American writers, and most especially young male American writers:* There is on these shores an indigenous tradition of the “American Sublime”—though in many cases it might better be called “American Fustian.” One encounters it at its worst in William Faulkner and Thomas Wolfe when they are at *their* worst, as well as in a number of other authors whose names I here omit. We as a people like to strive for grand effects, often vastly in excess of any plausible occasion for doing so. Whether this is because of the presence of our magnificent landscape or because of the absence of a long cultural history I cannot guess. I would not say that you must resist the lures of this style altogether. It is there also to be found in the best of our literature—in Melville and Emerson, Muir and Thoreau, and so on—and there it is often glorious. Still, yield to it only to the degree that you can control the forces you set loose. Otherwise, you will lapse into inadvertent parody.

Punctuation:

25. A writer who disdains the semicolon is a fool. In fact, hostility to this most delicate and lyrical of punctuation marks is a sure sign of a deformed soul and a savage sensibility. Conscious life is not a brute concatenation of discrete units of experience; it is often fluid, resistant to strict divisions and impermeable partitions, *punctuated* by moments of transition that are neither exactly terminal nor exactly continuous in character. Meaning, moreover, is often held together by elusive connections, ambiguous shifts of reference, mysterious coherences. And art should use whatever instruments it has at its disposal to express these ambiguous eventualities and perplexing alternations. To



master the semicolon is to master prose. To master the semicolon is to master language's miraculous capacity for capturing the shape of reality.

26. Second only to the semicolon in subtlety, fluent beauty, and whimsy is the dash. Cherish it. Use it with abandon.

Readers:

27. Those who read only to be informed and never to delight in the words on the page have every right to do so. But do not write for them.

28. The only book reviewers of any significance are themselves distinguished writers. Cultivate critical intelligence in yourself and try to read your own work with impartiality; but studiously ignore criticism from the unaccomplished.

29. Do not write down to what you presume to be the level of your readers (unless you are writing specifically for very small children). To do so is an injustice both to them and to you. Even if your suppositions regarding them are correct, you should do them the honor of assuming they know what you know, or can learn it, or are at least willing to try. True, some readers become indignant at their own inability to follow prose of any complexity or to recognize words any more obscure than those they are accustomed to using when talking to their dogs. Invariably they will blame the author rather than themselves. You owe them absolutely nothing. If you attempt always to descend to the lowest common denominator, you will never hit bottom, but you will certainly end up losing the interest of better readers. Ours is, sadly, an age of declining literacy and attention spans, and the situation grows worse by the year. You simply must not make any concessions to that reality, unless you are prepared in the end to give up on writing altogether.

The Last Things:

30. *Memento mori.* One day you will die and go to your long home and your voice will fall silent. You have only so much time to make the treasures of your mind and soul manifest. Do not waste the little span allotted to you producing only work intended for the moment rather than for posterity.

31. Know the names of things and the names of places. Both are a kind of poetry and both contain mysteries. It is an ancient intuition that to possess something's proper name is to possess power over it; it is, if nothing else, to share in that thing's form—its unique manner, that is, of making being's inexhaustible richness manifest. This is because language is magic.

32. Language is magic. It is invocation and conjuration. With words, we summon the seas and the forests, the stars and distant galaxies, the past and the future and the fabulous, the real and the unreal, the possible and the impossible. With words, we create worlds—in imagination, in the realm of ideas, in the arena of history. With words, we disclose things otherwise hidden, including even our inward selves. And so on. When you write, attempt to weave a spell. If this is not your intention, do not write.

33. As you near your life's end, you will be able to look back over your work with some satisfaction if there have been moments in your prose when you have achieved precisely what you hoped to achieve. Keep an inventory of these in your mind, so that you can return to them when you find yourself depressed, uninspired, or suffering self-doubt. I offer two of my own such moments in parting, not because either is in any sense the best thing I have written, but only because each happened (almost miraculously) to have exactly the form and effect that I wanted it to have before I began to write it.

The first is not even a complete sentence, but only a sequence of fragmentary impressions in a story called "A Voice from the Emerald World":

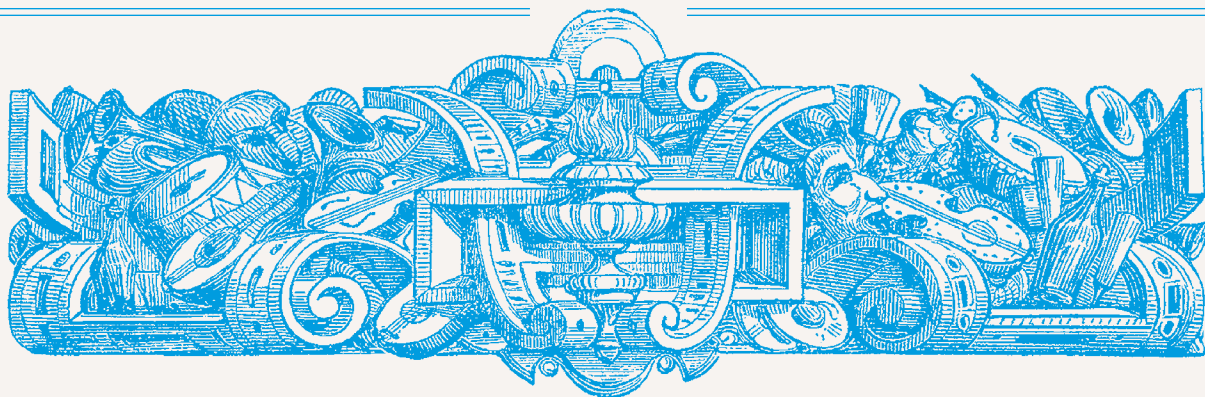
The light, palely golden in the fluttering leaves, and between the slowly swaying culms ... and, when I look up, that great eye of soft luminous blue, fringed by the mercurial sparkle of green and silver leaves ... that blank, quietly menacing, mysterious gaze....

The second is a short passage from near the end of a novel entitled *Kenogaia*:

He could even see Kenopolis from here, no longer under a pall of storm-clouds, ringed by the mild aqueous shimmer of the moonlit harbor and bay and sea; now, though, it all looked poignantly diminutive, like a chaotically turreted sandcastle among shallow tidal pools, waiting for the rising surf to break it down, or like a frayed cardboard diorama in a neglected corner of the nursery. Why, he mused, had they ever felt it necessary to flee from something so quaint and ephemeral?

Only I can ever really know what it is about each of them that I find so perfectly pleasing; but, believe me, that knowledge makes all the hard work of writing seem more than worthwhile.

David Bentley Hart's most recent books are Roland in Moonlight, Kenogaia: A Gnostic Tale (both from Angelico Press), and Tradition and Apocalypse (Baker Academic).



ARTS AND LETTERS



THE WAGES OF GIN

THE PHILOSOPHY OF GIN

Jane Peyton
The British Library,
pp. 112, \$16.95

BY EDWARD FESER

Nobody likes his first martini. I don't think I was too keen on my second either. But at some point things clicked, and now I rarely drink anything else. I imagine most people's experiences with spirits are similar. They take getting used to.

This of course raises the question of why we bother trying to get used to them. There's the old joke about the guy who's asked why he keeps hitting himself with a hammer: "Because it feels so good when I stop." But there's more to repeated martini trials than that. It's not the satisfaction of enduring something unpleasant that draws us in. Rather, even with the first sample, there's

something agreeable lurking behind the sting—something we sense that we might perceive more clearly if only we persevere, by disciplining the palate.

Even for the veteran drinker, each individual martini recapitulates this learning process. The initial sip is always bracing, even slightly unpleasant, like a cold swimming pool when you first put your foot in. The second goes down a bit more smoothly, and after that you're in the zone. There are the familiar stages. At the start there's just the brisk taste of frigid alcohol, but by the third sip the distinctive notes of the particular gin used are all detectable. After several minutes, the martini grows detectably warmer. But this is compensated for by the alcohol's having begun to take effect, so that the strength of the spirit no longer needs masking by the cold. As you approach the bottom of the glass, the brine from the olive becomes unmistakable. It is bittersweet, a pleasant new note of its own, but, alas, one that heralds the end of this particular martini.

You could, of course, always have a second. Sadly, I cannot, or at least I haven't been able to do so after reaching middle age.

Morpheus outwrestles Dionysus and I'm down for the count. The upside is that gin's dormitive virtue has, for me, neutralized the possibility of drinking to excess. Though I suppose it is relevant that I absolutely always use the larger of the two standard martini glass sizes.

Arguably the hard road by which reluctant novice becomes habituated connoisseur recapitulates the history of gin itself. That, in any event, seems to me a lesson one might draw from Jane Peyton's *Philosophy of Gin*. Notwithstanding its title, the book does not contain any abstract theorizing about its subject. It is devoted instead to a pleasing and well-written account of the long process by which what began as a rough and sometimes even dangerous spirit came to have the refined character and reputation for sophistication it enjoys today.

Gin developed out of a beverage known in the Low Countries during the sixteenth century as "genever." The name is derived from the Dutch word for juniper, since juniper berries were used to flavor the spirit, which was distilled from malted cereal. Early genever, Peyton tells us, "could not be described as anything

other than firewater,” and needed the masking effects of botanical ingredients to make it palatable. The so-called Glorious Revolution brought it to England alongside William of Orange, and what came to be known as “gin” remained so coarse that it had to be downed “quickly, almost desperately, and often without pleasure.” But it was simultaneously so potent and cheap that it took off with the poor masses. The result was the notorious eighteenth-century Gin Craze, immortalized in Hogarth’s print. The sequel was a public health crisis, due not only to widespread drunkenness but also to the dangerous ingredients (such as low doses of cyanide, turpentine, and sulfuric acid) inadvertently introduced into the spirit by the shoddy production methods of unscrupulous distillers.

Eventually, though, gin came to be associated with health benefits, or at least those of the ingredients with which it was commonly combined. To help battle scurvy among sailors, it was mixed with lime juice, yielding the gimlet. Medicinal bitters were added to it in order to aid digestion. An especially fateful innovation was to combine gin with quinine tonic water, which was regarded as a prophylactic against malaria. When British colonists took this practice back home with them, the gin and tonic would make the spirit a respectable libation for polite society. With the martini, gin at last reached its apotheosis, its *telos* or final cause, the grand oak toward which the lowly genever acorn had been aiming all along.

To be sure, the ascent was not steady. There were temporary reversals. The bathtub gin of the Prohibition era could sometimes be as dangerous as the stuff the characters in Hogarth’s print were swilling. Especially

humiliating were those dark years in the middle of the twentieth century when that weak sister vodka eclipsed gin as the preferred martini base, at least for those hipsters who’d still deign to drink a martini in the first place. But like bell-bottom jeans, helmet hair, and that period’s other lapses in taste, this one was mercifully short, and by the Eighties gin regained its hard-won status.

What is the source of its appeal, then? Why do we persist past that first stinging sip? Why does the beginner make a second and third attempt before, finally, actually *enjoying* a martini? Why did History Itself carry gin from its humble origins as cheap, drinkable paint thinner to the reliably smooth sophistication found in Tanqueray and other venerable mass market brands no less than in boutique options such as Four Pillars?



Peyton notes that part of the attraction has to do with the “pageantry” of making a gin-based cocktail. Now, all martini adepts are well familiar with the obsessives—people who insist on merely misting the glass lightly with a vermouth sprayer, and other such preciousness. But you needn’t go to such scrupulous extremes to see Peyton’s point. A martini must be made correctly.

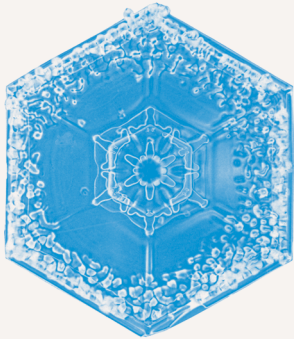
The glass must be chilled, and the gin must be arctic. A non-trivial amount of vermouth is fine, but it must never add more than an additional mild note. “Dirtying” the martini a bit with a little more juice than is already there in the olive is okay, but too much of that and you’re left with a soup rather than a cocktail.

