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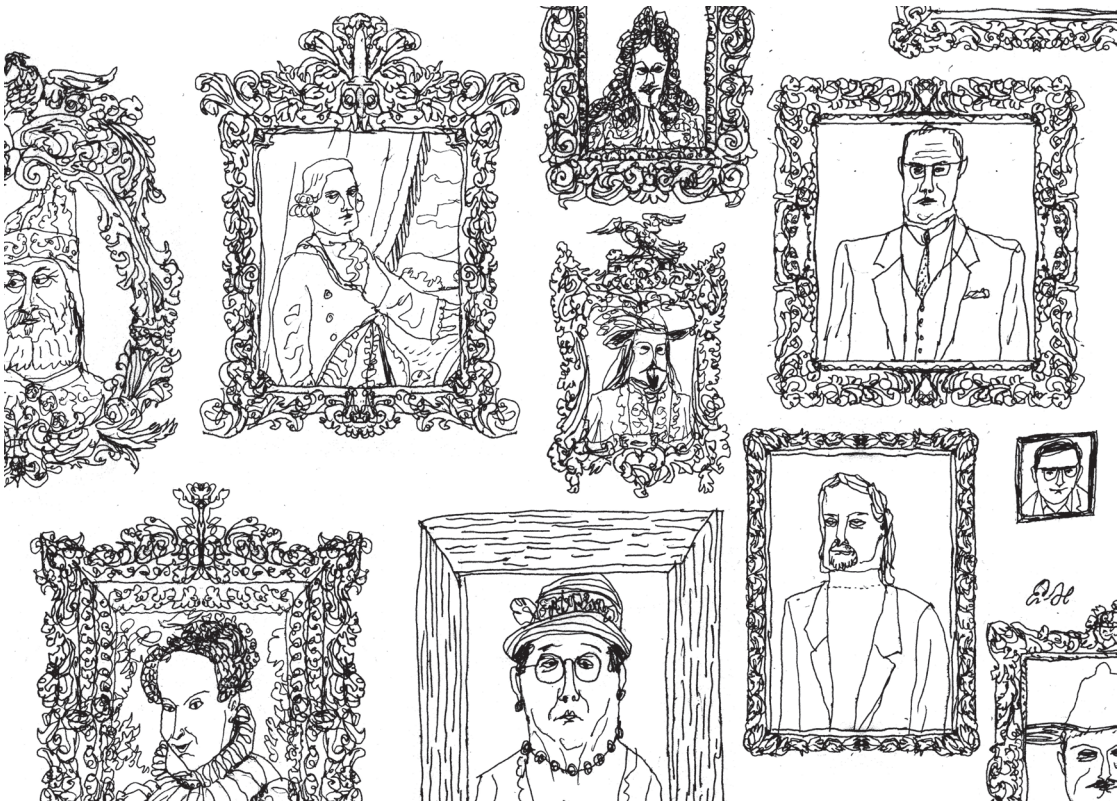
THE LAMP

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



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Grant me just one summer, powerful ones,
And just one autumn for ripe songs,
That my heart, filled with that sweet
Music, may more willingly die within me.

Hölderlin

THE PUBLISHER'S DESK

The Assumption 2023 issue of THE LAMP is not dedicated to Cormac McCarthy, but it may as well be. As I look through our features, I find more than ten thousand words devoted to the American novelist who once proclaimed that he was the first writer to take cowboys "seriously" in modern American fiction. McCarthy was an eccentric, to be sure, and he delighted in the arcane, the brutal, and, at times, the ornate.

And yet, behind all of it, McCarthy often hinted that there was something more to his world than death and thoughts of death. Robert Wyllie (page 34) calls him a "wannabe believer," whose pessimism "seems duty-bound, as if the consolations of faith would prevent his witness to the victims of the stupid, vicious, utterly unremarked post-apocalyptic barbarisms, after humanity screws up the destruction of the world." Joseph Bottum (page 42) diagnoses his outlook as "half-Augustinianism," which is to say that McCarthy understood the world as a place where "there's justice, perhaps, but no mercy, and affliction does not signal redemption." This unsettled approach, and the infrequent "glimmer of light" in some of McCarthy's novels, Paul Mariani explains (page 41), is in large part what keeps readers coming back.

McCarthy also had a wonderfully idiosyncratic sense of humor. "The McCarthy I like is the fox rather than the hedgehog: the magpie collector of words and literary styles," writes Sam Sacks (page 40). And he had little compunction about revealing influences in his work: although often compared to Faulkner, he admitted freely that he drew from everyone from Milton to Melville to Conrad. "No one questions whether or not Faulkner had decisive effects on McCarthy's storytelling sensibility or on the particular pitch of his syntax," writes William Giraldi (page 43), "but the books from which Faulkner made his own books were also on McCarthy's shelf."

This issue also has many fine essays which have nothing to do with Cormac McCarthy (though, as often happens, many have something to do with death). There's Thomas Pink on whether the motu proprio *Traditionis custodes* is lawful (page 17); Peter Brown on how he learned to "listen" to Saint Augustine (page 12) when writing his biography; and our editor on a new parlor game based on Vatican II (page 56). And in Appreciations, Aaron James surveys the life and legacy of Orlando di Lasso (page 59), one of the most sought-after composers during the high Renaissance. After a long and successful career, Lasso fell into "true melancholy" and, according to his wife, would speak "only of death." In his sacred music, however, he transformed that pain into a sweet suffering, contemplating the fact that "whatever his own suffering may have been, the suffering of Christ at least was not finally in vain."

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FEUILLETON

❖ Those of us who go to the liquor store as a hobby are no doubt aware that for about two years now there has been a shortage of Chartreuse. It began on the margins. First it was difficult to find a bottle of the green V.E.P., then the yellow. But soon, even those unwilling to spend two hundred eighty dollars on a digestif felt the pinch as the standard version also became unavailable. Liquor store owners around the country explained to dissatisfied customers that this was a genuine supply problem; and they had no expectation of restocking what Quentin Tarantino called "the only liquor so good that they named a color after it."

The reason behind the shortage is that the Carthusians of the Grande Chartreuse, who have made the liqueur more or less continuously since the seventeenth century, do not care to meet demand, which has increased in the past few years. They decided, after much reflection, that producing more Chartreuse was a distraction: "We wish to allow the monks to remain faithful to their primary vocation of prayer and solitude within their community and thus to preserve the balance of life at the monastery of the Grande Chartreuse," a spokesman for the company that distributes the liqueur said. And, in any case, she added, growth isn't everything: "Maintaining production at its current level also means refusing the race for infinite growth and favoring the future," she said. "It also means keeping a business activity on a human scale."

We agree with this reasoning wholeheartedly, even if it means one fewer bottle in our liquor cabinets. Still, we did want to have at least one bottle of Chartreuse in store. So we began making phone calls. Washington, D.C., was all emptied out. So was Northern Virginia. (The nearest bottle to Arlington was one hundred fifteen miles away.) Our representatives in Philadelphia and New York City turned up no results. (A liquor store owner in Union Square actually began cursing when asked for Chartreuse.) On a lark, we stopped at a grungy place in La Plata, Maryland, where there were two green bottles still on shelves. (We snapped them up immediately.) The Midwest was a little better. Although we couldn't find a single bottle in Indiana, Illinois, or Iowa, the liquor stores of Nebraska came through. We called every place in Omaha and Lincoln before finally tracking down four bottles. The store owner said he had bullied the distributor into selling them to him.

Then we made the sweep back east: Michigan, Ohio, Pennsylvania—all busts. One store owner in southeastern Michigan said that he's been keeping a list of people asking for Chartreuse. It stretches back a year. He has no expectation that he'll ever fill those orders. We can see those who placed them now, waiting, pale, unsatisfied, no doubt muttering the stanzas Matthew Arnold wrote while at the Grande Chartreuse:

> Years hence, perhaps, may dawn an age,
> More fortunate, alas! than we,
> Which without hardness will be sage,
> And gay without frivolity.
> Sons of the world, oh, speed those years;
> But, while we wait, allow our tears!

❖ While we're on the subject, here's Anthony Powell's sketch of a typical Chartreuse drinker:

> Hugo liked to "pose"—in his own word—as an "aesthete." He used to burn joss-sticks in his rooms. He had bought a half-bottle of Green Chartreuse, a liqueur he "sipped" from time to time, which, like the Widow's cruse, seemed to last forever; for only during outbreaks of consciously bad behavior was Hugo much of a drinker.

❖ The copyright on Winnie-the-Pooh lapsed last year, meaning that we can now, without fear of retribution from the Milne estate, present our bedtime story, "In Which Pooh Goes Visiting and Gets Stuck in a Tight Place":

> Pooh always liked a little something at eleven o'clock in the morning, and he was very glad to see Rabbit getting out the plates and mugs; and when Rabbit said, "Honey or condensed milk with your bread?" he was so excited that he said, "Both," and then, so as not to seem greedy, he added, "But don't bother about the bread, please." And for a long time after that he said nothing . . . until at last, humming to himself in a rather sticky voice, he got up, shook

Rabbit lovingly by the paw, and said that he must be going on.

"Must you?" said Rabbit politely.

"Well," said Pooh, "I could stay a little longer if it—if you——" and he tried very hard to look in the direction of the larder.

"As a matter of fact," said Rabbit, "I was going out myself directly."

"Oh, well, then, I'll be going on. Good-bye."

"Well, good-bye, if you're sure you won't have any more."

"Is there any more?" asked Pooh quickly.

Rabbit took the covers off the dishes, and said, "No, there wasn't."

"I thought not," said Pooh, nodding to himself. "Well, good-bye. I must be going on."

So he started to climb out of the hole. He pulled with his front paws, and pushed with his back paws, and in a little while his nose was out in the open again . . . and then his ears . . . and then his front paws . . . and then his shoulders . . . and then——

"Oh, help!" said Pooh. "I'd better go back."

"Oh, bother!" said Pooh. "I shall have to go on."

"I can't do either!" said Pooh. "Oh, help and bother!"

Now by this time Rabbit wanted to go for a walk too, and finding the front door full, he went out by the back door, and came round to Pooh, and looked at him.

"Hallo, are you stuck?" he asked.

"N-no," said Pooh carelessly. "Just resting and thinking and humming to myself."

"Here, give us a paw."

Pooh Bear stretched out a paw, and Rabbit pulled and pulled and pulled. . . .

"Ow!" cried Pooh. "You're hurting!"

"The fact is," said Rabbit, "you're stuck."

"It all comes," said Pooh crossly, "of not having front doors big enough."

"It all comes," said Rabbit sternly, "of eating too much. I thought at the time," said Rabbit, "only I didn't like to say anything," said Rabbit, "that one of us was eating too much," said Rabbit, "and I knew it wasn't me," he said. "Well, well, I shall go and fetch Christopher Robin."

Christopher Robin lived at the other end of the Forest, and when he came back with Rabbit, and saw the front half of Pooh, he said, "Silly old Bear," in such a loving voice that everybody felt quite hopeful again.

"I was just beginning to think," said Bear, sniffing slightly, "that Rabbit might never be able to use his front door again. And I should hate that," he said.

"So should I," said Rabbit.

"Use his front door again?" said Christopher Robin. "Of course he'll use his front door again."

"Good," said Rabbit.

"If we can't pull you out, Pooh, we might push you back."

Rabbit scratched his whiskers thoughtfully, and pointed out that, when once Pooh was pushed back, he was back, and of course nobody was more glad to see Pooh than he was, still there it was, some lived in trees and some lived underground, and——

"You mean I'd never get out?" said Pooh.

"I mean," said Rabbit, "that having got so far, it seems a pity to waste it."

Christopher Robin nodded.

"Then there's only one thing to be done," he said. "We shall have to wait for you to get thin again."

"How long does getting thin take?" asked Pooh anxiously.

"About a week, I should think."

"But I can't stay here for a week!"

"You can stay here all right, silly old Bear. It's getting you out which is so difficult."