All of us have pasts, sins we’ve had to repent of, episodes we recall with shame. One of mine is the time, many years ago, when I mixed two bad martinis for a couple who had never had one but were keen to try. I have never brought this up in the confessional, but not for lack of guilt. I feel I let down the side. The glasses were too large, and thus the amount of alcohol too great for the inexperienced. But worse, the glasses and the gin had not been sufficiently chilled. My friends were too polite to say anything, but their expressions gave it away. They were like that of someone trying hard to look placid in the dentist’s chair and not entirely succeeding. If there were any doubt, it was dispelled by the fact that each glass was still two-thirds full by the end of the evening. At least they enjoyed the olive, I think.

Confucius insists that it is absolutely imperative for the good of society and the character of the individual that rituals be performed correctly. It is, perhaps, an innate if dim awareness of this truth that attracts us to the martini, as Peyton’s remark suggests. But since cocktails with a different base also have a touch of ceremony about them, there must be more to the story. And it is, I submit, hiding in plain sight—precisely in the stern, unforgiving taste that initially repels but at the same time draws us back for more. Gin is in that way like human life itself, which, as Woody Allen famously exclaims

in *Annie Hall*, is “full of loneliness and misery and suffering and unhappiness, and it’s all over much too quickly.” Gin gives us tough love, bitter at first but increasingly warm and even comforting as it travels down to the stomach. It intoxicates us with the sober truth. *In martini veritas*.

It is no accident that gin, more than other spirits, is often said to produce sadness. But its sadness is like that of nostalgia or unrequited love, which arises not from revulsion but rather from frustrated attraction, and is for that reason strangely pleasant. We are drawn to it because we see good not only *beyond* the mild melancholy it generates but even *in* that melancholy.



For this reason, and despite its vaguely Protestant associations, gin is a most Catholic spirit. Indeed, I was gratified to find Peyton reporting that “the first written proof of the concoction that evolved into gin came from mid-eleventh-century monks at a monastery in Salerno, Italy.” (Take that, William of Orange!) My point runs deeper, however. Christ is closest to us precisely when we suffer the most, and thus falsely seem cast off by Him. It is at those moments that we can best unite ourselves to His Passion. And when we meditate

upon this we can find joy even in suffering.

It would, needless to say, be absurd to press too far any analogy between a deep theological truth and an alcoholic beverage. But this is an essay on the philosophy of *gin* (of all things), so some pretentiousness is only to be expected. The Catholic faith instructs us that pain is neither an accident nor pointless, but is an inevitable part of the condition of fallen man, and its penitential acceptance a means to our sanctification. Perhaps the attraction of gin is that in its own eccentric way it teaches, and exemplifies, the truth that the deepest satisfactions are to be found in what is hard rather than in what is easy. That is why the martini is the paradigmatic *adult* drink, slowly savored with the patience of a man who has earned some leisure after a long and difficult day—in contrast, say, to the shallow, greedy hedonism of the drunken frat boy or soccer hooligan. Mere beer is small beer by comparison.

I’ve been speaking as if the martini were the only gin-based drink worth bothering with. Of course, that’s not true. Other such drinks exist, albeit only for the purpose of giving us something to do with gin that isn’t suitable for making martinis. Before the conclave that gave us Pope Benedict XVI, a joke made the rounds to the effect that Cardinal Carlo Maria Martini was destined to be elected, given that Saint Malachy’s famous prophecy had characterized the pope to come as the “glory of the olive.” The phrase did not, as it happens, fit the man, but it does indeed fit the cocktail that is his namesake.

Edward Feser is professor of philosophy at Pasadena City College.

MOST SHAMEFUL EXCESSES

THE BETROTHED

Alessandro Manzoni

(Translated by Michael F. Moore)
Modern Library, pp. 704, \$28.99

BY JASPREET SINGH BOPARAI

Alessandro Manzoni’s novel *I promessi sposi* (usually translated into English as *The Betrothed*) was first published in 1827 and is celebrated as both the first modern Italian novel and one of the greatest literary works in the Catholic tradition. If you cannot understand Italian, you should read Archibald Colquhoun’s stylish 1951 translation (reprinted in 2013 by Everyman’s Library). Other, more recent versions may be more accurate; but Colquhoun’s version feels and sounds like Manzoni in ways that its successors rarely do. In 1954, Colquhoun followed up his translation with *Manzoni and His Times: A Biography of the Author of The Betrothed*. There is no more readable introduction to Manzoni in English. Colquhoun was not a Catholic; like many of Manzoni’s twentieth-century champions he was skeptical of Christianity. This leads him to highlight material that many of Manzoni’s more orthodox apologists would prefer to ignore.

Catholic readers of Colquhoun’s biography will be taken aback by certain details: Manzoni, for all his piety and devotion to prayer, scornfully dismissed the Rosary as the “psalter of the ignorant.” His political opinions too may surprise self-consciously traditionalist

Catholics. It seems difficult to square all of Colquhoun's revelations with *I promessi sposi* itself, which deserves pride of place in every Catholic home. But what are we to make of its author? Alessandro Manzoni turns out to have been, among other things, a self-described Jansenist. Jansenist Catholicism as Manzoni believed in and practiced, while tolerated grudgingly by some of the Church hierarchy in his day, was very likely heretical (in the strong sense of the term). Yet nineteenth-century "Liberal Catholicism" is incomprehensible to anyone who has not studied the Jansenists.

Jansenism is often confused with Calvinism, and the doctrines formulated by John Calvin. Like the Jansenists, Calvin regarded himself as an orthodox interpreter of the authentic teachings of Saint Augustine, at least with respect to God's Grace, and the salvation of souls. Yet the association is misleading in many ways. For all the shared focus on a strictly Augustinian view of God's Grace, and the superficial common ground between the Calvinists and Jansenists in terms of moral rigidity and a highly regulated daily life, it would be unwise to ignore the unbridgeable gap between the two positions. Jansenists were Catholics: they believed in the Real Presence of Christ in the Eucharist, whereas Calvinists continue to believe in the Mass, not as a sacrificial rite, but as a mere ritual of remembrance. Calvinists take radically different views of all the sacraments, beginning with the purpose and meaning of baptism, and reject Catholic dogmas on saints, the priesthood, and any number of foundational issues. To equate the two positions is to be slanderous in the eyes of both sides. The comparison is ultimately too vague.

Jansenism arose as a response not only to the rise of Protestantism but to the practices of the Jesuits, many of whom helped justify moral laxity among the wealthy. As the Jesuits gained influence, and began to supply confessors to powerful families, they were cautious not to impose too rigorous a morality on their high-society penitents. By allowing penitents the benefit of the doubt, Jesuit schools of thought protected them (in theory) from any errors of judgement on the part of their confessors that might cause them to be refused absolution, and thus cut off from the sacraments. But of course this only worked if those who had sinned were truly repentant. It was not meant to invite either penitents or their confessors to twist facts, or find obscure but favorable opinions to let sinners off the hook.

The Jansenist movement originated with two friends who met as theology students either in Paris or Louvain. Monsignor Cornelius Jansen, or Jansenius, as he is commonly known, came from a modest background, but eventually rose to become Bishop of Ypres. Jean Duvergier de Hauranne was the son of minor Basque nobles; in 1620 he became Commendatory Abbot of Saint-Cyran, and so is traditionally referred to as Saint-Cyran, or l'Abbé de Saint-Cyran. Saint-Cyran acted as his friend's patron for a few years, then invited him to his family seat, where they spent three years intensely studying the works of the early Church Fathers, particularly Saint Augustine. Jansenism as a set of doctrines originates from Jansenius's posthumously published study *Augustinus*; as a distinct spirituality and mode of life it developed from 1633, when Saint-Cyran served as confessor and spiritual director to the nuns at Port-Royal.

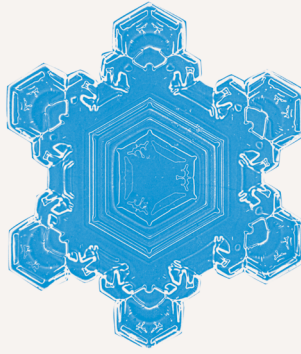
In 1625 the abbey of Port-Royal moved to Paris; the original site, Port-Royal-des-Champs, became an ascetic community for laymen who took no vows but lived in seclusion as the "Solitaries" of Port-Royal. The Solitaries were, for the most part, cultured men from distinguished families; they founded and staffed a school where Jean Racine, greatest of French tragedians, received his classical education. Blaise Pascal was never one of the Solitaries; but after his famous conversion on the night of November 23, 1654, he made frequent retreats at Port-Royal-des-Champs, and would become one of the Jansenists' fiercest champions in his polemical *Lettres provinciales*.

The story of the Jansenists' struggle with the Jesuits, the Vatican, and the French king, and the destruction of Port-Royal-des-Champs in 1709, can be difficult to follow. In the eighteenth century, as Jansenism lost its influence and was subject to various sanctions, it developed offshoots and mutations that were occasionally unfortunate; the most embarrassing of these was the "Convulsionnaire" (convulsionary) movement centred round the tomb of the eccentric, reclusive, self-flagellating Jansenist ascetic abbé François de Pâris at the church of Saint-Médard in Paris. Pilgrims gathered at the tomb and had convulsions, spoke in tongues, or displayed behavior that seemed to some miraculous but in other eyes looked more like mass hysteria. Voltaire's brother Armand Arouet was associated with these convulsionaries; so were countless other respectable people. The Jansenists on the one hand were cultivating a kind of superstitious folk piety that was unknown to the nuns and Solitaries of Port-Royal-des-Champs. On the other hand, they were

developing an anti-authoritarian political streak, which was largely a response to perceived persecution at the hands of the Vatican, the French crown, and the Jesuits. The Jansenists sometimes openly defied the authority not only of the Crown but of the Vatican itself; in general they were anti-absolutist (as opposed to anti-authoritarian); many of them drifted towards anti-monarchist positions. Throughout the latter half of the eighteenth century, the Jansenists became increasingly allied with liberal, radical, and even revolutionary political ideas, despite the uneasiness among cultured intellectuals with the populist and superstitious elements in Jansenist spirituality. But some *philosophes* openly admired their rigor and discipline, and openly compared them to the ancient Stoics.

Liberal reformers agreed with the Jansenist disdain for worldly and material interests within the Catholic Church, as well as Jansenists' contempt for State hierarchy and State favors, the Jansenists' apparently disinterested devotion to public affairs, and above all their insistence on convictions and first principles, and their sometimes showily austere way of life. That said, there were obvious irreconcilable differences between Jansenist Catholicism and the liberal individualism and Deist or atheist materialism of the *philosophes*.

Italian Jansenists and Jansenist sympathizers tended to be opposed to the notion of the Pope as a temporal ruler, and to the very existence of the Papal States. Alessandro Manzoni's friend Father Antonio Rosmini was deeply influenced by Jansenist ideas and practices, and generally hostile to anything associated with the Jesuits, who tended towards absolutist and reactionary political positions throughout the



nineteenth century. But Jansenism in its strong form died out during Manzoni's lifetime; these tendencies and practices drifted into the Liberal Catholic movement, which was an attempt to reconcile revolutionary republicanism with an authentically devout, rigorous adherence to the traditional teachings of the Church.

To understand how the most beloved of all Catholic novelists might have ever become involved in any of this, it is necessary to understand Manzoni's relationship with his mother and her family, through whom he was associated with important circles of anticlerical and republican intellectuals in Milan and Paris. Manzoni's maternal grandfather was the jurist and criminologist Cesare Beccaria, Marchese di Gualdrasco e Villareggio. Beccaria remains best-known for his influential treatise on prison reform *Dei delitti e delle pene*, which called for reform of criminal law and abolition of the death penalty. He also maintained that torture was barbaric. The treatise was quickly translated into many languages; the French edition included a commentary by Voltaire. When he visited Paris, Beccaria was treated as a celebrity by the intelligentsia; Diderot, Helvétius, and Holbach all paid him homage, as did David Hume (then *chargé d'affaires* to the British ambassador).

Beccaria was also one of the

co-founders of a short-lived but highly influential intellectual journal, *Il Caffè*, which was published from 1764 to 1766. Liberal members of the Milanese aristocracy were equally interested in the Scottish Enlightenment and the writings of the French *philosophes*. But until the advent of this journal there had been no real focus or direction to their liberalism beyond a vague intellectual Francophilia and an inclination towards the practical reform of various institutions along scientifically informed lines. *Il Caffè* was in some senses a literary project: in form, tone, and general approach the essays were inspired by the *Tatler* and *Spectator*. Italian literary and intellectual prose of the period tended to be fussy, pompous, and verbose; one of the aims of *Il Caffè* was to feature writing with simpler rhetoric and clearer style. But this periodical was in no way dominated by *belles-lettres* or artistic or humanistic concerns. Intellectually it was equally derivative of Edinburgh, London, and Paris-based theorists and philosophers in its attention to economic theories, jurisprudence, political economy, and evidence-driven theories of reforming society. Although *Il Caffè* was short-lived, the circle of intellectuals that grew around it developed into the principal reform-minded group within the Milanese establishment. During the French Revolution, Beccaria and his associates were denounced as Jacobins. This is not generally true: although there were a few genuine radicals among them, the most influential Milanese liberals favoured relatively moderate reform; the majority among them seem to have welcomed the advent of Napoleon.

Manzoni's direct ties to French rationalist circles were established by his mother, who became friendly with Sophie de

Condorcet, widow of Nicolas de Caritat, Marquis de Condorcet, the rationalist philosopher, mathematician, and Girondin leader who died in prison during the Terror. The Marquis de Condorcet was an economic liberal with influential ideas on constitutional government. His widow translated Adam Smith's *Theory of Moral Sentiments*, and remained influential throughout her life as a prominent salon hostess. Madame de Condorcet was at the centre of a group known as the Société des Idéologues, which was founded by Antoine Destutt, Comte de Tracy. Destutt de Tracy coined the term "ideology" to describe the study of the nature and origin of ideas. He was a social theorist as well as a philosopher; he and his group were openly atheist, anticlerical, republican, and focused on a laissez-faire approach to economic policy. The Idéologues were most influential in the early years of the nineteenth century until Napoleon decisively turned against them, mocking them openly in public. With the Bourbon Restoration they lost all remaining political power, but retained considerable social and intellectual prestige as the liveliest liberal intellectual circle in Paris; Stendhal frequented the Idéologues' salon for a time, as he recounts in *Souvenirs d'égotisme*, his memoir of his life in Paris throughout the 1820s.

After the fall of Napoleon, the Austrian occupying forces in Lombardy would suspect Manzoni of maintaining contact with subversive groups. This was inevitable, given his connections through his mother and maternal grandfather to elite liberal and republican intellectual circles, and his own friendships with figures who were vocally opposed to the Austrian occupation. Also, Manzoni was very

well acquainted with the founders and editors of *Il Conciliatore*, a literary and intellectual journal that was published fortnightly between September 1818 and October 1819. He knew many or most of the writers. *Il Conciliatore* was only implicitly political: its position was liberal, Romantic, anti-authoritarian, and generally progressive in its way, but the editors took care never to criticize the government except to hint at possible reforms. The intended audience was more the Lombard bourgeoisie than the liberal aristocrats of Milan. Still, the Austrian secret police noted that all the major opponents to the Austrian occupation happened to be either subscribers or active contributors to *Il Conciliatore*. Although he naturally distanced himself from radical anticlericalism after his conversion, Manzoni remained personally close to intellectuals who maintained the positions that he had repudiated. His confessors, spiritual directors, and clerical friends tended to Jansenists, so that he was never tempted to adopt absolutist, Ultramontane, or otherwise reactionary opinions. In French Revolutionary terms, Manzoni's sympathies consistently remained with the Girondins, who were (in modern terms) right-wing classical liberals favouring a separation of Church and State, an independent national church and a constitutional government.

Manzoni's background and these sympathies make it all the more strange that he became the pre-eminent Catholic novelist of the nineteenth century. His first forays into the literary world were as a lyric poet. His earliest surviving verses are fiercely anti-Catholic, anti-clerical, and anti-religious, as might be expected from a teenager in that world who was besotted with Napoleon. At the time Manzoni's

principal influences included the Piedmontese tragedian Count Vittorio Alfieri and the Lombard neoclassical poet Giuseppe Parini. In terms of living literary mentors, Manzoni enjoyed the guidance of Vincenzo Monti, who was technically brilliant but lacking in firm principles, and the passionate, turbulent Napoleon-worshipping soldier-poet Ugo Foscolo. During this period Manzoni began to develop strong views about the Italian language. This was mainly the result of his sojourn in Venice during the winter of 1803–1804. He stayed with a cousin, and was enchanted by the Venetian dialect. This was also his first exposure to the plain-spoken, down-to-earth comedies of Carlo Goldoni, whose realism and sheer purity of language had a great impact on him. Goldoni was never one of Manzoni's major avowed influences; though the humility and realism of Goldoni's approach, and his refreshingly simple dialogue, appear to have decisively shaped Manzoni's tastes and style.

In 1805, Donna Giulia Manzoni's lover Count Imbonati died. Manzoni went to Paris to be with his mother, and would spend most of the next five years there. Count Imbonati left his entire fortune to Donna Giulia; Don Pietro Manzoni died in March 1807, leaving his entire fortune to his son. Manzoni became intimately associated with the Idéologues; Mme de Condorcet's lover, Claude Fauriel, became his closest friend. Fauriel was a former Jacobin; in 1830 he would become a professor of foreign literatures at the Sorbonne. Once Manzoni had buried his father decently and come into his inheritance, Donna Giulia decided that he should marry, and selected Henriette Blondel as his bride. Henriette's family were Swiss merchants and

bankers; indeed, the Blondels' agents in Paris were Donna Giulia's own bankers. The Blondels were Calvinists: this resulted a scandal in Milanese society when, on February 6, 1808, Don Alessandro and Henriette were married, first in a civil ceremony at the Town Hall, then in an austere ritual with a Calvinist minister in the Blondels' drawing-room.

In Paris, Henriette became attracted to Catholicism through a Swiss friend who was friendly with Father Eustachio Dègola, a Genoese priest who was perhaps the most prominent of Italian Jansenists. In August 1809, Manzoni's first child was baptized in the Catholic Church; the following month, the still-unbelieving Manzoni officially requested a re-celebration of his marriage in the Catholic Church. Later that year, Henriette formally abjured Calvinism.

Manzoni's own spiritual conversion to Catholicism took place in April 1810. He and Henriette had joined the crowds in Paris celebrating the marriage of Napoleon to Marie-Louise. During a fireworks display, a stray rocket swerved into the crowd, causing a stampede. Henriette was swept away by the mass of people. Manzoni panicked, and ducked into the nearby church of Saint-Roch, where a Benediction service was taking place. He prayed to God for his wife to be returned safely to him. When he went back home, he found Henriette patiently waiting for him. The following week Manzoni began formal instruction with Father Dègola.

In June 1810, Manzoni, his wife and the newly Jansenist Donna Giulia left Paris and settled at Count Imbonati's estate at Brusuglio. The family confessor and spiritual director was Monsignor Luigi Tosi, who was then a Canon of the Basilica of

Sant' Ambrogio in Milan, and would be installed as Bishop of Pavia in 1823. Tosi was an old-fashioned Jansenist: politically very conservative, he had no time for radical or republican ideas. He would have a great influence on Manzoni's studies and literary output. In 1815, Manzoni published his five *Inni Sacri*, which won him the admiration of both Goethe and Stendhal. Henceforth Goethe would be a champion of his work. But the influence of Tosi was causing some strain. Manzoni's literary and intellectual circles in Milan and Paris remained predominantly atheist and anticlerical; although his wife and mother were strict in their devotions, they do not seem to have had very many devout friends, other than the clergy who had an increasing influence over their lives. In 1817, Tosi took Manzoni's prized edition of the complete works of Voltaire and burned it volume by volume.

Jean Charles Léonard de Sismondi, the Genevan historian and political economist, was one of the Geneva correspondents for *Il Conciliatore*. His multi-volume history of Italian republics in the Middle Ages would be the principal source for Manzoni's tragedy *Carmagnola*. But the main reason Manzoni was so intimately familiar with Sismondi's writings is that he was induced by Tosi to attack its distorted vision of Catholicism and the Church. *Osservazioni sulla morale cattolica* was published in 1819. After publishing this apologetic, Manzoni resumed work on more congenial projects. *Carmagnola* was published in 1820; in 1821 he completed his celebrated ode "Il Cinque Maggio" on the death of Napoleon; he finished his tragedy *Adelchi* the following year. Goethe was now enthusiastically championing his work, even though Manzoni's talent was

more for lyric than dramatic poetry. His tragedies are interesting as exercises in "Shakespearean" Romanticism, but survive only as curiosities in literary history.

Manzoni did not understand how to write for the stage. Disappointed by the reception for his tragedies, he abandoned work on a third that he had begun drafting on the Roman gladiator and revolutionary Spartacus. Instead, he decided to work on a novel. In a letter to Claude Fauriel he wrote:

I scarcely dare to add yet another few words on literary projects. To do so shows a real longing to become a major author, which I have. You must know then that I am in the middle of a novel, whose story is set in Lombardy between 1628 and 1631.

The memoirs that have come down to us from that period give a picture of a society in an extraordinary state: utterly arbitrary government combining feudal with popular anarchy; laws that are astounding both in their aims and their results; deep, ferocious, pretentious ignorance; classes with opposing interests and principles; some little-known anecdotes, preserved in reliable documents, that reveal all of this to a great extent; and a plague which gives rise to the most shameful excesses, the most absurd prejudices and the most touching virtues, etc. etc.... This is the material to fill a canvas, or rather this is the material that might only serve to demonstrate the incompetence of the man who sets to work on it...

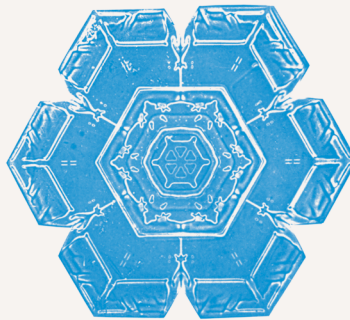
I flatter myself that I shall at least avoid the charge of imitation. To this end I am immersing myself as far as I can in the spirit of the era which I have to describe, so I can live in it; this spirit was so one-of-a-kind that it will be entirely my fault if I fail to communicate this quality

when I describe it. I think the best way not to do as others do with respect to the sequence of events and the plot will be to make myself think about the way people behave in real life, particularly in areas where real life opposes the spirit of fiction. In every novel I read, I seem to glimpse efforts to establish interesting and unexpected connections between the various characters, to bring them onstage with others, to find events which at some point affect all of them and their various destinies to reveal what is in truth an artificial unity that is not to be found in real life. I am aware that such a unity pleases the reader, but this seems to me the result of ingrained habit. I know that this is considered a virtue in some works of genuine high quality, but reckon that it will one day be criticised, and that this means of connecting events will then be cited as an example of the way fashion influences even the freest and most highly cultivated spirits, and of the sacrifices made in the name of taste.

I promessi sposi was inspired by a seventeenth-century edict that Manzoni read in the 1821 study *Dell'ingiuria, dei danni, del soddisfacimento e relative basi di stima avanti i tribunali civili* by the Milanese economist Melchiorre Gioia, who had found it in Muratori's *Annali d'Italia*. Manzoni's great friend Father Rosmini would later dismiss Gioia as a charlatan, and consider him a personal enemy; but at this point Father Rosmini and Manzoni had not yet met (their first encounter was in 1826). Of particular interest in this study was Gioia's emphasis on laws that had been imposed on societies by foreign occupiers, particularly when legislators paid no attention to local customs or realities. Manzoni's

principal historical sources for *I promessi sposi* were the histories of the Milanese Church and the plague of 1630 by Father Giuseppe Ripamonti, a member of the famous College of Doctors at the Biblioteca Ambrosiana. These gave him the outlines of his narrative; he filled in details with exhaustive research into archival sources as well as contemporary studies on law, economics, and medicine. In another letter to Claude Fauriel he wrote:

To show you briefly what my main idea about historical novels is, I will tell you that I think of them as representing a state of society through actions and characters that are so close to reality that they could be taken for genuine historical texts. When historical events and characters are added to this mixture, it seems to me that they ought to be represented with the strictest historical accuracy; in this respect Richard Coeur-de-Lion in *Ivanhoe* seems lacking.