"We'll read to you," said Rabbit cheerfully. "And I hope it won't snow," he added. "And I say, old fellow, you're taking up a good deal of room in my house—do you mind if I use your back legs as a towel-horse? Because, I mean, there they are—doing nothing—and it would be very convenient just to hang the towels on them."

"A week!" said Pooh gloomily. "What about meals?"

"I'm afraid no meals," said Christopher Robin, "because of getting thin quicker. But we will read to you."

Bear began to sigh, and then found he couldn't because he was so tightly stuck; and a tear rolled down his eye, as he said:

"Then would you read a Sustaining Book, such as would help and comfort a Wedged Bear in Great Tightness?"

So for a week Christopher Robin read that sort of book at the North end of Pooh, and Rabbit hung his washing on the South end . . . and in between Bear felt himself getting slenderer and slenderer. And at the end of the week Christopher Robin said, "Now!"

So he took hold of Pooh's front paws and Rabbit took hold of Christopher Robin, and all Rabbit's friends and relations took hold of Rabbit, and they all pulled together. . . .

And for a long time Pooh only said "Ow!" . . .

And "Oh!" . . .

And then, all of a sudden, he said "Pop!" just as if a cork were coming out of a bottle.

And Christopher Robin and Rabbit and all Rabbit's friends and relations went head-over-heels backwards . . . and on the top of them came Winnie-the-Pooh—free!

So, with a nod of thanks to his friends, he went on with his walk through the forest, humming proudly to himself. But, Christopher Robin looked after him lovingly, and said to himself, "Silly old Bear!"

❖ In a recent Apostolic Letter on Blaise Pascal, Pope Francis defended his old hero, whom he has expressed a desire to beatify, from charges of Jansenism:

I must mention Pascal's relationship to Jansenism. One of his sisters, Jacqueline, had entered religious life in Port-Royal, in a religious congregation the theology of which was greatly influenced by Cornelius Jansen, whose treatise *Augustinus* appeared in 1640. In January 1655, following his "night of fire," Pascal made a retreat at the abbey of Port-Royal. In the months that followed, an important and lengthy dispute about the Augustinus arose between Jesuits and "Jansenists" at the Sorbonne, the university of Paris. The controversy dealt chiefly with the question of God's grace and the relationship between grace and human nature, specifically our free will. Pascal, while not a member of the congregation of Port-Royal, nor given to taking sides—as he wrote, "I am alone. . . . I am not at all part of Port-Royal"—was charged by the Jansenists to defend them, given his outstanding rhetorical skill. He did so in 1656 and 1657, publishing a series of eighteen writings known as *The Provincial Letters*.

Although several propositions considered "Jansenist" were indeed contrary to the faith, a fact that Pascal himself acknowledged, he maintained that those propositions were not present in the *Augustinus* or held by those associated with Port-Royal. Even so, some of his own statements, such as those on predestination, drawn from the later theology of Augustine and formulated more severely by Jansen, do not ring true. We should realize, however, that, just as Saint Augustine sought in the fifth century to combat the Pelagians, who claimed that man can, by his own powers and without God's grace, do good and be saved, so Pascal, for his part, sincerely believed that he was battling an implicit pelagianism or semi-pelagianism in the teachings of the "Molinist" Jesuits, named after the theologian Luis de Molina, who had died in 1600 but was still quite influential in the middle of the seventeenth century. Let us credit Pascal with the candor and sincerity of his intentions.

This Letter is no place to re-open the question. Even so, what Pascal rightly warned against remains a source of concern for our own age: a "neo-pelagianism" that would make everything depend on "human effort channeled by ecclesial rules and structures" and can be recognized by the fact that it "intoxicates us with the presumption of a salvation earned through our own efforts." It should also be pointed out that Pascal's final position on grace, and in particular the fact that God "desires everyone to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth," was set out in perfectly Catholic terms at the end of his life.

As I noted earlier, Blaise Pascal, at the conclusion of a life that was brief yet extraordinarily rich and fruitful, set the love of his brothers and sisters above all else. He felt and knew that he was a member of one body, for "God, having made the heaven and the earth which are not conscious of the happiness of their existence, wished to create beings who would know that happiness and constitute a body of thinking members." Pascal, as a lay Christian, savored the joy of the Gospel, with which the Spirit wishes to heal and make fruitful "every aspect of humanity" and to bring "all men and women together at table in God's Kingdom." When, in 1659, he composed his magnificent Prayer to *Ask of God the Proper Use of Sickness*, Pascal was a man at peace, no longer engaged in controversies or even apologetics. Gravely ill and at the point of dying, he asked to receive Holy Communion, but that was not immediately possible. So he asked his sister, "since I cannot communicate in the head [Jesus Christ], I would like to communicate in the members." He "greatly desired to die in the company of the poor." It was said of Pascal, shortly after he took his last breath on 19 August 1662, that "he died with the simplicity of a child." After receiving the sacraments, his last words were: "May God never abandon me."

All the more remarkable considering that Francis is a Jesuit himself.

❖ The long-suffering Commanders may see yet another name change in the next few years, said one of the team's minority owners in July. We suggest a return to tradition: The Washington Football Team.

❖ Right now in the United States, one round of in vitro fertilization costs about twenty thousand dollars. There are fourteen states that require insurance to cover the treatment (five years ago it was only nine). Four in ten employer insurance plans offer IVF. Those who cannot afford IVF in the United States often go abroad, where regulations

on egg retrieval are more relaxed. The Czech Republic, Mexico, Thailand, and, until somewhat recently, Ukraine, are popular destinations. Private equity, however, has sensed a "market gap" in the baby business and is trying to bring much of this business back to the States (about a third of IVF cycles in America are done through clinics affiliated with private-equity funds). The future, investors promise, is in "automated" IVF, meaning a process guided by artificial intelligence. One venture capitalist claims that, given the cash, he could raise the worldwide number of IVF babies from sixty-four thousand per month to more than one million per month. Another claims that artificial intelligence could reduce the costs of IVF by as much as seventy percent in America. The operating term in both pitches is the word hope—a hope that for most women seeking IVF is ill-founded. For women under thirty-five, the success rate of IVF after the first try is about forty-one percent. That's the bright side. For women older than forty, the success rate is just over eight percent. It only plummets from there.

❖ "I'm surprised that your first wasn't in a tent somewhere or in somebody's basement."

Readers can be forgiven for thinking that this remark is not the sort of thing a priest friend ought not to have said to me recently. But context is everything. Here "first one" meant my first episcopal consecration, and his words were occasioned by hearing that I would be attending the consecration of Edward M. Lohse as the next bishop of the Diocese of Kalamazoo.

As it happened I found my "first one" very interesting. I sat next to a delegation from the Knights of Columbus, jolly, big-bellied mustached fellows wearing the old-fashioned regalia. I had forgotten how long the distribution of Holy Communion takes in the absence of altar rails. I ended up having to leave before the recessional ("O God Beyond All Praising," according to the booklet, which is surely the most enjoyable of the post-conciliar "hymns"), which I regretted at first because I had hoped to attend the reception that was supposed to follow. But another friend later informed me that there were no drinks, only dessert, a reality that, perhaps even more than the use of the vernacular in the conferring of the fullness of holy orders, brought home to me how much the Church has changed.

Enough about me. The principal consecrator was Archbishop Vigneron. My Lord of Detroit spoke movingly of the bishop-elect. "You are not to be an ecclesiastical civil servant." This more than anything else is the lesson that the world's bishops must take to heart. But "civil servant" is precisely how the office is often conceived, and it is certainly what it tends to become in practice even for those who resolve upon proceeding as successors of the Holy Apostles.

Bishop Lohse can hope for no better guide than his predecessor. As readers of this publication will know, Paul Bradley was the last bishop in the United States to suspend public Mass and the first to restore it. He has done the Church many another service, including several which cannot be discussed at present.

We ask readers to pray for Bishop Lohse and for all the episcopate.

—M.W.

❖ An exercise from Bradley's Arnold meant to test the student's knowledge of the use of the Latin infinitive as a noun. Translations should be sent to submissions@thelampmagazine.com. Grading will be strict!

i. It is always delightful to parents that their children should be praised.

ii. He said that it was disgraceful to break one's word, but keeping one's promises was always honourable.

iii. Both your brother and you have told many falsehoods; falsehood is always vile.

iv. It is one thing to be praised, another to have deserved praise.

v. To be praised by the unpatriotic is to me almost the same thing as to be blamed by patriots.

vi. Feeling gratitude, says he, is one thing, returning thanks another.

vii. Procrastination, which in all things was dangerous, was, he said, fatal in war.

viii. Pardoning the wicked is almost the same thing as condemning the innocent.

ix. Procrastination in showing gratitude is never praiseworthy; for myself, I prefer returning kindness to being under an obligation.

x. Happiness is one thing; success and prosperity another.

xi. Brave fighting, says he, will today be the same thing as victory; by victory we shall give freedom to our country.

BRASS RUBBINGS

NO LONGER FOREIGNERS

BY RAFAEL ALVAREZ

I was in Tokyo for my birthday this year, a Wednesday afternoon, sixty-five years down the line from the coronation of John XXIII, and the doors to the Old Cathedral of Saint Joseph were open on a lovely late Spring afternoon. The cathedral, established by the Paris Foreign Missions Society in 1874, stands back from the street in the Tsukiji neighborhood, the Edo canal district of old. An unlocked sanctuary was a welcome surprise to this Catholic from Baltimore, the premier see of the United States, where the doors to most Roman churches are shut tight except for Mass. I sat on the left, a few rows back from a statue of the Blessed Mother, and took out my rosary. The kneelers were bare wood. Cushions hung from hooks on the back of the facing pew, but I wasn't sure if they were for kneeling or sitting. I'd like to say that I kneel while circling the mysteries—they were the Glorious on this day, from Christ's Resurrection to his mother's Coronation—but that would be a lie.

I sat on the cushion and began, continuing a five-month, on-and-off Novena for the healing of a young relative from multiple cancers. Since a pilgrimage to Louisiana earlier this year, I have sought the intercession of a twelve-year-old girl, Charlene Richard, currently up for sainthood, who died from leukemia in 1959. After praying at Charlene's grave, I asked a lay Catholic whom I admire if it was okay to seek intercession from someone not yet recognized as a saint. "I wouldn't hesitate," he said. And I didn't.

For most of my way around the beads, I was the only one in the spare, wooden church that seats about one hundred fifty people, replaced as the cathedral of Tokyo in 1920 by Saint Mary's in the Sekiguchi neighborhood. Nearing the end of the devotion—*grant, we beseech you, that we who meditate upon these mysteries . . .*—I sensed someone sitting in the back. I met him in the "history room," an alcove displaying bricks from the original, Gothic church destroyed in 1923 by the Great Kanto Earthquake. The church was rebuilt in 1927. There were also artifacts dating from the seventeenth to the nineteenth century, when Christianity was *kindan* in Japan. Along with a vintage notice board proscribing Christianity once placed in Japanese towns is a replica of a *fumi-e*, a plaque with an image of Christ that citizens were forced to stomp to prove they had not converted to the *kirishitan* sect. Most striking was a statue of the Blessed Virgin Mary—known here as "Maria Kannon"—camouflaged as a Buddhist deity; the Mother of God disguised to protect Catholics who had gone underground—*kakure kirishitan*—from persecution. Shinto, the Japanese indigenous religion, involves the worship of ancestors, spirits of the natural world, and sacred powers found in people, places, and things; some eighty percent of Japanese participate in Shinto rites. On par with Shinto in terms of the number of adherents is Buddhism. And far, far behind is the Roman Church, with one-third of one percent of the population identifying as Catholic.

And so when I saw this middle-age man in the back of the church, I thought that my chance had come to learn about such things one-on-one instead of from books. I approached him and introduced myself. His name was Katsura Matsuo, and though we couldn't communicate very well, I hoped to get from him a sense of Japanese Catholicism. The only exchange possible was a brief back-and-forth via Google Translate. "We met by chance," he said. "I work nearby at the Tsukiji Hongwanji Temple. I'm not a monk. I help with various administrative tasks." I wasn't able to determine why he was there.