On September 17, 1823, Manzoni finished the first draft of *I promessi sposi*. Fauriel spent over a year and a half, from November 1823 to summer 1825, at Manzoni's estate at Brusuglio working with his friend on the manuscript. In

August 1825, the corrected text was given to a copyist; in October it was handed over to a printer; but corrections took a great deal of time, and *I promessi sposi* was finally published in June 1827. It was initially controversial in clerical circles, and at one point was allegedly almost placed on the Vatican's *Index Librorum Prohibitorum*; but by 1830 even the Jesuits were celebrating it as a triumph of Catholic literature. Manzoni's harshest critics turned out to be his former allies among liberal and anti-clerical intellectuals. Also, his Jansenist spiritual director and spiritual advisors remained dubious about the value of novels. Father Rosmini was one of few clergy in his orbit who approved wholeheartedly of *I promessi sposi*.

The rest of Manzoni's life is principally of interest to specialists in the Italian language and historians of the reunification of Italy; after the publication of his great novel he dried up artistically, and wrote no more fiction or verse. Henriette's sudden death on Christmas Day 1833 shattered him; the last forty years of his life were grimly melancholy. On Epiphany 1873 he slipped outside a church; he died on May 22, aged eighty-nine. On December 31, 1875, Gustave Flaubert wrote a letter to George Sand in which he famously asserted: "*L'homme n'est rien, l'oeuvre tout!*" ("The man is nothing; his work is everything.") When you compare the delightfully entertaining *I promessi sposi* to the sad, dour man who wrote it, you see how Flaubert may have had a point. Whatever Manzoni's personal shortcomings, his great novel demonstrates deep sympathy and wisdom, and can help direct readers towards the only truth that matters.

Jaspreet Singh Boparai is
a former academic.

MONUMENTAL AFTER- NOON QUALITY

**SHIRLEY HAZZARD:
A WRITING LIFE**

Brigitta Olubas
Farrar, Straus & Giroux,
pp. 576, \$35.00

BY HANNAH ROWAN

At lunch with Graham Greene at a trattoria on the Italian island of Capri, Shirley Hazzard and her husband, Francis Steegmuller, once found a plaque commemorating the first-century poet Statius. Greene asked, one assumes rhetorically, whether anyone still read that old Roman. When Hazzard and Steegmuller promptly responded that in fact they did, Greene laughed and said, “What swank.”

Swank or no, Hazzard the novelist and Steegmuller the biographer established a reputation as one of the major intellectual power couples of the mid- to late twentieth century. They were among that rare breed of popular writers whose cultural pursuits actually connect them with civilization, and in the broad sense that makes one want to start capitalizing abstract nouns—Literature, Culture—and overusing the word “great” for books, poetry, men, aspirations. There was a timeless element to their interests: Hazzard had whole volumes of Romantic poetry in her head, Steegmuller produced the

preeminent translation of *Madame Bovary*, they spoke French in Paris and Italian in Rome. They read Homer at dawn and Muriel Spark over dinner, and both with pleasure.

One assumes that this cultural *dolce vita*—New York part of the year, Italy for the rest—could only be the slow-ripened fruit of generations, grown from established wealth and a long lineage of learning. But Shirley Hazzard grew up in the 1930s in a suburb of Sydney, Australia, and then shuttled around Hong Kong and New Zealand following her father’s career as a diplomat. She started teaching herself Italian in her teens after stumbling across some Leopardi translations and saw Italy for the first time at age twenty-five when she was stationed in Naples as a young missionary for the United Nations. Her marriage and writing were intertwined in an intense literary fusion that insisted on the epic over the essay, fate instead of happenstance, the whole historical sweep of Italy over dusty Australia. In *Shirley Hazzard: A Writer’s Life*, the first biography of Hazzard, Brigitta Olubas shows this autodidact and cultural aspirant using fiction in the highest Romantic fashion—as magic. Hazzard rewrote reality into fiction when the former didn’t suit and created an entirely new life for herself through literature.

This was a pursuit Hazzard shared with Steegmuller, who started out ahead of her. Twenty-five years older than Hazzard, when he met her he was an accomplished widower with half a shelf of detective novels, biographies, and translations to his name. Hazzard, by contrast, was relatively new to the New York scene, with a C.V. that was mostly blank. But she was sharp: she could remember poetry on sight—famously, she later made friends with

Greene by supplying the final line of a Browning poem he was struggling to remember—and she had a vibrant voice and magnetic personality, which had led to some early successes with magazine editors. In 1963, when she first met Steegmuller, she was writing her first novel and had published some short stories in the *New Yorker*. The first, “Woollahra Road,” is a period piece that evokes her dissatisfaction about her Australian origins. It is promising, charming, but unquestionably minor.

Still, Muriel Spark, a fortuitous early *New Yorker* connection, saw something. She introduced the two, saying to Hazzard: “There’s a man coming I think you ought to marry.” He had an austere face, a gentlemanly manner, and a list of literary accolades as long as his beautifully tailored greatcoat. They sat on the same armchair and talked. Completing what Spark called her own “best novel ever,” they married later that year, after the always cool Steegmuller conquered his fear of commitment, especially to a fiery young upstart like Hazzard. The two took off traveling, more for Steegmuller’s work at first than Hazzard’s, to France and Italy as Steegmuller interviewed French artistes for his biography of Jean Cocteau, along with other scholarly projects.

Hazzard kept writing. Her first novel, *The Evening of the Holiday*, appeared in 1966 and expressed less interest in the lovers who are its protagonists than in the country that provides its setting. The plot is simple: a frigid Northern woman has a reluctant affair with a hot-blooded Italian man. She changes her mind and leaves; their story ends.

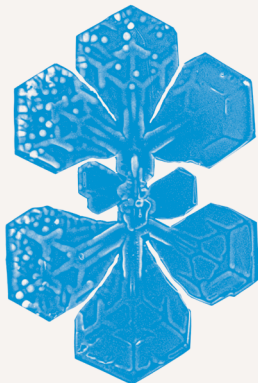
But the romance is Italy:

The café where they sat was freshly painted, and their corner of it faced the piazza’s single

architectural asset—a church consecrated to one of the town’s numerous patron saints, who appeared in marble above the portico with an open book short-sightedly held before his face.

The transitory polite smile on Sophie’s face developed into something less fictitious. The scene was so totally lacking in haste or violence. It provided an easy accustomed setting for the long afternoon, which today had such a monumental afternoon quality that it might have been any afternoon in the whole of memory. It was for just these anonymous public pleasures that Sophie came to Italy.

The backdrop for *The Evening of the Holiday* was Hazzard’s frequent stays, beginning in 1957, at the Villa Solaia near Siena in Tuscany. Her friend Elena Vivante regularly hosted foreign intellectuals there and provided much of the air of Old World sophistication and liveliness that so enamored Hazzard early in her affair with Italy. The Italian hostess provided a formative model for Hazzard of the strength and pull that a cultured woman could have: “To have known her was to understand that the human ideal is not a striving for perfection but for wholeness: she was true, vital and entirely human, not a paragon but a criterion,” Hazzard wrote—clearly



also thinking of herself. Elena made “a principled life believable ... She had lived it, she was it.”

The Bay of Noon, Hazzard’s next novel, was her love letter to Naples. The protagonist, Jenny, is sent to the city by NATO soon after World War II on one of those portentous bureaucratic missions that ends up as a masquerade of pushing papers until afternoon tea has been drunk and it’s time to go home. The idealistic Jenny becomes the romantic one as she, like Hazzard, gazes with adulation at the Bay of Naples and follows the affair of two elegant Italian connections: a beautiful, mysterious Italian writer and her lover, a film director. Almost as a sidenote, Jenny passes on a chance to start an affair. Love, in Hazzard’s early novels, is larger than the people who contemplate it; it lives in the charmed air, water, and earth of Italy.

Heady stuff, and themes that would develop in Hazzard’s later work, but her breakthrough novel didn’t come until ten years later, in 1980, with *The Transit of Venus*. It is about the motions of fate. A pair of orphaned sisters leave Australia for postwar Britain and make fateful decisions about the men they will marry or love, with fateful consequences. Caro, the Venus of the novel and an Elena or Hazzard figure, from start to finish eclipses in beauty, insight, and, ultimately, destiny her sister Grace and the men with whom she has affairs. Neither nature nor fate looks kindly on any of them: “Men go through life telling themselves a moment must come when they will show what they’re made of. And the moment comes, and they do show. And they spend the rest of their days explaining that it was neither the moment nor the true self.” The entire novel feels circumscribed by ominous portents, from Grace’s unambitious

marriage to the sisters’ abuses at the hands of their older half-sister (drawn, disturbingly, from Hazzard’s relationship with her mother) to a lover’s prophesied suicide. Love does not come easily without the blessing of fate, and fate in the late 1940s is not in a blessing mood.

Stegmuller said of *Transit*: “No one should have to read it for the first time.” This seems to be less a statement about its gloom than an acknowledgment of the work’s high-minded aspirations to serious literature. The classical allusions in the title are obvious on their face but demanding in context, and the characters ask more of the reader than do most merely human acquaintances. *Transit*’s characters quote poetry at a Hazzard-esque clip and regularly experience weighty, George Eliot-like moments of mutual comprehension such as this in the course of their amorous affairs:

Caro sat without speaking, turning toward him her look that was neither sullen nor expectant but soberly attentive; and, once, a glance in which tenderness and apprehension were great and indivisible, giving unbearable, excessive immediacy to the living of these moments. Paul had seen that look before, when they first lay down together at the inn beyond Avebury Circle.

The brilliant expat Caro awes all the rest with her brilliance, gravitas, magnetism. This is “Hazzardland,” as Alice Jolly named it: a place where the mundane is resolutely swept into the closet, the character with the best grasp of Victorian poetry wins, and no character can be imagined using the loo or living contentedly in the dirt and backwardness of someplace like, say, Australia. This is the beef that some Australian writers, such as the crotchety realist and Nobel

winner Patrick White, had with Hazzard: Hazzard-land seemed to deliberately exclude his beloved Australian muck.

But Hazzard's romantic inclinations were not so much a sign of detachment from reality as a sensibility that led her to adhere to ideals and principles beyond it. There can be a better world, and is; I have seen it and am proof of it—this was also the subtext of both her fiction and nonfiction. It's what fired her scathing reports on the United Nations, after her youthful enthusiasm for the organization was swept underneath what became ten years' worth of low-level typist's work in the 1950s. This frustration with not only the UN's bureaucratic daily operations but also its false nationalism and its failure to meaningfully engage with foreign cultures led to her books on the "self-destruction" of the UN, including a major expose of the Nazi past of its secretary-general Kurt Waldheim. But more ruinous for believers in global progress through the United Nations are Hazzard's short stories satirizing the organization, collected in *People in Glass Houses*, from 1967. There, Hazzard proves that Spark didn't have sole possession of the comedic talent in the friendship between "Shirlers and Mu" (which would eventually break down when, according to Olubas, a history of nasty but typical Sparkisms about Hazzard came back through the grapevine).

Hazzard's office tyrant in the story "Miss Sadie Graine" could easily be the secretary of Miss Jean Brodie: "had Miss Graine ever been seriously contemplated as a life partner, had she even been asked—let alone taken—in marriage, her demands on the world might have been different." But unfortunately she's already busily at work for the UN:

"Senior members of Pylos's staff would compliment him on her efficiency, saying 'What would you do without her?' As time wore on, a note of wistful speculation crept into this rhetorical inquiry, and it developed the ring of a real question." And here is her writer's belief that murky language leads to failure in mission: "'Got one.' Algie Wyatt underlined a phrase on the page before him," as the hero of the story, whose tenure is doomed by his intelligence, mocks a UN writeup's contradictions in terms. He soon finds another: "cultural mission."



Throughout the 1970s, Hazzard and Steegmuller seemed to work themselves onto equal intellectual footing as Hazzard added to Steegmuller's powers of observation as scholar and biographer her novelist's gift of astonishing insight and intuitive grasp of human motivation. There is also an acceptance of fate: after a miscarriage sometime in their first years together, they settled in to the ways of childless writers. They rented an apartment in Naples, and another on Capri, where they enjoyed literary friendships with eminences such as Greene, Harold Acton, Robert Penn Warren, and so on. Whole seasons were spent in this writerly bliss: read poetry aloud

at dawn, write until lunchtime, repose over wine, cheese, and literary discussion, explore the Italian countryside, and return for an early dinner and late talk over drinks before bed.

It was Hazzard who did most of the talking. While Steegmuller presided as the staid gentleman, Hazzard would discourse on a massive range of topics, sometimes trying the patience of her listeners but more often impressing them with the breadth of her knowledge. Alec Wilkinson, a young protege, said that he "thought she talked too much" at their first dinners together with *New Yorker* editor Bill Maxwell and other *New Yorker* colleagues. "[T]hen of course you couldn't hear her talk enough. You were in the presence of someone whose gift was so profound that you better just shut up and listen. The amount of poetry that she could quote ... The appreciation of it, a great discernment." At its heart was a simple thing: a love for literature that bound Hazzard and Steegmuller and drove them—Hazzard especially—to pursue ever-greater largeness of vision, depth of feeling, in a way that is almost galling for those who may now cringe at the threat of being something so earnest as inspired.

Consider this statement from Steegmuller, commenting on Nabokov's insistence that his students saturate themselves with English poetry in order to write English prose: "One cannot truly do it for a 'purpose.' Only for love." Hazzard and Steegmuller's romanticism about literature, and their immersion in the places that produced its greatest works, was what kept their own romance alive. Hazzard's fullest realization of this romantic vision came late: in 2003, with *The Great Fire*, a book decades in the writing. Set in the late 1940s, it's a story about Aldred Leith, an

older, British man, aged further by his heroic military feats, who falls in love with Helen Driscoll, an Australian teenager whom he meets while traveling through Asia chronicling the aftermath of the war. After a long and tortured courtship, this one works out.

But not entirely convincingly. The Australian novelist and critic Michelle de Kretser calls Aldred's devoted pursuit and winning of his precocious and preternaturally patient Helen a "fulfillment of wishes." Hazzard offered an almost defensive explanation: "in fiction one can correct an ultimate tragedy into a suggestion, at least, of a 'happy ending'. That is, set life right, as one can't manage to do it in reality." This reveals her state of mind regarding her own life around the turn of the century: Hazzard had been retelling her love stories for years. Steegmuller had died a decade before, in 1994. As he lost his memory, she had nursed him and read him Gibbon, Tolstoy, and Shakespeare. By all accounts, she was a loving and patient caretaker. But her diary reveals, potently, that her life with Steegmuller challenged her romantic notions, and had long done so:

So many good things—but on this—a blank. Not a shred of real understanding, nor wish to understand. Immediate rebuttal, egotism.... As I'm speaking, with (a little) animation, feel the lack of response, the boredom on the other side. Whenever I show spontaneity there is this. Surely connected to a compulsion to make me feel that spontaneity is a show, unwelcome, of foolishness.... The best self in prison.... no expression of the heart allowed me—neither the spontaneous sharing; nor the loneliness, the subsiding "with a shudder" ... I feel within, often, like a bleached bone.

After Steegmuller's death, though, the frustration inherent in their high-strung intellectual relationship disappeared, and soon, "She was living within the shrine she had constructed to their marriage," according to Matthew Spektor, who worked with Hazzard on a screenplay for *The Transit of Venus*. Olubas notes throughout her biography the extent to which Hazzard used her fiction to pull her own experiences to a higher plane: to the epic, the fated, the Romantic. The question of the plot's success notwithstanding, in *The Great Fire* Hazzard's late turn to the happy ending is perfectly consonant with her idealistic fusion of art and life. Olubas finds a model for Aldred in an old love affair with Alec Vedeniapine, a colleague from her teen years in Hong Kong who, in Hazzard's telling, cowardly chose his farm over her love (though even Hazzard's friends at the time thought there may be some wisdom in not consigning this ambitious social climber and spouter of poetry to a lifetime of milking cows). With Aldred, Hazzard wanted to set Alec, and also Steegmuller, right.

The novel won the National Book Award all the same—deservedly so, for *The Great Fire* is by far Hazzard's greatest achievement in prose. The destruction, physical and moral, of the war are rendered in poetry like this, about one of Aldred's friends, Paul Exley, considering a relationship with a coworker: "The airy room, the light of Asia, and strange red lilies in a vase could do nothing for them.... As ever, his thoughts drawn by pathos; his imagination captured, when it might have been fired." Exley is a minor character; there are entire chapters of this masterly sustained alignment of close observation and uncanny insight.

In her acceptance speech for

the National Book Award, Hazzard revealed further the way she fit the romances in her life and work into the grand edifice of Literature. Stephen King had received a medal for his "Distinguished Contribution to American Letters" at the same ceremony and had proceeded to rebuke the audience for small-mindedness in prizing "literary" fiction over "popular" (read: Stephen King's) books. Hazzard deviated from her planned remarks to respond to his ignorant or self-serving false dichotomy:

I want to say in response to Stephen King that I do not—as I think he a little bit seems to do—regard literature (which he spoke of perhaps in a slightly pejorative way), that is, the novel, poetry, language as written, I don't regard it as a competition.... We have this huge language so diverse around the earth that I don't think giving us a reading list of those who are most read at this moment is much of a satisfaction because we are reading in all the ages, which have been an immense inspiration and love to me and are such an excitement.

This huge language turned a Sydney suburbanite into a fine novelist and one of the twentieth century's largest cosmopolitan sensibilities.

For Hazzard, another definition of romance may be this: one should not settle for reporting reality when one can chase fate. When it favors her—and in so many ways it did—it transports her to a higher realm, where culture lives and swank holds sway.

It may be a matter of taste whether one prefers her Italian fantasies to the Australian muck. But Shirley Hazzard is always moving.

Hannah Rowan is managing editor of the American Spectator.

APPRECIATIONS

PHILIP
LARKIN

BY JUDE RUSSO

Book publishers are inscrutable. In the 1990s, Penguin produced an excellent series titled “Poets in Translation,” featuring the classic works of non-Anglophone poets from the Psalmist to Baudelaire in their best and most influential English translations. The central question was in keeping with the critical outlook of the era: How has English literature absorbed material from non-native traditions? How have we gotten to where we are now? The books were, as a rule, carefully selected, edited, and commented—late monuments of the last century’s confluence of popular and scholarly interests. Needless to say, they are now out of print.

The exemplar of the series is *Horace in English*, edited by the late D.S. Carne-Ross and Kenneth Haynes. Alongside the expected renderings of Dryden, Pope, and Housman there are a few surprises—John Quincy Adams and even Gladstone. Carne-Ross is at pains to insist that Horace is not merely the property of the Augustans; his echoes in English can be heard all the way through to the heroes of Carne-Ross’s own generation. He singles out Philip Larkin as the giant with whom to contend.

“We may however find qualities that seem genuinely Horatian—the tough reasonableness beneath the lyric grace, the alliance of levity and seriousness by which the seriousness is intensified—in poets who show no interest in Horace and may not even have had any Latin,”

Carne-Ross argues. “Let admirers of Larkin who prize his stern insularity not be affronted by the relation to Horace proposed here. Let them, if they wish, insist that no such relation ever entered Larkin’s mind.”

The relation proposed is between “Lines on a Young Lady’s Photograph Album,” the first piece in *The Less Deceived*, and *Odes* 1.19; Carne-Ross invokes the sudden changes of register in each, the particular dynamics in the speaker’s view of the beloved. Not a wholly unconvincing parallel, but it certainly leaves the reader hungry for a neater intertext, a way to draw the prophets of disappointed and straitened middle age closer. The critic may indulge in some light historicism—Larkin finished third in Latin among the Arts Sixth at King Henry VIII School in Coventry. If there is a discernible chain of influence between Larkin and Horace, surely something more concrete than mere impressions of similar technique must emerge.

As it happens, I think there is one, and that Carne-Ross cannot be blamed for missing it because it appears in a collection that is now generally regarded as Larkin’s juvenilia: *The North Ship*, published in 1945, a full decade before his mature epoch begins. Larkin himself did not care to revisit these works. “With regard to the republication of the poems, I am still undecided about this,” he wrote in 1965. “They are such complete rubbish, for the most part, that I am just twice as unwilling to have two editions in print as I am to have one.” Elsewhere he described the collection as “ghastly,” “awful,” and “not very good.”

Daunting stuff. Yet here is exactly the intertext pulling together the twin objects of Carne-Ross’s fascination—and not in especially subtle form. Horace, *Odes* 1.11:

*sapias, vina liques et spatio brevi
spem longam reseces. dum loquimur,
fugerit invida
aetas: carpe diem, quam minimum
credula postero.*

Readers will recognize “carpe diem” from its crude popular rendering, “seize the day”; but *carpere* properly signifies a gentler horticultural activity, a picking or a plucking. Among his chosen renderings of these lines, Carne-Ross offers us the following from Charles Stuart Calverley, that eminent Victorian who, “proving too witty and obstreperous to please constituted authority,” transferred from the staid Oxford atmosphere at Balliol to Christ’s College at Cambridge, and later gave up a promising career at law after injuring his head while ice skating:

Be thou wise: fill up the wine-
cup; shortening, since the time
is brief,
Hopes that reach into the future.
While I speak, hath stol’n away
Jealous Time. Mistrust To-
morrow, catch the blossom of
To-day.

Let us turn our attention back to the nearer past. In *The North Ship*, xxx:

So through that unripe day you
bore your head,
And the day was plucked and
tasted bitter
As if still cold among the leaves.



Begone, “stern insularity”; come hither, intertextuality and the burden of history. This unmistakable parallel repudiates Horace’s studied relaxation in the face of mortality in a way that points to Larkin’s later efforts to address death in “Aubade.” It has gone unremarked by all Larkin’s commentators. But it is not the only hint of the classical in *The North Ship*. Let us examine XIII:

I put my mouth
Close to running water:
Flow north, flow south,
It will not matter,
It is not love you will find.

I told the wind:
It took away my words:
It is not love you will find,
Only the bright-tongued birds,
Only a moon with no home.

Here is Catullus, drawing on a common Greek motif in poem LXX:

*sed mulier cupido quod dicit amanti,
In vento et rapida scribere
oportet aqua.*

But what a woman says to a
lusty lover,
One might scribble in wind and
running water.

Or take XVI:

And I am sick for want of sleep;
So sick, that I can half-believe
The soundless river pouring from
the cave
Is neither strong, nor deep;
Only an image fancied in conceit.

An imprecise image, but unmistakable—indeed, apparently a combination of two descriptions of the gates of Hell in Aeneid VI:

*spelunca alta fuit vastoque immanis
hiatu,
scrupea, tuta lacu nigro nemorumque
tenebris*

The cave was deep and vast in
its gulf
Rugged, guarded by a black lake
and the shadows of the wood

And

*facilis descensus Averno;
noctes atque dies patet atri ianua Ditis*

The descent to Avernus is easy;
Through nights and days the door
of Dis lies open

So what does this mean? In 1945, Larkin could still draw upon his sixth-form Latin reader for three images in a thirty-two-poem collection. While this brief tally is a nice piece of trivia, it hardly seems more relevant than Larkin’s single echo of Poe, also from *The North Ship*—“the birds’ clamour, nor / The image morning gave / Of more and ever more.” Serious commentators have ignored these allusions in favor of harder parallels to Yeats and Auden. And the very categorization of “juvenilia” writes off the relevance of the early work—poems from “before I began to sing,” in Larkin’s own words.