Through the open doors, under billowing clouds sailing across blue skies, came the voices of public

grade school children singing, more than a hundred kids in uniform banging sticks in unison while competing in field day exercises. The rhythm of their chants echoed the cadence of my silent prayers on the beads. I bid Matsuo *sayōnara* with a bow and left the sanctuary in search of someone who spoke English.

The history of Catholicism in Japan intrigues me in the same way that anything that is forbidden does. My son, on my trip with other members of our family, knew that I would be visiting the country's churches, and instructed me to read "Dr. Ogata Ryosai: Memorandum." The story is by Ryunosuke Akutagawa, whom my son described as a Japanese Edgar Allan Poe, and who began writing about Christians in Japan about ten years before his death. (At thirty-five, he swallowed a handful of Veronal, apparently while reading the Bible, and never woke up.) "Dr. Ogata Ryosai" was published in 1917, and it takes place in the seventeenth century, during the Tokugawa shogunate, when Christianity was prohibited, foreigners were banned, and citizens who refused to renounce Christ were executed. A Catholic widow named Shino is desperate for the village doctor to save her gravely ill nine-year-old daughter, Sato. The physician, Dr. Ryosai, refuses to treat the girl until her mother disavows Christianity. He attributes the distraught woman's belief to "some error in judgment." It's one thing to become a martyr for one's faith, as some four hundred did (twenty-six by crucifixion in 1597) during the prohibition. But who among us would have the stomach to uphold that faith if the price were the life of their child?

The anguished Shino finally agrees, taking a crucifix (described as being "shaped like one of our impalement racks") from her kimono and treading on it three times. Good enough for the doctor. They go to Shino's house, where the girl is fervently praying to the Savior her mother has just forsworn. But they're one teardrop too late. Sato succumbs to fever and her mother goes mad. The next day, a red-haired Portuguese missionary and several fellow Jesuits arrive with "alien" incense and incantations. Shino "quiets down from her derangement," and Sato begins breathing again, an oddity the doctor declares without precedent except in a few cases of alcohol poisoning. Mother and daughter go off to live with the Jesuits. Once they are gone, neighbors are instructed by the chief priest of the local Buddhist temple to burn the family's house to the ground.

I thought of all of this after Matsuo and I parted, he to his desk job at the grand Jodo Shinsu temple and I to the church offices. I knocked on the door, and a volunteer who spoke only Japanese led me to a South American volunteer who told me that the pastor would be back soon. In the time it took to eat a mediocre cheeseburger at a strip mall around the corner, Father Leo Schumacher and his New Zealander's command of English returned. Father Leo, sixty-two, a thirty-year veteran of the Missionary Society of Saint Columban, is one of about twelve hundred Catholic priests in Japan spread over nine hundred fifty or so parishes. After he had pointed out a statue of Saint Peter at the doors to the church damaged by the 1923 earthquake ("Look," he joked, pointing to a broken key in Peter's hand, "he can't open the gates anymore"), we sat beneath a courtyard tree. He was patient with my questions and candid in his answers. Asked how the call to religious life found him, he said, "I don't know . . . I really don't know." He described himself as neither a liberal nor a conservative cleric, simply "pastoral."

A half-dozen years ago, Father Leo accepted the Tokyo assignment without knowing much of the language, embracing the humility that comes with ministering a faith so small in number "that in some sense the Church here is a powerless church. We're under the radar." He added, however, that "our size and minority status no more make us irrelevant than it made the churches of Ephesus or Corinth. As a small church we hear Paul's words as if they are directed straight to us." Which they are. Paul wrote to the Ephesians, Father Leo said, referring to his message to non-Catholics who seek him out: "You are no longer foreigners and strangers but fellow citizens with God's people and members of His household."

"Because I work with so many converts," Father Leo added, "many of them adults, they are hearing these words for the first time."

Rafael Alvarez is the author of First & Forever: The Archdiocese of Baltimore, A People's History.

THE JUNGLE

THIS SIDE IDOLATRY

BY NIC ROWAN

I am not one for marathon readings, and I can recall only two books that I have blown through in one sitting. The first is a detective novel by Ottessa Moshfegh. I picked it up at a shop in Rome after a terrific fight with my wife (shouting, slammed doors, fists pounded on the wall) and devoured it in the basement of the McDonald's behind the Vatican. The second I actually read twice in one sitting. I was in the last row on a long-haul flight from Amsterdam to Washington, and had nothing on me but Shirley Hazzard's *Transit of Venus*. When I reached that heavy final phrase—"the great gasp of hull and ocean as a ship goes down"—I remembered the appraisal of Hazzard's husband, Francis Steegmuller: "No one should have to read it for the first time." So I did my due diligence and found, as I re-examined that crystalline tragedy, that a third read would likely be required as well.

This diagnosis, that some novels only become intelligible after a few tries, is most often given to Joyce's *Ulysses*. (Hardly anyone claims that *Finnegans Wake* ever becomes legible.) On first read—if there is a first read—*Ulysses* is said to wash over the reader like a seaborne summer shower. It is only on second, third, and fourth reads that Leopold Bloom's beachside indiscretions and Molly Bloom's twenty-four-thousand-word, punctuationless Yes monologue finally become recognizable as towering achievements in English prose. Or so I was told in college. My own opinion is that it is unfair to point to any particular passage in *Ulysses* for praise or disparagement. It is the ultimate realist novel, in that it attempts to present a day of life—and all of life itself—as it is actually lived; and for that reason, it can only be enjoyed in one long shot.

I think this explains at least in part the popularity of Bloomsday marathon readings. These have taken place more or less annually on June 16, the day on which *Ulysses* is set, since 1954, when six friends in Dublin attempted to retrace Bloom's footsteps through the city, exactly as they occurred in the novel. The expedition failed in a typically Irish fashion; midway through their journey, the friends took a break in a pub and soon found themselves unable to leave their benches. Subsequent efforts were more successful, and by the end of the century Bloomsday had become to Dublin what Saint Patrick's Day is to Chicago. These days, cities throughout the Anglosphere celebrate it. (In America, where all literature is bound up in politics, the festivities usually emphasize the novel's triumph in an obscenity trial at the Supreme Court over its literary merit.) A proper

Bloomsday looks something like a mummers' play interrupted by a Yippie demonstration: revelers dress in their most absurd Edwardian clothing, bystanders drain pints of Guinness as they gawk, and, of course, the most committed Joyceans read the novel aloud in its entirety—a full performance can last up to thirty-six hours.

My hometown has never been a hotspot for Bloomsday. There was one bookstore in Washington, D.C., that for about five years held an annual reading, but after the entire country closed in March 2020, the read-through was also canceled. Now that shutdowns are long over, I checked the store's website in early June with some hope, only to find that something quite different had taken Bloomsday's place. The bookstore is now the official sponsor of Awesome Con, which its owners describe as "Washington DC's Comic Con! A 3-Day celebration of geek culture, bringing over 70,000 fans together with their favorite stars from across comics, movies, tv, toys, games, and more!" Other searches in libraries, coffee shops, and local theaters proved fruitless. At last, I stumbled on a notice advertising an abbreviated reading at a bookstore just up the street from my house. This is what it said:

> Instead of a marathon reading of the entire work—the ultimate experience; our event sees volunteers read short 2-minute episodes from each of the 18 famous chapters. It all takes just a little over an hour. The emphasis is on having fun.

I was intrigued. I have heard *Ulysses* described as titanic, iconoclastic, and challenging, never as *fun*. And I was curious to see how my local bookstore (which, incidentally, is co-owned by Hillary Clinton's former chief speechwriter) could wring any sense out of the two-hundred-sixty-five-thousand-word novel by presenting two-minute snippets which, anyway, were largely uncontextualized dialogue. But a footnote in the notice promised "small spot prizes" to anyone who participated in the reading, so I felt I had no choice but to go and muddle along as best I could.

There were about twenty other people who felt the same way, mostly retirees who lived in the neighborhood. I was the only person there younger than forty. (Perhaps the younger set was at Awesome Con.) We gathered in the back of the bookstore—right by the astrology section—while a middle-aged employee with a faint but real brogue assigned parts to the willing. Before I even had the chance to volunteer, he thrust a sheet of paper into my hands. "I'm giving you one of the hardest parts," he said. "But I think you can handle it."

I looked down at the paper. It was from the beginning of the ninth episode, which, in Stuart Gilbert's schema, is titled "Scylla and Charybdis" (the bookstore included a pronunciation guide for those unfamiliar with the proverbial monsters of Homer). The episode is often excerpted; it's mostly dialogue—funny dialogue, too—and proof that Joyce's reputation for humor is not totally unmerited. I took my seat and studied the cadence of my ten sentences.

In front of me two elderly women quarreled over the pronunciation of a few words. One of them, an elementary school teacher, had been assigned the opening paragraphs of the novel, and was worried that she would embarrass herself in front of the audience. She was just settling on a guess at a tricky phrase when she was called up to read. There was no more time for uncertainty, and so she began with confidence:

> Stately, plump Buck Mulligan came from the stairhead, bearing a bowl of lather on which a mirror and a razor lay crossed. A yellow dressinggown, ungirdled, was sustained gently behind him on the mild morning air. He held the bowl aloft and intoned:
>
> —*Introibo . . .*

"I'm really not sure how to pronounce this," she apologized.

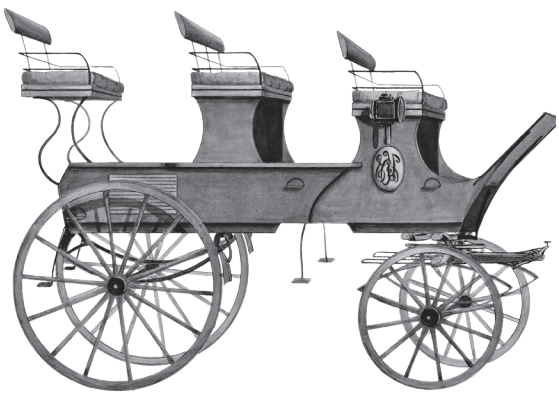
"It's Latin!" someone in the back shouted.

The schoolteacher shook her head and pressed on, loudly enunciating each syllable of the troublesome psalm with a dull emphasis:

IN-TROY-BO-AD-AL-TAR-A-DAY-EE

We may as well have been in her fourth-grade English class.

The reading continued in this manner for the next half hour. Very few of the participants had much familiarity with *Ulysses*, though everyone was enthusiastic.



As a woman read from the end of the second episode, where Mr. Deasy tells Stephen Dedalus that Ireland "has the honour of being the only country which never persecuted the jews," the schoolteacher let out a whoop. But her approving cheer came a moment too soon, for the reader continued:

> —Because she never let them in, Mr Deasy said solemnly.
>
> A coughball of laughter leaped from his throat dragging after it a rattling chain of phlegm. He turned back quickly, coughing, laughing, his lifted arms waving to the air.
>
> —She never let them in, he cried again through his laughter as he stamped on gaitered feet over the gravel of the path. That's why.

"Oh," the schoolteacher mumbled. She didn't speak for the rest of the reading.

Of course, there were a few real Joyceans present; every city has them. A middle-aged man, dressed in a tuxedo shirt, a bow tie, and green pants, read a stream of legal jargon in episode twelve with perverse relish. All the while, an older gentleman, whose features called to mind an overweight Dr. Zaius, waved his hands through the air, as if he were a conductor calling the words up off the page. When his turn to read came—the notoriously difficult episode fourteen—his speech tumbled out in a melodious murmur better suited to *riverrun, past Eve and Adam's* than Joyce's parody of a schoolboy's lazy Latin translation. And at the very end, a woman interpreted the final block of text in episode eighteen ("yes I said yes I will Yes.") with coded winks at her husband that suggested an understanding of Molly Bloom's monologue uncomfortably more intimate than literary study.