Yet perhaps Carne-Ross’s instinct—although imprecise and possessed of incomplete information—is basically correct, and there is a recurrent classicism in Larkin’s mature work. In his final collection, *High Windows*, we encounter “Cut Grass”:

Cut grass lies frail:
Brief is the breath
Mown stalks exhale.
Long, long the death

It dies in the white hours
Of young-leafed June
With chestnut flowers,
With hedges snowlike strewn,

White lilac bowed,
Lost lanes of Queen Anne’s lace,
And that high-built cloud
Moving at summer’s pace.

Here is an echo of the unseen mower in Frost’s “Tuft of Flowers,” but the arrow passes through to the original image found in Catullus:

*Nec meum respectet, ut ante, amorem,
Qui illius culpa cecidit velut prati
Ultimi flos, praetereunte postquam
Tactus aratros.*

Nor does she look, as she once
did, to my love,
Which through her carelessness
has fallen as the meadow-
edge’s flower, after by the passing
Ploughshare it is touched.

Running westward from the Firth of Forth to the Firth of Clyde is a curious ridge, turfed over and in many parts forested. Trees growing from it push out at odd angles, and their mature crowns are displaced from where they would rise were the ground even. This rise is the Antonine Wall, the terminus of Roman power in Britain and in northern Europe—slumped, overgrown, pillaged for stone, and largely neglected until the nineteenth century. Yet this deep past conditions how trees still grow. Saxo Grammaticus wrote that the Roman walls are proof that true giants, primordial earth-movers, must once have walked the earth.

The past pushes us at the tips of its fingers; ends are found in beginnings. Sometimes influence is so deep that it looks like a grassy knoll. Is it too bold to agree with Carne-Ross’s discovery of the “genuinely Horatian” in the work of Coventry’s most famous son? Or can we say that Horace pushes up through the ground into Larkin’s early poems, and Larkin’s early poems push up into the deep blue endless air of his later verse?

Carne-Ross died in 2010; *Horace in English* was not reprinted after its original run. A boy scrambles down a Scottish slope, chasing sheep along the ridge; underfoot, turfed stones wait.

*Jude Russo’s writing has appeared
in First Things, America,
and other publications.*

CHRISTMAS
GHOST STORY

KYRIE

BY THOMAS CASEY

It was the first time I heard *The Warbler*. Ed Pinson had invited me over to his house to plan some of the remaining details of the Huntsville Amateur Radio Club's annual meeting, which was coming up in a couple of months. I was still relatively new to the club and had only been operating in the local frequencies on the cheap V.H.F./U.H.F. equipment I'd bought second-hand online. A few months scanning the local fire and rescue channels had whetted my appetite, and the guys had encouraged me to take a more active role in the club. Ed was just wrapping up the weekly emergency radio league call-in.

"This is W.K.R.Q. saying *thank you* for everyone's participation in tonight's emergency radio league call-in. Be sure to check in *next Tuesday* at 9:00 P.M. We had a total of *seventeen* check-ins tonight. This is W.K.R.Q. closing the broadcast and returning this frequency to normal use at 9:25 P.M." Ed had a good ham radio voice. It was upbeat and resonant in a way that conveyed competent optimism even when garbled by interference. It was the sort of voice you'd want to hear if the south Huntsville transmission station ever really did go down under four feet of snow. Ed switched off his mic, leaned back in his swivel chair, took a mouthful of coffee from his insulated mug, and rested it on the substantial slope of his belly. "Seventeen. That's pretty good. We've had a couple of younger guys like you callin' in lately. Good for the hobby." We were theoretically preparing for a cellular network collapse in the wake of some unspecified natural or human disaster, but the emergency league was just another excuse for those of us attached to the ham radio culture of the mid-twentieth century to socialize and maintain our unique interests. In our lonely basement workshops and garages, we liked to think we were preserving something both more civilized and more free than the cellular technology that had dethroned analog radio communication not so long ago.

Ed looked over at me and grinned. "Hey, we just have time to catch the *Bolero* transmission at 9:30." He swung around to face his equipment. "You ever

pick up any numbers stations?" he asked. He now had his back to me and was fiddling with the dial on his receiver. I told him I hadn't.

"Well hang on just a sec." He rotated his dial clockwise, zeroing in on 18740 kHz. At first, I heard nothing but static. Then right at 9:30 P.M., the faint sound of Maurice Ravel's *Bolero* began to play—a few bars of the main theme played on a French horn. When the music stopped, we heard the compressed sound of a synthetic female voice come through the speaker in a blend of Spanish and English. *Atención. Atención. Atención. 24. 12. 5. 19. 21. 8. 74. 14. 2. 75. 22. 8. 27. 11. 5. 62. 20. 7. Atención. Atención.* The message repeated two more times, then the same bars of *Bolero* played again and the transmission ended. Ed swiveled back around, another grin stretched across his face under his fulsome mustache. "Pretty freaky, huh?"

He had my attention. "What in the world was that, Ed? Some sort of spy stuff?" I sat down straddling the office chair facing me, rested my crossed arms along the chair back, and leaned towards him.

"Spy stuff? Yeah, that's the idea," he said. "It's a numbers station. A ghost station. Nobody claims it. It's not registered in the U.S. or anywhere else as far as anyone can tell. There used to be a lot of them. Most of 'em shut down after the Cold War. Look here." He stood and grabbed a clipboard off the weathered pegboard wall to his right and flipped through a stack of papers clipped to the front. "This is a list of the ghost stations I've picked up over the years. Some of them are still active." He handed me the clipboard and sat back down. "Those numbers you heard probably reference a cypher book of some sort. Each set of three numbers could refer to a page, line, word. Something like that. Could be any book too. *Moby-Dick*, for example."

The page he flipped to had a chart with station nicknames running down a column on the left side. Each row specified the frequency on which the station transmitted, notes about the nature of the transmission, dates of operation, and assumed transmission location. *Apache. Bolero. The Buzzer. The Gong. The Pip. The Swedish Rhapsody. The Thumper. The Lincolnshire Poacher. The Warbler.* All these names I would become very familiar with over the next few years. *The Buzzer*, thought to operate out of the former Soviet Union, transmitted nothing but a repeated metallic buzz day and night. It was still active and had been since the Seventies. *The Pip* had broadcasted a similar continuous beeping noise but was occasionally interrupted by cryptic Russian language messages such as *continue to develop relationship with Stefan*, as translated on one of the

ham radio internet forums. It ceased operation in 1995. *The Swedish Rhapsody*, possibly based somewhere in Eastern Europe, opened its broadcasts with the sound of Hugo Alfvén's "Swedish Rhapsody No. 1" played on a music box. The voice of a young girl would then deliver seemingly nonsensical messages in German. It ceased broadcasting in 1988. There are several such stations still operational in East Asia, thought to be broadcasting into or out of China.

I ran my finger down the list to *Bolero*. "Bolero's operating out of Cuba?"

"Yeah, that one was easy to locate. Strong signal. Couldn't be coming from anywhere else." Ed was entering all the callsigns that had participated that night on an Excel spreadsheet on a laptop open on the desk adjacent to his radio equipment. "How many agents you think they have still operating in the U.S.?" he asked.

"At least a few, right? Maybe in South Florida?" I poured a half cup of stale coffee into the cleanest mug I could find on the work bench along the far wall. I took another look at the chart. "Hey, some of these are in Europe and Asia. You can pick these up?"

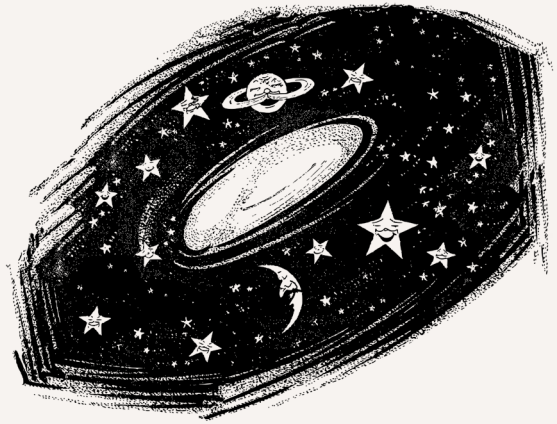
"Sure," he nodded. "Depending on transmission conditions, I can pick up shortwave broadcasts from South America, Europe, Asia. Some folks have bounced Morse code off the moon using shortwave. Never tried that myself." He laughed. Ed turned from where he was working and pointed to a faded National Geographic world map on a wall pin board on the other side of the room covered in a variety of colored pins. "The ones in red up there are some of my DXs—the long-distance transmissions I've picked up." There were little red pins scattered around Europe, South America, Asia, and a few remote islands. Ed crossed his arms in meditation, looking pleased with himself.

I followed the list to the next page. At the bottom, the last entry was a station called *The Warbler*. "Huntsville?" I exclaimed. One of these is local?" I stood up and brought the clipboard over to Ed, gesturing at him with it, almost tripping over a large, partially disassembled A.C./D.C. power converter in the middle of the floor.

Ed swiveled around away from his laptop. "Well, not Huntsville *proper*, mind you. I think it's broadcasting from the hills east of town. It's been there a long time. Mid-Fifties." He rolled his chair over to his receiver and started fiddling with the knob, rotating its dial down to 4820 kHz. Before he even landed squarely on the frequency, I could hear a three-toned pattern cutting through the static. It was loud and clear—a short run of three escalating

notes, the final note of the triad held for a little longer than the first two.

"Some of the older guys started calling it *The Warbler* 'cause it sounded a bit like a bird call—like a warbler staking out its territory in the spring or something." He crossed his arms and leaned back away from the transmitter, facing me. "Best guess we have is that it's military. Maybe a project out of Redstone Arsenal. Something one of the Germans who came over with von Braun cooked up. Redstone hasn't claimed it though. Ted Long used to work on the arsenal but never could find out anything about it. No one knew anything. The property is likely Redstone but nobody seems to have jurisdiction over it, from what he could tell. Could be operated out of D.C."



"So what do you think it's for?" I asked.

Ed shrugged. "Don't think they're broadcasting any messages. Maybe they just want to maintain control of that frequency. You know, in case of an emergency. Nobody else can broadcast on it while it's doing this," he gestured towards the speaker.

"Has it ever been used for emergency broadcasts?"

"Nope. Although we think the mic is live. It's a mechanically generated sound, not digital. Hang on." Ed opened a file cabinet and flipped through some manila folders until he found a thin, green spiral notebook. He found the page he was looking for and handed it to me. There were notes with dates and times recording irregularities that had been picked up in some of the transmissions.

"I used to listen to it in the background for a few hours at a time, just listening for somethin' different."

"Says here the tone changed a couple of times?"

"Yeah, the pitch shifted a little bit. Twice, as far as we can tell. It used to be a little faster too. That's pretty much what you'd expect from an old mechanical tone wheel or something like that." Ed was now wrestling with a bag of Fritos. The bag was getting the better of him.

"So how hard would it be to actually find this thing—the source of this transmission?"

"Probably not hard at all, really. I imagine I could triangulate the location of the station pretty well with the directional receiver I got in the truck. You'd just have to drive around a bit. Maybe do a little trespassin'."

"Well, we should go do that some weekend. It would be fun." I tossed the notebook on the work bench next to me.

Ed laughed. "Sure, kid. It would be fun. Maybe next month." He stood up and offered me the now opened bag. "You want any of these?"

Ed never had the chance to find the station with me. He died two years later of pancreatic cancer, just a couple of weeks after the initial diagnosis. Ed was not married and had no children, leaving the management of his estate and funeral arrangements to his only living sister, Barbara. A few of us from the club joined her for the funeral and graveside service. It was a clear, cool morning in early November and I remember lingering over lunch with her in the room the club reserved at Nick's by the River for our small reception following the service.

"Ed and I were never close," she said, gazing into the half cup of coffee in front of her. "Y'all were really like his family. His brothers. I could never get into all his radio stuff." I plucked another cornbread muffin from the basket in front of me and began to slowly, thoughtlessly, spread margarine across the halves of its crumbly interior. "It was so kind of y'all to help out this morning."

"We were happy to do it. Ed was such a big part of our club. Won't be the same without him."