I read, too, without distinction. When the bookstore employee told me that my passage was difficult, I had assumed he was giving me something with twisted diction, irregular punctuation, or whole paragraphs of nonsense words. But, as I glanced at my paper before walking up to the lectern, I realized that he meant difficult in a subtler and altogether sadder way. Episode nine of *Ulysses* takes place in a library, and it concerns, in the loosest sense, a conversation about *Hamlet*. Throughout, Stephen Dedalus and his friends discuss, in a freewheeling way, English literature and joke about the possible biographical details of Shakespeare's love life—while acknowledging admiration, as Ben Jonson did at Shakespeare's death, "on this side idolatry." It's all very amusing, but, I imagine, hard going for those who haven't read most (or any) of Shakespeare. And, if the bookstore's own shelf stock was any guide, there was no reason for the employee to assume that I had.

As the decades roll on, *Ulysses*'s reputation comes to rest less on its stylistic innovation and more on the assumption—and the encouragement—of its admirers' ignorance. The novel is not an especially hard read, and to those who have a broad familiarity with the great quantity of English texts from which it borrows and steals, it's not much more than an odd and oftentimes entertaining exercise in technical virtuosity. (It also really is obscene.) But to those for whom these things are a mystery, the novel and its proponents seem to encourage that they remain so. "It is a book to which we are all indebted, and from which none of us can escape," Eliot wrote. No doubt he would be horrified to learn that, among the diminishing number of high-minded, English-speaking bookworms, it is the *only* book. And after they die, what will be left?

As promised, I was showered with prizes for my performance. When I returned home, I laid them before my two-year-old daughter: a sheep-leather wallet, a woolen sheep keychain, Dublin-themed postcards, a ballpoint pen, a bar of lemon soap, and a little James Joyce finger puppet. Later, when we went for a drive, she dangled the puppet out the back window of our Mini Cooper. Every now and then, the gilt of his eyeglasses threw all about the backseat bits of the reflected sun, flung spangles, dancing coins.

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HISTORIA ECCLESIASTICA

LEARNING TO LISTEN

BY PETER BROWN

In 1962 I began in earnest to write a biography of Saint Augustine of Hippo, which occupied me full-time until the spring of 1966. It was published by Faber and Faber in the summer of 1967.

One would have thought that a biography of the great bishop of Hippo was a natural subject for any scholar interested in the history of the Roman Empire and of Latin Christianity in the fourth and fifth centuries. Here was a figure where history and autobiography intersected, and whose career summed up the stormy passage of an age. In 397 Augustine wrote the *Confessions*, a work generally acclaimed as the first autobiography in Western literature. In 413 he began the *City of God*, which was a deeply meditated comment on the nature of history, provoked by the Gothic sack of Rome in 410. As we have seen, his controversy with the Donatists determined all future thought on the relation between Church and society in western Europe. In his old age, Augustine's opposition to the ideas of Pelagius, on grace and free will, left an indelible mark on Latin Christianity up to the time of the Reformation and beyond. What could be more challenging than to attempt to bring all these great moments together by writing a complete *Life* of this singular man?

Yet this had not been done. The rich and humane sketch of Augustine as a preacher and pastor by Frits Van der Meer in his *Augustine the Bishop* dealt only with his activities as bishop of Hippo. The admirably learned and fair-minded book of my friend Gerald Bonner—*Augustine of Hippo: Life and Controversies*—was only a study of the theological controversies in which Augustine had been engaged. As far as I was concerned, here was a mountain still waiting to be climbed.

To move Augustine to center stage by writing his biography was a new sort of history writing for me. I would find myself in the company of a solitary giant—a religious genius, whose thoughts still ran, for good or ill, in the bloodstream of all western European Christians (Catholics and Protestants alike); the most prodigious author in the entire history of Latin literature; and—behind all this, it seemed to me as I came to know him in the course of those years—a person of magnetic charm and riveting originality, whose quality of mind was unmistakable even in his smallest turn of phrase and most routine writing.

I had to learn to listen to a single voice. I was no longer involved in an ongoing historical controversy. Nor was I out to prove a single point or push through a single agenda for the study of Augustine. I was there to listen. I had to learn to hear Augustine clearly as he spoke the unfamiliar language of an ancient Christian from a millennium and a half ago, and then to pass on what I heard to modern readers. In brief: I had to stretch my heart in order to read Augustine's heart. That was the greatest challenge, and the greatest joy, of those five years.

The first part of the business was easy. It involved the crucial link between All Souls and the wider world through its London fellows. The London fellows did not remain in Oxford as academics; but they retained their membership of the college and would often appear at weekends. Charles Monteith was one such fellow. He was an editor at Faber and Faber in London. In December 1959 I discussed with him, over a drink before dinner, the possibility of a biography of Augustine. I then sent him a full proposal. As one fellow of All Souls to another, he agreed that Faber's would consider a biography of Augustine

whenever I chose to hand in the manuscript. It was as simple as that. With his characteristic, wry view of the English academic scene, Arnaldo Momigliano was amused: "Does Monteith allot bits of ancient history to every fellow?"

At that time, I barely realized that I was enjoying an incomparable privilege. I did not have to look for a publisher. The gentleman's agreement with Charles Monteith set my mind at rest. I may have been wrong to be so confident: in reality, Faber's had their own system of screening manuscripts that was as discreet and prompt, and as exacting, as that of any university press. In the meantime, however, my constant contact with Monteith, through his weekend visits to All Souls, spared me much anxiety. I felt confident that I could write what I wished as long as it passed muster at the end of the day. So how did I set about it?

First and foremost, these were years of deep reading. I would sit in a large armchair with a board across the arms and read my way through the folio volumes of the works of Augustine published by the Benedictine scholars of Saint Maur between 1679 and 1700. I would work my way down those generous pages noting on a piece of paper the page, the letter on the margin of each vertical column, and the position, within each letter, of the passages that interested me (so that "11r D mbm" would be page eleven, right-hand column, division D, middle-to-bottom-middle). Then, having read through the entire text, I would return to copy into my notes those passages that I had marked. This method of taking notes had a direct effect on the way in which I absorbed the works of Augustine. I hardly ever made a précis of what Augustine wrote. Instead, I went out of my way to copy by hand every passage in the original Latin. By doing this, I aimed to capture, through citations, not only what Augustine said, but, quite as much, how he said it. By taking notes in this way, I found myself catching his tone of voice.

What struck me most about Augustine was the care that he took to make his ideas intelligible to his readers. Here was someone who had grappled, throughout his life, to express himself—to drag his thoughts into the open, "through the narrow lanes of speech." Augustine once wrote in 399 (when he was at the height of his powers as an author) to console a deacon who was anxious about his catechism classes. The young man should not worry: "For my own way of expressing myself almost always disappoints me . . . I am saddened that my tongue cannot live up to my heart." I found that, as a young author, I could identify my own ache to communicate with Augustine's constant awareness of the hiatus between himself and the outside world. I knew instinctively that I myself would grow as a communicator (as well as in many other ways) by keeping close to such a person.

It was lonely work. In many ways, I was the wrong person to be doing a biography of Augustine. I was not a clergyman—though, a little later, I was often amused to receive letters addressed (on the strength of my known acquaintance with Augustine) to "Monsieur l'Abbé." Nor was I a theologian or a classical scholar. These were the people most usually engaged with the study of the Fathers of the Church. I lacked the abstract cast of mind of the one, and the training in handling difficult texts of the other. I was an out-of-place medievalist, whose Latin (fortunately) was up to the job. The best I could do was sit and read.

As far as reading went, I realize that I was doubly spoiled. I was able to carry the magnificent pages of the Maurist edition of the complete works of Augustine, one by one, out of the basement of the Codrington Library of All Souls where they had been stored. But I was also able to make my way up to the upper gallery of the Codrington, to mount a ladder so as to take from a high shelf, poised vertiginously a good twenty feet above the marble floor below, the thirteenth volume of the *Mémoires Écclésiastiques* of Louis Sébastien le Nain de Tillemont.

Tillemont was a Jansenist scholar, connected with Port-Royal, who continued his work on his family estate after Port-Royal had been destroyed by Louis XIV in 1679. The thirteenth volume of his *Mémoires* contained a complete *Life of Augustine* put together with unfailing accuracy, and in strict chronological order. It was published in 1702, a few years after Tillemont's death. I would not begin to write on any incident or embark on any chapter of my book until I had established its chronology and the place in his life through a careful reading of the relevant pages of that tenacious Jansenist scholar.

I realized, with something of a thrill, that in doing this I was following in the footsteps of Edward Gibbon. Gibbon would always refer, with gratitude, in his *Decline and Fall*, to "the indefatigable Tillemont": he was "the sure-footed mule" whose patient work on the chronology of the later empire as a whole (not only of the life of Augustine) enabled Gibbon to

unroll, with majestic certainty, his narrative of the rise of Christianity and the fall of Rome.

So I had all the books I needed—on my own doorstep, as it were—but how to write the *Life*? When it came to listening to Augustine, I could not have wished for a more readily accessible subject. Augustine wrote prodigiously on innumerable topics and in many different genres. From the time of his writing the *Confessions*, in 397, to his death in 430, he wrote over a million and a half words: I am glad that I did not know of this statistic when I began my reading! More important yet, we also know exactly when, and even why, he wrote almost everything that he wrote. This was because he went out of his way to complete what might be called, in modern terms, his own C.V. At the very end of his life, in 426–427, he put together his *Retractationes*—his "Rereading" of his own works. He placed all of his ninety-two formal works in chronological order—each with a small comment on why it was written. It is hard to exaggerate the importance of this fact, which we all too easily take for granted. Here was a figure who had already laid out the chronological framework of his life for future historians.

This huge advantage was well known to every scholar who studied Augustine. What I did not realize fully at the time was that there was an important part of Augustine's works that he had not put into chronological order in this way—his abundant letters and his sermons. As a result, many of these still pose serious problems of dating and context. They remain loose cannons. But they have also proved to be one of the growth points of modern Augustinian scholarship.

Partly because of the great advances in computer digitalization in recent years, we have become more aware of the fact that letters and groups of sermons by Augustine may still linger, as yet unrecognized, in medieval collections, hidden beneath the cramped Gothic script of unprepossessing late medieval manuscripts. In the last few decades alone, entire groups of letters and sermons, of which we knew nothing in the 1960s, have surfaced. One of the joys of writing an epilogue to my *Augustine of Hippo* (which I did in 2000) was the opportunity to hail some of these discoveries. We now have twenty-nine further letters from Augustine's old age, which were discovered by Johannes Divjak and first published in 1981. Furthermore, a group of sermons, preached in the years when Augustine was writing the *Confessions* and beginning his career as a bishop, were discovered by François Dolbeau and published in 1996.

Although these new letters and sermons contain no spectacular revelations, they have brought Augustine, once again, into vivid focus as a preacher and as a conscientious bishop. We often see him from unexpected angles. This was not the ethereal figure that we imagine the author of the *Confessions* to have been. He is a bishop with mud on his boots, battling injustice in the harsh world of late Roman Africa. In one of the most remarkable of the letters discovered by Divjak, we find Augustine, at the age of seventy-three (only three years before his death), interviewing a terrified country girl who described how her farm had been raided by slave-traders. The poor child could not even speak Latin—only Punic. Her older brother translated for her. This was part of a dogged attempt by Augustine and his congregation to break a ring of slave-traders who operated (with the full protection of local bigwigs) out of the port of Hippo.

On a lighter note, in an unexpected aside in one of his newly discovered sermons, we hear Augustine (in 403) telling his congregation, with total *sans gêne*, how, as young students in Carthage, he and his friends would attempt to pick up girls at the heady festivals that took place at the tomb of Saint Cyprian. What I could have done with these nuggets in 1962!

It is precisely in this undergrowth of sermons and letters that we have been able to discover, against all expectations, further, vivid traits in our portrait of Augustine. In the moving image of Dolbeau, we meet him again, in such sermons, "with the emotion that one feels when a tape-recording brings back the voice of a long-dead friend." I must confess that, every time, in the past fifty years, when a new sermon of Augustine is identified, when a new letter is discovered or an old one redated and set in a new context, I suffer a twinge of regret. I wish that it had been to hand in the 1960s, to add a touch of yet further life to a figure who slowly, as I read him, had begun to come alive.