"He wanted to leave all his equipment to the club. But he asked me to give you the equipment in his truck. He thought you'd get some use out of it."

Later that week, we helped Barbara clean out Ed's house. His radio equipment, now silent, lay stretched along the desk in his workroom just as he had left it, illuminated only by the late fall light filtering through the raised horizontal window along the back wall. I carefully took down his world map and sat looking at it for a few moments in his swivel chair. Here were the final, tangible remains of the hours he spent working in this room. There would be no more pins added to the map,



no new call signs recorded in his transmission log. His sister let me keep it. We moved his radio equipment into the club's storage facility at the EZ-Store on the parkway. I pulled Ed's equipment out of his truck along with the mounted directional antenna he kept in the passenger's seat.

The club was not the same without Ed. Ted and I took turns keeping the weekly emergency league call-in going every Tuesday night. But I spent more and more time in my home office exploring the vast, obscure world hidden in the long-distance shortwave frequencies.

It was in January of the following year that I finally decided to get out of the house and triangulate *The Warbler's* transmissions. I started my journey from the parking lot at the top of Monte Sano State Park on the eastern edge of Huntsville. Through the bare trees I could see the valley unroll before me to the east and rise again in the foothills of the Appalachian Mountains in the gray winter light further on. The air was crisp and cold on my fingers as I calibrated Ed's directional antenna mounted to the roof of my hatchback. As Ed had anticipated, the signal was strong, broadcasting from somewhere due east from where I now stood.

I drove southeast towards Scottsboro until the signal shifted to the northwest. I then drove north and back around to the west, triangulating the transmission's source as best I could from the county highways, winding through the foothills, as I closed in around it in concentric circles. I soon found myself following the contour of a prominent hill to my left as I followed the trail south again. While farm and grazing land stretched out to my right, the hill on the other side was heavily forested with mixed pine and deciduous trees rising

towards its summit. As best I could tell, the source of *The Warbler's* transmissions was somewhere up that hill shrouded among the trees. Across from a pasture, I found a steel gate crossing a dirt road, winding through the woods up the hill. There was enough of a shoulder for me to pull over and examine the gate more closely. It was marked

*Redstone Arsenal Property
Authorized Personnel Only
No Trespassing*

While the gate was enough to prevent vehicular ascent of the hill, the wire fence running through the woods parallel to the highway was rudimentary and poorly maintained in places. It was easy to find a gap along the bottom of the fence, perhaps dug by some enterprising animal, not far from the gate and wide enough for me to slip under. I left all of my gear in the car except for a pair of binoculars. I could always claim to be an overzealous birdwatcher if I had a run-in with security.

I stayed close to the edge of the red clay road as I followed it up, stopping every few minutes to listen for the sound of an engine or raised voices echoing down the side of the hill. I heard nothing. As I neared the crest of the hill, my pulse quickened as I now could see the outline of a radio tower rising through the bare trees ahead of me. From the edge of a clearing near the top, I could clearly see the antenna and there, beside it, a weathered, flat-roofed cinder block building with a single door facing the road. A pair of partially shuttered windows faced my side of the hill. A single white truck was parked in the grass alongside the building.

I slowly began to circle the clearing counterclockwise just inside the tree line, always keeping an eye on the door. As I got closer to the house, I could see that the truck had Huntsville civilian plates but no other markings that might have identified its owner. As I came around towards the back side of the building, I saw two more windows on the opposite side and a large covered generator parallel to the house next to the power line that fed the building from a wide easement running up the opposite side of the hill. I crossed the easement out of sight of the building and continued around to where the large, branching shortwave antenna reached from the earth into the sky.

The truck bothered me, but I had come a long way to learn something about this place and I wasn't quite ready to work my way down the hill and back under the fence again. I slowly approached the antenna, crossing the clearing out of sight of the building's windows. I just wanted to get a glimpse inside if I could. As I came within

arm's length of the antenna, sharp barks erupted from inside the building. Before I could move more than a step or two, I heard the door, now on the opposite side of the building, give way and the all-too-familiar sound of a dog padding across the frosty grass heading in my direction. I turned and made toward the woodline as fast as I could, but not before the border collie caught up with me and continued to bark, wagging his tail, as he followed me towards the trees.

"He won't bite you." I heard a flat, gruff voice address me from behind. "But I suggest you come on back and tell me what you're doing up here before I call the police. They'll get here and find your car before you can get back down the hill."

He asked me to call him Mike. I was now sitting across from him just inside the front door of the station in a room arranged as a work space or office of some kind. Old steel-framed bookshelves lined the walls, filled with books, technical manuals, and labeled boxes. A desk lamp and an inexpensive coffee maker sat on a mid-century work table along one wall. Mike was pouring me some coffee into a Styrofoam cup as the dog curled up on a bed underneath the table. Mike was still wearing a brown Carhartt coat with the hood pulled back from his close-cropped gray hair.

"George and I don't usually get visitors." He handed me the cup and sat down across from me. He studied me through his oversized bifocals. "So, do you think you found what you were looking for?" He took a sip of coffee.

I hesitated for a moment, trying to decide just how much truth I should share with him. But I figured being at least somewhat forthcoming might inspire similar candor in Mike. I told him the little I knew—or had heard—about the station.

"I'm surprised more folks like you haven't shown up over the years. But you're the first I know of who's actually found the place."

Mike was at first somewhat reticent but he confirmed some of my suspicions. The station was the source of *The Warbler's* transmissions. It had been operating since the early 1950s. The property was owned by Redstone Arsenal but operation of the station had at least temporarily been handed over to civilian control. He also asked me a good bit about my own education, work experience, and family background. We soon developed a friendly rapport and, perhaps because of my age and background, he didn't seem to think of me as any kind of threat.

"Here," he said, "let me show you something." A door on the opposite side of the room we were in led to a short hallway, at the end of which another

door led into a large, windowless room lined with shelves full of radio equipment. Another long desk stretched across the far wall, covered in books, tools, and more radio components. Some of it was very old, but interspersed among the vintage equipment were newer model components that appeared to be wired in parallel sequence to provide continuing operations in case of malfunction. Mike sat down at the desk and flipped a switch controlling a single speaker to his right on a shelf above the desk. Immediately I heard *The Warbler's* familiar three-step pattern. "This housing here," he said, pointing across to a green metal frame wired into the transmitter on the other side of the desk, "is the mechanism that produces the tone you're hearing. It's actually two separate tone boxes, one of which acts as a backup in case the other malfunctions or requires maintenance." That might explain the shift in tone Ed had heard, I thought to myself. Mike flicked off the switch on the speaker.



"So what is it for," I ventured to ask.

Mike hesitated for a moment. "I don't know," he answered. "I have *ideas* about what it's for but I'm not going to share those with you right now. I've already told you quite a lot. And all of it is confidential, you understand." Mike looked at his watch. "But it's getting late. Let me drive you back down to your car." After a moment's hesitation he added, "Why don't you come back up here next week and maybe you can help me a bit. I could use a hand from someone who knows his way around a radio."

I returned Monday afternoon and just about every day I could get time away from work. Over

the next few months, I spent a lot of time with Mike and George monitoring the station and becoming familiar with the layout and operation of its equipment. Over time, Mike began to share more of what he knew bit by bit. The station's proper name was not *The Warbler* but *UVB-52*. It had been in operation as a closely guarded project originally under the joint command of the Army and the Air Force. Mike was not the first civilian who had taken on the task of keeping the station operational. He had been recruited by a man Mike called Gabe whom Mike had met while he was still teaching electrical engineering at the University of Alabama in Huntsville. Gabe had been the first civilian charged with continuing the operation of the station. From a file, Mike produced a cryptic unmarked letter dated March 26, 1989, the day Gabe took charge of the station.

Temporary civilian operation of PROJECT ANTHONY approved. Uninterrupted transmissions are to continue until further notice. PROJECT ANTHONY to remain HIGHLY CONFIDENTIAL.

This was the only written record of the station's origin as a federal operation prior to civilian hand-off. Gabe had operated the station alone for almost fifteen years before he recruited Mike to provide him with support. There had been no express arrangement or approval of any subsequent hand-off to a successor, but without further instructions, and with no point of contact at Redstone, Gabe decided he had no choice but to make his own plans.

"So I came on board around 2002 and started helping Gabe take care of things," Mike explained while we were cleaning and inspecting the exterior generator on the side of the building one day. "He passed away about five years ago and I've been on my own since then. Gabe didn't tell me much about how he first got involved other than that only a handful of people in D.O.D. even knew the project existed. Gabe thought transfer of operation to him was intended to keep the project isolated from internal oversight. There was no point of contact locally at Redstone and he was quite firm in thinking he was not supposed to reach out to anyone on his own. Whatever contact he originally had disappeared but he believed he had an obligation to keep the station going." I wasn't surprised to hear that Mike now needed some help. He asked if I could take on some of the responsibility for maintaining the station and keep things going.

That's also when Mike first told me about the account. On the first of every month, an automatic deposit was made to a bank account held for the use of the station's operation and maintenance.

The amount of the deposit was also automatically adjusted for inflation on the first of every fiscal year. “Gabe always assumed that if the money was continuing to be deposited every month in support of the station then *somebody* must have intended it to continue operation. Someone might be monitoring it too.”

Eventually the topic came back around to the purpose of the station. I told him Ed thought the transmission was intended to maintain control of the frequency in case of emergency.

“That’s a good guess,” he responded. “But I don’t think that would have satisfied Gabe. The project was too sensitive for that.” By now we were back at the antenna tower, checking its electrical connections to the station building. “Gabe thought it was some sort of dead hand. If the transmission ever stopped, he thought it would trigger some kind of automatic response.”

“What kind of response?” I asked.

“Who knows. Could trigger some automatic escalation of Department of Defense threat level or maybe put Redstone in lockdown. Could even trigger automatic retaliation. You have to think in terms of the era when this was built,” he explained. “Termination of the transmission signal could have indicated a Soviet attack on Huntsville. An automatic dead hand response system wouldn’t require a human operator to initiate. Anyway, that’s what Gabe thought.”

As we walked back towards the front of the building, he said to me over his shoulder, “The only thing that really puzzled Gabe were the transmissions they previously picked up on that frequency. During the war, mind you, we greatly expanded our capability to monitor radio transmissions globally and to pick up distant or weak signals, especially when there wasn’t a lot of solar interference.” He slung a bag of tools into the bed of his truck. “Gabe said in the late Forties maybe, after the Germans were set up over at Redstone, they mounted some pretty sensitive shortwave receivers to pick up any Soviet communications. And on this frequency, the same we’re broadcasting *UVB-52* on now, they found a lot of low-level garbled chatter. Gabe said they heard *voices*, but in some sort of code or unknown language.” He thought for a moment, his elbow propped up on the tailgate of his truck. “The really weird thing he told me was that they never could determine its direction, and the strength of the signal never varied either. Multidirectional, always the same. It’s like it was just background noise—everywhere—but hard to detect without the sort of equipment they were using.”

Occasionally, we’d sleep at the station, during

storms or when the temperature dropped well below freezing, just to make sure the station remained operational. Off the hallway that ran straight through the building was a makeshift bedroom—really more of a cell—with an adjacent utilitarian bathroom. One of us would get a little sleep in there while the other sat in the transmission room.

One night, after I had been working with Mike for a couple of years, I volunteered to stay up at the station alone. The chance of severe weather was low and I felt confident I could handle things on my own. By that time, Mike trusted me with the run of the place, and so he readily agreed. “I’ll bring you some breakfast early and you can get on in to work if you need to.”

In the late afternoon, the sky had grown overcast. As I was returning from my car to the station, I looked across the clearing and saw a single coyote watching me from the edge of the power line easement. Its gaze was almost human as it watched me enter the building. I had almost forgotten about it when about an hour later I looked up from the desk in the front office and saw through the window that the coyote had now been joined by two more of its kind, the three standing together by the easement watching the building, silently.

The air cooled as a moonless night descended over the hill. I closed the shutters on the windows and turned on the space heater in the front room to counter the draft creeping in around the door frame. I wished then that Mike had left George at the station to keep me company. There’s an uncanny transformative quality that loneliness at night brings to the space around you. Innocuous sounds take on sinister significance in the still of your isolation. It’s perhaps for that reason that I’m still not sure how much I can trust my own memory of the first night I spent alone on the hill.