Peter Brown is the Philip and Beulah Rollins Professor Emeritus of History at Princeton University and the author, most recently, of Journeys of the Mind: A Life in History, *from which this essay is extracted.*

APOLOGIA

ROADSIDE ATTRACTION

BY IAN BOTHUR

Quite some time ago, over winter break, two friends and I made a road trip through central Europe. At the time, we were all seminarians living in Rome (only one of us went on to receive Holy Orders). Naturally, we improvised our itinerary and planned on spending as little money as possible. We began by taking an overnight train (standing room only) from Rome to Bolzano in the far north of Italy. Looking back, our trip would have been much easier if there were more signs along the road that provided useful information to strangers. We were less prepared than we had anticipated: the people of the northern reaches of Italy do not speak Italian, but German. None of us knew German, which made communication quite difficult. We also found it incredibly hard to find accommodations because it was deep in the holiday season, just before Epiphany.

Finding food was also quite a task. Most of the towns we drove through were vacation destinations for skiers, booked full. On the second day we drove over the border into Austria, through Innsbruck, and then west into Lichtenstein. We eventually found by chance a lodge of some sort which provided room but no board. In our ignorance, we were forced to wander in search of sustenance until we found what I guessed to be a resort complex, containing an open establishment that was presumably a restaurant; a bar was visible from the vestibule and a young woman came to greet us as we entered. When the three of us asked for a table, I sensed bemusement in the hostess and the bartendress who exchanged unintelligible words in German. At about three in the afternoon, there were no other customers in the place. The motif could most accurately be described as Carlsbad Caverns meets the moloko bar from Kubrick's *Clockwork Orange*. We ended up leaving before long, and before food, to resume our search.

After a few more hours of driving and some breathtaking vistas over Vaduz, the sun set and we began to grow desperate. Finally, in a relatively remote area, we spotted a large, lit building set off from the road. There was no sign telling us what exactly the building was, but it looked enough like a restaurant that we parked the car and walked up the steps to the front door. We entered through the vestibule into a noisy dining room full of crowded tables. A woman walked out of an adjacent kitchen and asked how she might help us. One of my companions awkwardly phrased his question: "Do you have any food?" We were informed that they had noodles. Fine by us.

We sat ourselves at a table in the corner and began to wonder if we had made another mistake. Before long, a man approached us and asked who we were. We told him we were American seminarians living in Rome, on Christmas holiday. He smiled and made the sign of the cross to indicate that he too was Catholic. Another man asked about the cross of Petoskeyite (a rare mineral from Michigan) which one of my companions wore around his neck. He himself had relatives in Michigan. As we conversed, not only noodles but beer and peach schnapps materialized on our table. These strangers whom we met accidentally, on an isolated mountain road, in a strange land, and at an inopportune time shared with us a surprising amount of cheer and rapport on account of the signs we exchanged.

Although we had no small trouble navigating our journey, there was an unmistakable kind of sign that was commonplace along the way: Open-air shrines, religious plaques, and crucifixes were prominent features of many of the Alpine towns we traversed. At the time, I regretted that such a thing was not to be found in the United States. This sentiment of course

came from a fair amount of naïveté. In more recent years, I have had the pleasure (and equal displeasure) of driving through much of the southeastern United States. Open displays of Christian piety are numerous, albeit with an unmistakable New World flavor.

Unlike the ornate shrines dotting the eastern Alps, these signs are usually far more rustic: imagine the plain text of John 3:16, emblazoned in red paint on a plywood billboard, standing over a seemingly endless field of corn. Most of these signs are hardly as cliché, however. I could name at least six distinct categories: lessons, notifications, admonitions, exhortations, orations, and icons. Lessons are plain excerpts of sacred scripture like the example mentioned above. Notifications inform us of some revealed truth, such as the gas station notice "CHRIST IS THE ANSWER." Admonitions caution us away from evil, as in the Harlem graffiti that reads "OBEY GOD OR BURN." Exhortations direct or encourage us to do good, like the message "TRUST JESUS." Orations are written prayers, meant either to lead the reader to pray them as he travels or to bear witness to the one who offered the prayer. Icons are full images of sacred folk art, such as the face of Christ or Our Lady of Guadalupe, and seem to be the rarest type.

Some of these signs are bewildering and appear to be the product of an unsound mind. Consider the plywood sign bolted onto an absurdly modified bicycle:

ACTS-2
38.OR-
HELL.TAKE
YOUR CHOICE

Other signs might strike one as either histrionic compulsion or a kind of advertisement:

JESUS SAID YE MUST BE
BORN AGAIN JOHN 3-7
AREA SIZE RUG SALE
20% OFF

The forthrightness of these messages, however is simply a cultural phenomenon, which is to say that it is a Christian phenomenon. They are not merely Protestant. There are many examples of Catholic messages, from graffiti saying "BECOME A CATHOLIC" to Hail Marys trailing the highway. They are not mere southernisms: books such as Sam Fentress's *Bible Road* record photographs of such signs ranging from Connecticut to California, Alaska to Florida. And they are not only rural. It might be fair to say that they are essentially American. Such signs have been a feature of the American landscape since Christ's message was first brought to America. Near the National Shrine of the North American Martyrs in Auriesville, New York, is the former site of the Mohawk village of Ossernenon, where Saint Isaac Jogues and his companions lived, prayed, preached, and were eventually martyred. The caretakers of the shrine continue a practice that Father Jogues began during his captivity there: on each of the trees in and around the village, he would carve a cross and the Holy Name of Jesus. The trees still bear these marks in permanent red fixtures.

Display of the Holy Name is indeed the best instance of Christian signage. It is itself a lesson, an icon, and a prayer. The very sight of the Name may become an exhortation or an admonition in the heart of the traveler who unexpectedly encounters it. The respectful display of the Holy Name is an exorcism, not unlike the sounding of church bells. When accompanied by a cross, it is a reminder of our mission as Christians to imitate Him in all things—even His sacred passion, to which we can join our own pains and burdens. The display of His Name is a dual statement of ownership: that whoever erected it possesses the Truth of the Gospel, and that the Prince of Peace reigns over his land. Yet the most fundamental reality of the sign "JESUS" is analogous to that of all road signs: it signifies something important and imminent. It signifies our Lord, Who is the Alpha and Omega, everywhere and always.

Personally, the signs affect me most in their shamelessness. They all seem to indicate infatuation, and the audacity of their display is probably the best witness to the truth contained in them. At a glance, one understands that whatever the signs mean, they have made a serious impact on someone's life and are not to be taken lightly. Have those truths impacted us as strongly as their authors, so much so that we cannot help but to wildly demonstrate our convictions in public? One sign goes so far as to ask us outright:

ARE YOU TELLING
ANYONE ABOUT
JESUS CHRIST?

Ian Bothur lives in Arizona, where he spends his leisure time studying philosophy and writing music.

IS *TRADITIONIS CUSTODES* LAWFUL?

BY THOMAS PINK

In a recent book—*Does* Traditionis Custodes *Pass the Juridical Rationality Test?*—Father Réginald-Marie Rivoire poses an important question about Pope Francis's motu proprio issued in 2021 restricting use of the traditional Roman rite with the clear aim of its complete suppression, specifically the question of whether it passes the so-called "juridical rationality test." But the book's intent is to mount a critique of the entire Pauline liturgical reform, addressing not so much the content of the reformed liturgy as the legislation of Paul VI that first imposed it and of Francis that now further enforces it. Rivoire denies the morally binding force of both these cases of papal legislation.

Rivoire makes many telling criticisms of the current Roman authorities, their claims, and their procedures. For example, contrary to official propaganda, the Pauline liturgical reform does not look, by any stretch, like a faithful application of *Sacrosanctum concilium* of Vatican II. It is monstrously unjust to use *Traditionis custodes* to impose the reformed rite on religious institutes legally established after the Pauline reform by the popes themselves specifically for the earlier liturgy. The Dicastery for Divine Worship lacked the authority to impose through its *Responsa* restrictive conditions of its own in the application of *Traditionis custodes*. These points are fair. So obviously fair in the last case that steps were eventually taken by the Prefect for Divine Worship to secure explicit papal approval for the restrictions in his *Responsa*. But these are secondary issues in relation to Rivoire's larger claim—that all this liturgical legislation, both of Paul VI and of Francis, by seeking in effect to legislate into existence a new liturgical rite, and to suppress a distinct and previously long-established rite, is without moral force because it is irrational as law.

In arguing against recent papal legislation for the liturgy, Rivoire emphasizes that he is not challenging papal teaching, which, he claims, involves a different form of authority, at its limit infallible, from papal legislation. Rivoire's conception of a fundamental distinction between teaching and legislative authority is very important, and we shall return to it.

Rivoire insists, surely rightly, that papal legal directives cannot bind simply as expressions of the pope's will. Like law generally, the law of the Church, canon law, is not a brute command. Law serves a rational function, that of furthering the good of the community it governs—in this case the ecclesial community and its saving mission. Legal directives, even those of a pope, count as unreasonable when they fail to fulfill this function.

Rivoire argues that certain features of the Church and of Her life are independent of the Church's canon law—so beyond the canonical authority of popes or bishops. Canon law, even law made by popes themselves, has to respect these prior ecclesial realities and will be damaging and unreasonable if it disregards

them. Rivoire is obviously right about this. The foundation of canon law, a law made by human authority within the Church, lies in a prior law that is divine. Just as the civil law of the state derives its morally binding force from a divinely established natural moral law—a moral law that civil law applies but cannot contradict or amend—so too the canon law of the Church derives its force from a divine law that is revealed, the law of the New Covenant. Canon law applies that revealed law for the varying and particular circumstances under which through time the Church pursues Her mission. Canon law may be more specific than the law of the New Covenant and unlike that revealed law may admit of human revision, but canon law must always remain consistent with the divine law that it applies and on which it depends for its authority to obligate us morally. The revealed law of the New Covenant fixes what is essential to the sacraments—for example baptism as involving the use of water with invocation of the Trinity. Canon law will determine more specifically how these divinely required elements are to be supplied, including the specific liturgy to be employed, and may in time amend its own determinations; but it cannot amend divine law itself.

Rivoire agrees that the pope "is obviously bound to respect divine law (the divine-apostolic tradition, which in part contains discipline)." But he adds further that the pope

> is not totally above certain human apostolic or ecclesiastical traditions, which maintain a more or less strong relationship of congruency with the revealed deposit. The liturgy is the privileged domain of this intertwining of the divine, the (simply) apostolic, and the ecclesiastical.

Rivoire later uses "Apostolic Tradition" (now capitalized) to include these protected human traditions which it is beyond the pope's authority to abolish. These are the historical liturgical rites of the Church, and so among these is the Roman rite that the Church had inherited up to the time of Paul VI: "A liturgical rite is more than a thousand-year-old custom: considered as a whole, it is a true Apostolic Tradition. For this reason, it is a juridically unavailable reality. It cannot be prohibited." Rivoire cites with approval Joseph Ratzinger's claim that liturgy "does not come about through regulation," and Sanchez Gil's view that "liturgical norms" and "juridical norms" are quite different things, involving a "different logic"; he adds that "Bibles, catechisms, Missals, and the like are not juridical laws pure and simple."

Rivoire presents the Pauline liturgical reform as an intrusion of human legislation into matters where it has no place. A liturgical rite cannot suddenly be legislated into existence by a pope. But that is what Paul VI attempted:

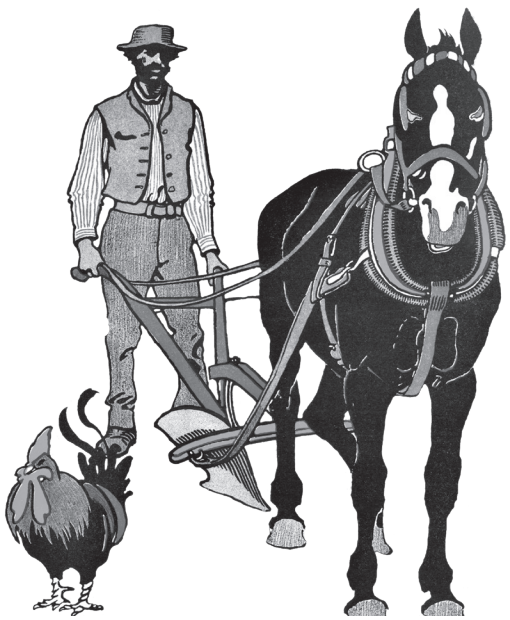
> Thus regardless of the consideration of its serious intrinsic ritual deficiencies, which make it an unsatisfactory expression of the *lex credendi*, the mere fact that the *Novus Ordo Missae* is a new and fabricated rite is sufficient for the canonist to question its legitimacy.

Even if a canonist did concede the legitimacy of the reformed rite as an option, he could never recognize it as a mandatory replacement for the former rite. For Rivoire, Paul VI's imposition of his liturgical reform is discredited on procedural grounds, as legislative overreach.

Rivoire also claims that *Traditionis custodes* involves a defective view of law itself, a voluntarism about law that, he thinks, also lay behind the original Pauline reform. This voluntarism treats law generally, for the liturgy included, as a matter of arbitrary will. All legislation is treated as if it were like the special case of legislation for something that really is arbitrary—like which side of the road to drive on:

> The logic followed is normativistic and legalistic, which is not only inappropriate in itself, but seems particularly unsuited to the field of liturgy that it claims to regulate: a Missal is not the highway code. What is shocking is not so much that Francis contradicts his predecessor, but that he treats a liturgical rite of many centuries' standing as if it were a purely disciplinary matter. Certainly, this kind of normativistic view applied to the liturgy is not limited to Pope Francis. The same logic was at work in the liturgical reform of Paul VI.

Rivoire is making bold claims. Liturgical rites, which arise over time as customs of a human community, cannot be products of legislation. And once in



existence they cannot legitimately be legislated out of existence either and replaced by another rite; and this not because of the deficiencies of the newly substituted rite, or other bad effects, but by the very nature of such a legislative act, as attempting to abolish "Apostolic Tradition."

We have here a juridical apotheosis of historical liturgical forms, raised to share the juridical inviolability of revealed divine law itself. Hence the overheated use of "Apostolic Tradition," with capitalization, to refer to what is very clearly not Apostolic Tradition, but post-apostolic human custom. Custom prompted by the Holy Spirit? Perhaps, but that could be claimed (and has been) for ecclesial legislation too. In fact liturgy and law are not obviously so far apart as Rivoire's rhetoric suggests. And it is Rivoire's critique that involves a misunderstanding of what law involves. He claims that the Pauline liturgical reform arose from a distorting voluntarism about law. But the Pauline reform reflected a view of law and legal authority which was rather traditional—by the standards of the last five centuries at least. It is Rivoire whose view of law is in the end the more distorted by the very legal voluntarism that he decries. And that leads Rivoire to understate the problems in the Pauline liturgical reform, which amount to a failure not just of papal legislation and legislative authority but of papal teaching.

Rivoire says a Missal is not a law; of course, but cannot the use of a given Missal be imposed by law? And though liturgical customs can arise other than by legislative decree, can they not acquire the force of law in a way that involves the authority of a legislator? And cannot the same legislative authority legally direct their amendment? History does not suggest at all that liturgy and law are so separated by a different "logic" as to put liturgy beyond legislation.

The precise form of the liturgy by the death of the last apostle is hard to determine. But various distinct rites seem to have developed thereafter, the liturgy in Rome under the authority of the popes. From early on some popes (such as Gelasius and Gregory the Great) appear on occasion to have directed substantial change; so they had the authority to intervene and determine. Canonical legislative authority seems therefore to have been involved—even where rites initially emerged through custom. Custom developing over time may acquire the force of law by the acquiescence of those possessing authority over a community, becoming outright obligatory when alternative customs are not similarly indulged. Here, in the development of liturgies, custom acquired the force of law with the consent of the bearers of legislative authority within the Church—with, as Vatican I defined, the pope as legislatively supreme. There is nothing in such a process that at all obviously places liturgical rites outside canonical authority.

Rivoire does not wholly deny (how could he?) that popes may properly use their legal authority to shape or amend the liturgy. He even admits that Pius XII's reform of Holy Week in 1955 may well have been legitimate and morally binding. To preserve his position Rivoire assumes a distinction between an historical rite as such, which amounts to "Apostolic Tradition," and which a pope cannot remove through legislation, and specific details of a rite, which he allows that popes can properly use legislation to amend. But I suspect that by relying on this distinction, somewhat indeterminate in any case, Rivoire forces us to ask the wrong questions about liturgical reform. Is the problem with Paul VI that by contrast to Pius XII he sought to replace one rite with another? Or that, irrespective of this, he introduced changes that were very clearly damaging in other ways?

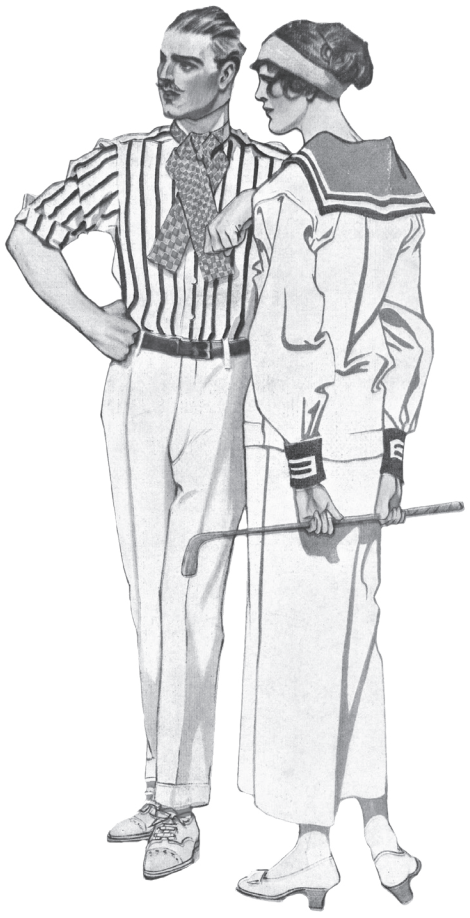
Compared to his predecessor, Paul VI changed far more liturgical texts—which is often alleged to establish the *Novus Ordo* as a completely new and different rite. Suppose though that Paul VI had changed fewer texts, but still abolished the silent canon and had through legislation formally mandated (as opposed to encouraging more or less mandatorily) turning altars around. The case for all this amounting to a new liturgical rite might be weaker. But that debatable issue

would not really matter. The important thing is that Paul VI would already have done a great deal of the vast damage that he did. He would still have wiped out the culture of intense internally meditative prayer at Mass that had by then developed within Latin Catholicism, a culture to which so great a saint as Francis de Sales notably contributed, and which produced vastly popular texts for lay devotion multiply re-edited and reprinted over centuries such as Wilhelm Nakaten's *Coeleste Palmetum*. This was a culture of lay piety that was also highly productive of vocations. This culture crucially failed, however, by the 1960s, to count for the clerical caste of liturgical experts as "active participation" and was publicly disdained by Paul VI. Suppose on the other hand that Paul VI had avoided the destruction of this culture of lay devotion but still fussily changed many texts (as Pius XII was already fussily beginning to change calendars and liturgical colors), yet somehow—hard to imagine, I know, given the culture of the time, but let's suppose—managed to replace them with ones of even more eloquent orthodoxy and piercing beauty. Would we care whether he had, strictly speaking, legislated the replacement of one rite by another?

Aware that an inviolability of liturgical rites equal to that of revealed law might not be entirely obvious within the Catholic theological tradition, Rivoire appeals to a nowadays much-cited passage from *De caritate* in which Suarez claimed that a pope would fall into schism from the rest of the Church if he sought to abolish all rites based on apostolic tradition. It is not at all clear, though, that in claiming this Suarez was deploying Rivoire's rather generous understanding of "Apostolic Tradition." By this hypothetical schismatic papal act Suarez seems to have had in mind some comprehensive papal assault on any ordered liturgy, to an extent that might directly violate revealed divine law itself.

Suppose we do then admit that liturgical rites develop and acquire legal force under canonical authority and are subject to that authority, at least insofar as they go beyond the law of the New Covenant itself. The issue that still arises is whether that authority is well or damagingly exercised. For a law may direct matters subject to the authority of a legislator—but still be so unjust or so damaging in its effects as not to bind morally. And that is the better case to make against Paul VI and Francis. It avoids asserting a complete juridical ringfencing of liturgical rites, which is distracting and implausible. Some historical rites, such as the Rite of Sarum, local authority opposed restoring when it might have decided otherwise. Was such a decision about future permission for a once long-established liturgical form really outside its legislative competence? Rome has now legislated into existence an Ordinariate liturgy. Is this liturgy the less legitimate simply because a "legislated product"? The case concentrates instead on the real discrediting feature of the Pauline reform—which is that it was damaging in its effects. It seriously disturbed and weakened what the liturgy should support and reinforce, which is faith and piety.

Liturgy has two very central functions under divine law. One is to teach—to communicate the faith. The other is to provide for worship, forming Christian devotion. In so furthering faith and piety, liturgical forms must represent and apply divine revelation, including God's revealed will for worship, to particular cultures and times. Allowing room for varying modes of applying that revealed will is the reason that there has always been a multiplicity, and even to a degree a changing multiplicity, of liturgies within the Church. Such application of revealed law is very much the business of canonical authority to regulate, but always so as to foster faith and piety. And that imposes the same respect for prior human custom that Rivoire so rightly feels, and that clearly animated the very proper and principled liturgical conservatism of popes and bishops before the twentieth century—without relying on his dubious juridical model



of liturgy as somehow mysteriously "Apostolic" while not really being so.

Human piety deeply depends on the affections, and these are formed and maintained through habit. That is an important part of why piety involves ordered and established ritual. By default the legislator should always respect established customs and rituals and work with them. And this very importantly involves the rights of the faithful themselves. Christians have a genuine right not to be denied forms of worship to which they have become accustomed and attached, especially those that engage their affections for very good reason, whether because of their historical importance to a culture or simply because the forms are beautiful and profound. Moreover the liturgy is a rule and communicator of faith. It conveys belief. But that means sudden changes in liturgy, such as sudden omissions of previously established forms and texts, are very hazardous. For, whether intentionally or not, they may suggest and communicate a change of doctrine—of what belief the Church intends to convey through her liturgy.

And here we come to a central weakness of the Pauline reform. Rivoire suggests that Paul VI's reform depended on a novel and voluntarist conception of liturgical legislation—as, like traffic rules, a matter of the pope's arbitrary decision. Rather the reverse was true, I suspect. The reform depended on a very traditional conception of legislation—as a mode of teaching. As we shall see, it was at least in part because of this very traditional conception of legislation as a mode of teaching that the Pauline reform took such a reckless and damaging course.

A conception of legislation as a mode of teaching is profoundly opposed to legal voluntarism. But Rivoire himself ignores this traditional conception and seeks, as would any voluntarist, rather too rigidly to distinguish the authority to legislate from the authority to teach. He claims:

> The power of magisterium has, as its formal object, revealed truth (or truth related to the revealed). Its proper act is that of teaching, and its intrinsic end is to obtain the assent of the believer's intelligence. The power of jurisdiction has, as its formal object, human acts which conduce to the end of the Church. Its act is that of commanding for the common good, and its intrinsic end is to obtain the obedience of the will.
>
> To teach is not to command. A teaching is true or false, whereas a law is more or less prudent. The faithful's attitude towards a document of ecclesial authority is therefore fundamentally different, depending on whether the document is magisterial or disciplinary.