It must have been after midnight while I was sitting in the transmission room, enjoying the warm glow of the transmitter’s amber display lights, when I heard the sound of laughter, somewhere in the woods sloping down the hill from the station. As best I could tell, it was an older woman’s voice. It was not a mirthful laugh either but to my ears sounded more like malicious cackling. The sound stopped and then started again a few minutes later, this time joined by other voices of both men and women. First one would start and then the others would join together in a chorus of chortling before the sound died down again. And then after a bit it would start up again. It must have lasted for at least half an hour and—though I cannot say for certain—it seemed to me at the time that the

sound moved from one side of the hill to the other.

Eventually, the laughter stopped and I reassured myself that it must have been a group of people from one of the farms nearby. The sound perhaps could have been carried by the wind echoing off the nearby foothills. I settled down as best I could in the little cell to sleep but never could reach deep, restful slumber. I was constantly wavering in and out of sleep and in that half-conscious state I had restless dreams or waking visions. I could hear the laughter in my mind again but now I imagined it was in the station with me and the owners of those cackling voices were reaching for me, their faces obscured in the dim half-light of the station. As I struggled against them, I would wake and find myself alone in the room.

I must have fallen asleep eventually. I awoke in the soft light of the early morning as I heard Mike open the door. I could hear his feet shuffling across the floor and the sound of him removing something from a plastic bag on the table in the front office. The sound of George's paws and tinkling tags soon followed together with the reassuring burble of the coffee maker. I did not tell Mike about my disturbing evening right away, but grabbed a biscuit off the table and a cup of coffee, as I hurried out the door to freshen up at home before work. My immediate thought was to never return. Whatever forces had converged on me alone in the dark meant for me to stay away. I was warned. But I came back. Mike needed me.

It wasn't for a few days that I broached the subject with Mike. He had brought a riding mower up to the station on a trailer along with some other landscaping equipment. We had to maintain the open space around the station ourselves. He didn't look at all surprised. "I should have said something to you," he said. "It hasn't happened a lot but I've seen some strange stuff up here too."

His own experiences had been similar to mine. Coyotes, feral dogs, wild pigs, vultures—he'd seen them on the property acting peculiar, coming close to where he had been working or sitting on the edge of the woods like they were watching him. "Once I came out here and found the tower itself just covered with crows. They were all over the ground too, squawking and carrying on like they were having a meeting. They didn't hurt anything, fortunately, but they only moved when George chased them off."

But the animals weren't the most peculiar thing he'd seen. "It feels crazy just talking about it. So anyway, me and George were spending the night up here like you did and I had just taken some trash out to the truck. Must have been pretty late.

After midnight sometime. When I turned to walk back toward the station, I see this dim violet light through the trees over there." He was pointing towards the back side of the hill to the right of the power line easement. "And there was almost a humming sound in the air but one I *felt* more than heard, if you know what I mean. So after an hour or so, I'm back in the station and George starts barking. I take him outside and he just starts going crazy, barking at something over in that same direction. The air is still lit up with that dim purplish light but as I'm looking, I see the silhouette of these *figures* over there, just by the woods. Didn't look like people exactly either. I had my gun on me and so George and I start walking that way and they just sort of slunk back into the woods or, unless I was just seeing things, up into the trees." Mike looked visibly disturbed by what he was recounting as we stood there looking together towards the trees. "We came back into the house and maybe a half hour later I looked through the window in that direction and the light's gone."

Mike went on to share with me some of his deeper speculations about the nature of the station. After hearing his story, I was not surprised to find out that he had considered the possibility that the station was used to communicate some message to off-world beings who were themselves monitoring the station's activities. Among his more fanciful conjectures, he even suggested that a dead hand purpose might still be a plausible explanation, but that it was meant to inform our visitors that humanity was still in functional control of the planet. "So what exactly do you think would happen if the signal went quiet?" I asked him.

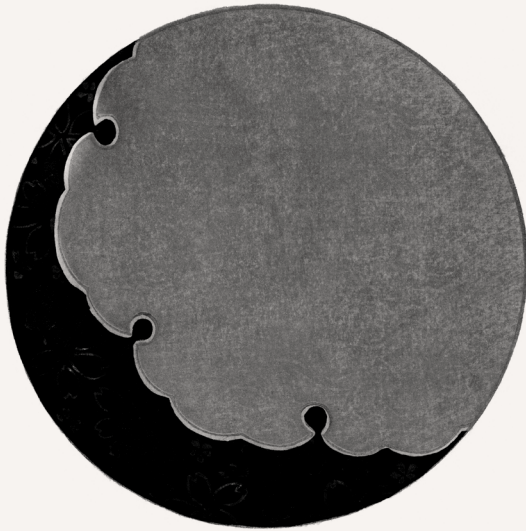
He thought for a minute. "Maybe it would tell them something's gone wrong. Instead of a dead-hand automated response, maybe it would tell them that humanity was no longer in charge—that we'd destroyed ourselves with war or disease."

"And then what?"

"Don't know. Maybe at that point they'd be free to take control themselves, maybe strip Earth down for parts." He laughed.

That was one of the last times Mike was able to do any heavy work in the field around the station. His rheumatoid arthritis was getting worse and he was visibly showing signs of age. Walking the perimeter of the field often left him winded. I offered to take on more of his responsibilities. Taking on his shifts also meant taking a leave of absence from work. I didn't have much to keep me in town and eventually I spent more and more time alone at the station with George, whom he left with me to keep me company.

At night, sometimes the voices return. I hear laughter just over the side of the hill echoing up towards the station from the woods below, whispers just outside my window, or muffled voices at the edge of the property over by the trees. Sometimes George springs from the floor and paces the station nervously or sniffs the air as a breeze passes. He may growl or bark briefly before returning to his bed by the chair at my feet. And then the dreams return at night and I waver in and out of consciousness while unseen hands grope towards me or I feel myself lifted off the mattress, hovering helplessly in the air over my bed, where ugly, distorted faces flicker before me in the shadows cast by the amber lights filtering in from the control room. From the window, I once thought I saw figures like Mike had described—bent black shapes no bigger than children that appeared to claw their way backwards up the trees over by the power line easement.



In the time I have spent at the station, I have developed my own thoughts about what its purpose is. My own endless search for answers led me down unexpected paths beyond the more familiar world of radio transmissions, Cold War spy stories, and space exploration. Not long ago, I happened across a scrap of folded, weathered paper when it dropped out of an old operational manual I took down off the shelf during one of the many quiet moments I had alone sitting in the front room while Mike was away. The note itself looked unremarkable—just a leaf of paper torn from a small spiral notebook perhaps once kept beside an old rotary phone. The pencil markings scratched across it at an angle had been written in a hurry and were already beginning

to fade after sitting untouched, perhaps for a half century, forgotten on the shelf.

isolated voice record believed by Dr. H to be related to UGARITIC, NAHUATL, and COPTIC – still awaiting add. confirm. others remain undetermined

It is said that the desert fathers of early Christianity, like Saint Anthony, went out into the deserts and remote places of Egypt not so much to avoid living a life among people in the crowded streets of Alexandria but to confront what was thought to be lurking out there among the dry bones and the sand. The wilderness, the mountains, the deserts—these places far from the cities of men—were the dwelling places of evil spirits and dark forces, the primordial sources of sin and disease. I now thought of the station in these terms too.

Ed, Gabe, and Mike were perhaps each at least partially right about the station. But they were like the blind men describing different parts of the elephant. In exploring the airwaves, those who came before us may have found something they did not expect and could not fully explain. Something dark and menacing attempting to break into our world. Something that spoke in many tongues, including the lost, forgotten speech of dead ages, ancient priests, or magicians. The three-toned run of *The Warbler* began to sound to me not so much like a radio signal but as a kind of prayer. *Ky-ri-e. Ky-ri-e. Ky-ri-e.* Whether *The Warbler* was meant to block this malevolent chatter from our atmosphere or counter it in some fashion remains unclear to me. But I'm also convinced of the importance of the station continuing its work, even if many of my questions remain unanswered.

I sit here tonight at my desk with George resting by my feet, lost in these thoughts. I will continue to do what I can to keep UVB-52 operational, singing its warbler-like song endlessly into the ether. I don't know how much longer that will be possible. The station is always in need of repair and it's long past time to upgrade much of the transmission equipment. The grass is growing tall outside the window. But the deposits stopped showing up in the bank account at the end of the year. We have no clue whom to contact and I suspect all memory of this project has been lost in time and the inevitable turnover that comes with our cyclical political order. Our own resources are limited. I do not know what will happen if the transmission ever fails. I hope to never find out. *Kyrie eleison.*

Thomas Casey is an attorney who lives and works in Birmingham, Alabama. He is the winner of THE LAMP's second Christmas Ghost Story contest.

NUNC DIMITTIS

TABLES FOR TWELVE

BY NIC ROWAN

For years, I've found that the most enjoyable regular column in the *New Yorker* is "Tables for Two," which runs at the front of the book. Its format is simple: each week a contributor to the magazine eats at a different restaurant in the city and writes up a short profile of the meal or the chef or whatever else strikes his or her fancy. Stars are given or subtracted and dishes are recommended—but that's not really the point. Tables for Two is a casual column, designed to ease couples into dining with a sensible chuckle.

Sometimes I wonder if such a column could be written with a large family in mind. I think of my own, for example. When we eat out, which is not often, it is almost invariably an intergenerational affair. You have me, my wife, and my daughter, of course. We're usually accompanied by my parents, and, at the best of times, my six siblings as well. Every so often, a grandmother tags along too. When we were all young, we piled into a blue fifteen-passenger van that in many parking lots occupied two spots. These days, now that we are all grown and moved out, we descend on the restaurant in five different S.U.V.s.

Whatever establishment we enter, be it the Palm or IHOP, much is made of our appearance. No one ever bothers to call ahead, which always means chaos at the front door. The hostess summons a second hostess, and we are shepherded to the back of the restaurant, nearest to the bathroom and out of the sight of the other patrons. (In the last days of smoking sections, we were sometimes dropped in there as well.) Tables are pushed together and anything extraneous—or breakable—is removed from their surfaces. We have never minded this treatment: we are a loud bunch, and more often than not a meal ends with a broken or at least spilled glass.

Not that it matters much. Except on the rarest of occasions—birthdays, feasts, and after funerals—we all drink water. When I was much younger, my mother lectured us in the car on the way

to the restaurant: "Fountain drinks are a scam," she said. "If you must have a soda, we'll order one for the table—and you can all share." She applied a similar rule to food. We were never permitted our own plates because, after all, children never finish their meals. Neither rule is still enforced, but both have become a way of life. I can't remember the last time I ordered a soda at a restaurant. And the decidedly foreign custom of sharing plates, which only recently has become trendy, has never seemed strange to me.

As the years have worn on, our customs have shaped our tastes to the point that when you find the Rowans out for dinner, it is almost invariably at a downmarket pizza joint where beer is served in pitchers. (We are even known sometimes to meet up at the Costco food court.) Our conversation is light, though not exactly coherent. Sometimes our friends politely describe the table talk as *spirited* and *enthusiastic*. My wife is more direct in her assessment. She likens the babble to Phil Spector's Wall of Sound, though my family's re-interpretation is not quite on the level of *Pet Sounds*.

I remember once, though, we did go somewhere nicer, one of the few Michelin-starred places near Washington, D.C. The exact nature of the occasion escapes me, but the meal lasted for something like five hours, many speeches and toasts were delivered, and, by the time the coffee and cognac made their way around the table, all the other patrons had left and the waitstaff were clearing away their tablecloths. When my father rose to retrieve his coat, it occurred to me that every other meal out was perhaps a rehearsal for this one. This dinner was a spectacle, overflowing with emotion, a public manifestation of everything that makes my family whole. I still think about it years later at other, lesser meals, re-running the scenes in my mind and still enjoying that one evening with a little inward chuckle.

Nic Rowan is managing editor of THE LAMP.



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