It is indeed one thing to assert something as true, and another to issue a directive. No one would deny that distinction. But it does not follow that the authority to teach is so very different from the authority to legislate—that the faithful's attitude to the pope as teacher is quite different from their attitude to him as legislator. Where a pope's magisterial teaching is concerned, the faithful believe his teaching—but out of obedience to him as a legislator. In turn his authority as a legislator depends on his more general authority as a teacher. The two forms of authority are in fact profoundly interwoven.

For Rivoire law governs the will while teaching addresses the intellect. But the magisterial teaching of popes and bishops legally binds the intellect and not the will alone. Teaching is distinguished as magisterial only because it imposes a canonical obligation, a legal obligation under ecclesial law, specifically on belief—and so on the intellect as well as the will. By the Code of Canon Law of 1983, magisterial teaching canonically obliges to an assent of faith in relation to teaching proposed as definitive, and to a religious submission or *obsequium* of intellect as well as will in relation to teaching that falls short of being proposed definitively. This obligation to *obsequium* according to *Lumen gentium* (to which the Code refers) again involves an obligation to intellectual agreement with the teaching authority—to assent:

> The faithful are bound to agree (*concurrere*) with the judgment (*sententiam*) of their bishop on matters of faith and morals when this is given in the name of Christ and adhere to it with a religious submission of the mind (*religioso animi obsequio*). This submission of will and intellect (*hoc religiosum voluntatis et intellectus obsequium*) should be given with especial reason to the authentic magisterium of the Roman pontiff even when he does not speak ex cathedra.

But how can a legislator legally direct the intellect; how can he put us under a legal obligation to believe that something is the case? Belief depends on truth, or the appearance of truth. Yet we cannot form beliefs just to obey a brute command to do so, or simply to avoid punishments. For in themselves commands and punishments have nothing to do with truth.

That shows of course that, exactly as Rivoire himself insists, a legal directive is not a brute command, and a lawgiver is not simply communicating his arbitrary will. Rivoire is right about that—but for reasons that undermine his account of teaching and legislation as involving quite different kinds of authority. For the authority of a sovereign legislator importantly includes and depends on that of a teacher. A central function of law is to teach—to form the intellects of those bound by law. The legislator has the epistemic

authority of a reliable witness—to truth, especially about what the good of the community requires. Though this is an historically Catholic conception of legislative authority, it does not apply to the Church alone. It applies to any sovereign legislator, political as well as ecclesial, and can be supported from the civil law of states. The state law that criminalizes theft functions to guide not only actions that are directly subject to will and to brute command, such as whether we steal, but the intellect. The law with its accompanying threats of punishment witnesses to citizens that theft is wrong morally, and sufficiently damaging to the community as to deserve punishment. The judge who sentences the thief to prison will often announce the penalty as "sending a message"—that theft is a very serious violation of the moral rights of others. The law serves to ensure that the law-abiding generally refrain from theft not simply out of fear of sanction or penalty but out of genuine belief in its moral wrongness. In prohibiting and punishing theft the state is not imposing some arbitrary rule. It witnesses to a prior moral reality—to the moral importance of property rights and to the damage to the community of their violation. And citizens generally comply with the state law on theft through accepting that witness and believing it.

This teaching function of law explains why, as the Catholic theology of the magisterium supposes, law not only guides and forms the intellect but may obligate it directly, putting people under a legal obligation to believe something. The Church too is a witness, to revealed truth and to the importance of belief in it to the ecclesial community. So when the Church legally directs and obligates us to believe something, She is not asking us just to obey a brute command. She is asking us to attend to truth and presenting us with Her witness to that truth, to which we are to respond as we would to any witness in whom we trust. In imposing a canonical requirement on Catholics to believe, say, in the Real Presence in the Eucharist, the Church witnesses both to the reality of that Presence and to the importance of its acknowledgment to the ecclesial community. The Church imposes an obligation on us to hold the belief not only because it is true but because, also according to Her same witness, acknowledgment of its truth really matters: one person's doubt or denial could seriously harm others. Disbelief or doubt would when expressed be a falsehood damaging to the ecclesial community as theft would be damaging to the political community. The function of threats of penalty or sanction is especially to communicate that potential damage, as sufficient to deserve punishment, and the consequent seriousness of our responsibility for responding to the Church's witness to the truth. Hence the Church's historical imposition of canonical penalties for heresy in the baptized—for the crime of doubting or denying in the external forum truths witnessed by the Church as revealed.

We now see how in the Church teaching authority and legislative authority are intimately connected. The pope teaches magisterially by virtue of legally obligating the faithful to believe that teaching. But his authority so to legislate is not based on his arbitrary will. His legislative authority depends on and expresses his epistemic authority—his superior capacity to witness both to truths of revelation and to truths about what the good of the community of the Church requires.

There are varying levels of epistemic authority involved here. At the highest level, by the teaching of Vatican I and II, there is infallibility—a divine guarantee that when popes and bishops obligate us to believe something by a pronouncement that is definitive, they will be preserved from falsehood. But then there are less definitive magisterial pronouncements, and also there are the many claims not formally taught as obligations on belief—not taught magisterially—but still very clearly conveyed. When a pope legislates, for example, he clearly implies—conveys a belief on his part—that the law is consistent with faith and morals

and that the law furthers the Church's good or, at least, that it will not actually be damaging to Her mission. The pope is very much teaching here too. How reliable in these cases is the pope as teacher, as a guide to truth? The less reliable he were, surely the less moral force would attach to his law. Why obey the legislation of someone whose laws are reliably based on error, especially on error about where the good of the community he serves really lies? But beyond the special case addressed by the Vatican Councils of papal teaching that is formally definitive, there is not much clear magisterial teaching about the pope's more general reliability regarding truth, at any rate in respects that matter to his legislative authority—certainly little magisterial teaching that is infallible itself.

But if there has not been magisterial teaching on the matter, there has certainly been much "official" theological opinion. And in the past that opinion generalized with extreme confidence from Vatican I—from that council's definition of an assurance of infallibility for some cases at least of papal teaching. The exercise of the pope's legislative authority could be classed by theologians as a mode of exercising his teaching authority—as an exercise of his teaching authority that was "practical" or "indirect." Moreover, exactly as the pope was supposed, when expressing himself definitively, to teach in an infallible manner, so, at least when he legislated for the whole Church—teaching thereby as well—he was also widely supposed to *legislate* infallibly. Not only was any harm coming from papal legislation divinely assured to be limited, so that it would always be better for Catholics to obey rather than criticize, but the claims about faith or morals implied and conveyed by that legislation—taught "indirectly"—would be divinely preserved from error too.

This infallibilist view of papal legislation was already to be found in the early modern period among those theologians, such as Bellarmine, who even before Vatican I defended the infallibility of the pope as teacher. After Vatican I, though certainly not formally taught by that council, the infallibility of papal legislation became even more generally accepted. Consider Edmond Dublanchy, in his day a very eminent Marist theologian who supplied numerous highly important articles to the *Dictionnaire de Théologie Catholique*—an unrivaled source of received theology and scholarship for the Francophone Church that appeared from 1899 to 1950. In his lengthy article "Église" of 1911, Dublanchy presented the infallibility of ecclesial legislation as obvious and generally agreed. He then referred back to that article in his later article "Infaillibilité du pape" of 1923, and, unsurprisingly, applied the infallibilist view of ecclesial legislation to the legislation of the pope in particular,

the pope being supreme within the Church as legislator just as he was as teacher. In legislating, Dublanchy argued, the pope was a teacher, albeit teaching "indirectly," just as he was in making formally doctrinal pronouncements. In both articles Dublanchy presented his infallibilist view as beyond reasonable challenge, indeed as dictated by Christ's promises to his Church, and as agreed upon by respectable theologians since at least the sixteenth century. Dublanchy paired the liturgy with the importantly related sphere of canonizations (which, after all, introduce new liturgical feasts) as especially important fields of papal teaching through legislation. For Dublanchy, in canonizations as in other legislation for the liturgy, the pope is teaching as infallibly as in formally doctrinal pronouncements. When the pope introduces the feast of a new saint, he is teaching us what Christian holiness involves. When he introduces a new feast of Christ, such as the feast of Christ the King, he is teaching concerning our Savior's nature and His role. How could a pope whose magisterium is infallible ever convey error by such legislation?

This "official" theology of legislative authority was widespread in the early twentieth century when Paul VI and his generation of liturgical reformers were formed and educated. Rivoire insists that the attitude of the faithful to the pope as legislator should be quite different from their attitude to him as teacher. But we now see that for a pre-conciliar theologian such as Dublanchy our attitude to the pope as legislator was,

in effect, our attitude to him as teacher—obedient to him because of his complete reliability as a teacher.

Over the first six decades of the twentieth century concern grew among theologians, priests, and bishops that the Church faced a radically new culture, requiring very new forms of communication. Would it not be a perfectly proper exercise of papal authority to reform the liturgy, not as Rivoire alleges, as a matter of arbitrary will, but the better to teach—the better to communicate and to apply God's unchanging law for worship for this radically new cultural context? Rivoire does note critically, exactly as did Joseph Ratzinger, that the extent of Paul VI's liturgical reform and the novel legislation that it involved was unprecedented in ecclesial history. But the reformers had their explanation for this. It lay in the radically novel character of modernity and the challenge it presented to the Church's mission.

If a liturgical rite is a mode of applying God's will for our worship of Him in a particular time and place, the pope could indeed properly use legislation to "produce a liturgical rite" in order to meet the challenge of modernity. And in so doing would not the pope be as reliable a legislator for the liturgy as ever before—even if, thanks to unprecedented cultural change, the extent of the reform required and the legislation that it involved was greater than it had ever been before? And would not disparagement of that liturgical reform and disobedience to it involve just as much contempt of his teaching authority as would disregard of formal teaching that came unaccompanied by any practical component? For mid-twentieth-century clerics concerned with cultural change but formed in a traditional theology of papal and ecclesial authority of the kind expounded by Dublanchy, there was then nothing inherently problematic about even quite radical legislative revision of the liturgy by a pope. If carried out by the will of a pope, there was nothing to fear—as the expression of a teaching authority that was divinely guaranteed.

If the Pauline liturgical reform has indeed been damaging, perhaps for some cultures and places even a calamity, the answer may lie in a critique of that reform rather different from Rivoire's. That critique would not target the papal legislation as something distinct from teaching, as Rivoire appears to do. Rather it would retain the traditional model that took legislation to be a mode of teaching and an important one, and it would locate a part of the legislative failure as lying in a failure competently to teach. The problem with the new liturgy is not that it was legislated at all, but that the legislation was very largely bad. It was disruptive of piety. And it conveyed serious error, at least by implication—often by falling suddenly silent about important aspects of revealed truth that the previous liturgical forms had clearly represented.

Of course this is what the more steely members of the traditionalist community have long, and very convincingly, argued. (Rivoire himself does mention this doctrinal issue along the way, but only as peripheral to his case.) Their critique of the liturgical reform has been that the *Novus Ordo* is problematic, not as a legislative production but in the specific changes legislated—sometimes in what it includes, but as much in what it suddenly omits. For example, there is the omission of many of the ritual modes of recognizing the Real Presence in the Eucharist that came to characterize the medieval Roman liturgy. There is the systematic reduction in references to the incapacity and weakness of fallen humanity—a radical de-Augustinianization of the liturgy, especially of Lent. There is a removal of much reference to judgement and punishment for sin in the liturgy for funerals and for the dead. There is the comprehensive removal of readings from Saint Paul stating the spiritually deadly consequences of sinful communions. There is the removal of references to the need for whole political communities, and not just their individual members, publicly to convert to Christ. Despite *Lumen gentium*'s continued teaching (in its section nine) that the Church is a New Israel for the salvation of Jew and Gentile alike that has succeeded the former Israel of the Old Covenant, there is the removal from the Good Friday liturgy of explicit and scripturally grounded prayers for the conversion of the Jewish people. There is omission of Satan's continued illicit but very real practical dominion over the fallen world and over fallen humanity, through the systematic removal of explicit exorcisms of the devil both from blessings of natural elements and from the liturgy of baptism.

These omitted elements may be of varying antiquity, and some may indeed be relatively late "accretions." But once they had arisen, suddenly to remove them, and in the 1960s, was a disaster—and a disaster at the level of teaching, as suddenly failing to represent and convey truths that the Church had previously taught, in most cases plausibly with dogmatic force. Sudden silence, at a time of radical cultural change, may well convey denial. Especially when in the case of some doctrines many clergy, including bishops, began to express the implicit denial explicitly themselves. We find priests and bishops openly suggesting, for example, that, without spiritual danger to them Protestants could more readily be admitted to Communion without first having been required to confess and receive absolution; or that the Church has indeed changed Her teaching about what *Dignitatis humanae* calls "the moral duty of men and societies toward the true religion and toward the one Church of Christ." It further re-inforces the appearance of doctrinal change when Prefects for Divine Worship and their official allies talk of the reformed liturgy as embodying a "new theology" that has mandatorily replaced an old "pre-conciliar theology."

It should be possible to advance a critique that, unlike Rivoire's, does not imagine a thoroughly post-apostolic "Apostolic Tradition" mysteriously transcending legal authority within the Church. This critique instead opposes the liturgical reform through a form of the same argument by which it was once defended. How, in our culture, best to use the liturgy to teach—to legislate for liturgical forms that best communicate for our time both revealed truth and the divine will itself for worship? The Pauline reformers and their supporters thought that the right way was to meet modern culture where it was, and to surrender those liturgical elements that seemed most alien to that culture. Whereas this critique suggests that on the contrary, since modern culture is secularized and hostile, what is most alien to it must most carefully be preserved. Even if many of those "alien" elements really were thoroughly post-apostolic, and had originally been introduced through human legislation, introducing legislation suddenly to surrender them was a serious mistake. It led to a profound erosion of piety and to the abandonment by much of the laity, and many clerics and bishops too, of aspects of the faith that are arguably *de fide* and non-negotiable.

In many regions of the Church the Pauline liturgical reform rather seems to have been a failure. Decline in numbers worshipping and in vocations nourished; endless controversy about the reform itself; even aesthetic and affective loss (attend a standard modern Catholic funeral in my own country of England and then a traditional requiem and experience the difference); the continued need, even fifty years later, for brutal legislation to force Catholics who are unusually faithful in many other respects to attend the reformed liturgy—none of this suggests success.

But accompanying this liturgical failure is a wider and very marked loss of trust—in popes and bishops as teachers, as reliable guides to truth in the respects that matter to their legislative authority and competence. Ignore the limit case of infallibility, at least as explicitly assured by the teaching of the Vatican Councils. Consider instead reliance on the judgement of popes and bishops in other cases. Consider their everyday theological opinions, their views on morals, indeed their judgement that some directive or decision would be good for the Church. Do you really trust them as Dublanchy trusted them? Somehow I doubt it. Which is why Edmond Dublanchy's absurdly trusting infallibilist theology of ecclesial and papal legislation, though once highly "official," is not now even considered and rejected. It is simply forgotten altogether and ignored—even by "traditionalist" theologians such as Rivoire.

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P.S. 51 TO THE END

BY PAUL HUNDT

About thirty years ago I drove my aged mother from her home in Hampton Bays on Long Island to a hospital an hour away in Port Jefferson. She wanted to visit her eighty-seven-year-old younger brother. It was a pleasant drive, but she was quiet because she was worried about him. When we got to his hospital room, we were shocked to see that he was already zipped up in a black vinyl undertaker's bag. When a nurse offered to open it for a last look, my mother declined, and we went out to a stairwell landing where she began to cry. Through her tears, she kept saying, "Now I'm all alone!" Her two other brothers had died years before, and while she had obviously grieved them, the intensity of this grief seemed much greater and her sense of isolation profound.

At the time, I could not understand. She still had my father, her adoring husband of over sixty years, and she still had me, her only child, whatever that was worth. I could understand her grief because my uncle had been the brother most beloved, but I couldn't understand that sense of isolation, that "Now I'm all alone!"

I am beginning to understand. My mother and my uncle had a history together from childhood to old age that was, by then, exclusively theirs. They had grown up under difficult circumstances in a very close Brooklyn Irish family with spinster aunts and bachelor uncles in residence as well. They had stayed close as young adults, as married couples, parents, and aging friends. They had summered together in Hampton Bays for years and then settled there in retirement. The rest of us knew bits and pieces of their shared lives, but only they knew it from the start. They had a history together that no one else shared, and, when my uncle died, my mother's childhood in a sense died with him.

I am facing a similar loss now. My best and most long-standing friend is approaching his end. He suffers from no specific malady other than prolonged bed rest as he waited for two fractured vertebrae to heal. But in that process, his muscles so atrophied that his legs are now just long bones and knobby joints covered in skin. This man who could talk endlessly in leaping conversational shifts and could intimidate waiters and waitresses with his formidable bellow can barely whisper a few coherent sentences.

My parents are long gone. I have no siblings or any cousins left who know my childhood well. My friend is my "knew him when" friend. We've been eating and drinking together for almost seventy-five years if you count milk and cookies.

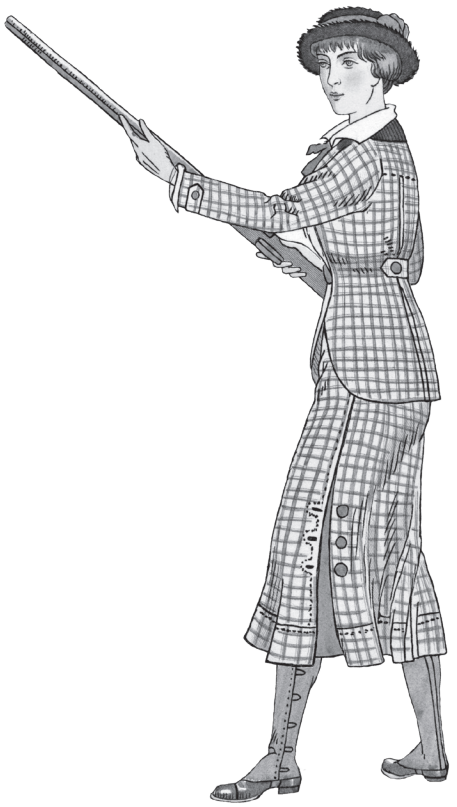
As he tells it, one day, when he was five and I six, he was languishing on his living room couch in his policeman's uniform when he heard a great commotion and screams of pain outside. Grabbing his rubber billy club and policeman's hat he rushed out to find the local bully jumping up and down on my spine. Somehow, he rescued me from paraplegia, and I have been in his debt ever since.

We were neighborhood kids on the northern border of Richmond Hill, Queens, the borough that always gets short shrift both in the literature about New York and when the City plows out after big blizzards. (One of the blots on its escutcheon is that it gave us Donald Trump.) Richmond Hill was then solidly white, middle to lower middle class, mostly Catholic and Protestant, and mostly German and Irish. My friend, however, was a Congregationalist. Although he has a pedigree on one side that can be traced back to the Puritans and is the grandson and great-grandson of formidable Congregational ministers, my friend's religious upbringing seemed less burdensome than the grim Irish Catholicism in which I was raised.

We began in the same small public school in Richmond Hill, but when P.S. 51 ended at fifth grade, we diverged onto separate academic paths: he to another

local public school, a local prep school, Princeton, and the Yale Law School; I to an awful Catholic grammar school, an excellent Catholic high school, Notre Dame and the Columbia Law School. (It is worth noting that out of two classes, each of about thirty boys and girls, I know of three boys who went to Harvard, Princeton and Dartmouth. I went to Notre Dame, and three of us went on to Ivy League law schools. There may have been even more. Not bad for a piddly oaky grammar school in a middle-class neighborhood in Queens.)

But we didn't live in each other's back pocket. High school with its intense academics, lots of homework, extracurricular activities, and for me a daily three-hour round-trip commute drew us into separate worlds. Our colleges too were distant and different experiences, but we always seemed to circle back to see how the other was doing. During college vacations while we still lived in the old neighborhood, we would take the IND subway to Manhattan to ice skate in Central Park, to trace Dylan Thomas's staggering steps through various watering holes in Greenwich Village, but mostly to enjoy being in each other's company. We were more explorers of the city than its denizens at that point. During one New York blizzard, we found a bar/restaurant in the Village that had amateur opera. On another night of wandering, we found a really neat bar with a ceiling covered in black fuzzy mold. Only recently did I discover that "Dirty Julius,"



as we called it, was one of the preeminent gay bars of the closeted years. How could we have missed that?

After our post–law school military service, he as an enlisted man in the reserves, I as an officer in an infantry battalion in Germany, we both began our legal careers on January 2, 1966, in separate Wall Street law firms that happened to be located on different floors of the same building in lower Manhattan. And that first day and for the week thereafter, we walked together across the Brooklyn Bridge to get to work because Mike Quill had pulled his bus and subway workers out on one of their long transit strikes.

One winter afternoon, he saved my future marriage. I had taken him and my then new girlfriend on a hike on the Shawangunk Plateau in upstate New York. I had done a bit of serious winter hiking, but this was intended just as an excursion. We were not equipped for any real challenges. The snow turned out to be knee deep in many spots along the trail. Somehow, I managed to get turned around, "just a little lost" as they say, and as the sun set and the dusk deepened, his mantra became "only a mile or two more." He was tall and a bit gangly. He joked and pranced about in the deep snow waving a long dry reed to distract my girlfriend from the seriousness of our situation while I tried to figure out how to get us back to the car safely. A year later, he was my best man, and a year after that I was his. (His wife is our younger son's godmother.)

I have no doubt that one of the factors in our long friendship, as probably in most long friendships, has been proximity. In the beginning we lived across the street from each other. After that, for over twenty years, Manhattan was our venue and even later it was our locus when we moved out of the city to nearby suburbs and the outer boroughs.

Another was long bachelorhoods in a very male world. While other good friends were sucked soon after college into the vortex of marriage, children, careers, and suburban commutes, we and a number of similarly educated and inclined bachelors wandered about the city together or separately, dining, drinking, and talking, always talking. It was a pleasant existence: responsible and challenging jobs which often extended into the night, active social lives, solitude in our apartments when we wanted it, and conviviality on the streets and in the pubs of Manhattan when we didn't.

Another factor was our liberal educations. Neither we nor our friends were professional intellectuals, but each of us had enjoyed four-year dalliances in our chosen liberal art. As a run-of-the mill English major with a tendency to writer's block, it was clear I would be totally unemployable upon graduation. Although my friend had a degree in economics from Princeton's Woodrow Wilson School, I doubt his prospects were

much better. To make a living, we needed professions. By happy circumstance, we both chose the law, but, being humanistically educated, we were never just lawyers. We were readers and noodlers as well, willing to exchange ideas and to delight in the disclosure of obscure facts in wide-ranging discussions.

For example, a few years ago he was lamenting his frustration that members of his history book club seemed unacquainted with an ancient naval battle whose name he momentarily forgot. I piped up that it was probably the Battle of Salamis, where an outnumbered Athenian fleet, through superior tactics, destroyed a much larger invading Persian force. We went on to discuss the tactics and reasons for the Athenian victory and its ultimate impact on history.

Long friendships mirror in many respects good marriages without the irritations of intimate daily contact. Friends can select the time and place to meet. It's not over the Wheaties every morning. But since, whether by nature or nurture, men are emotionally constrained and seldom unburden themselves or expose their vulnerabilities, lengthy male friendships require great restraint and sensitivity. One follows up occasional opaque personal comments at the risk of learning too much, and of creating residual resentments which can slowly erode the bonds of friendship. Thus, even though we knew most of each other's principal successes, failings, and insecurities, regardless of our opinions, we never delved too deeply, nor did we criticize, make strong recommendations, or give advice. We listened sympathetically to whatever the other felt impelled to disclose about personal problems, family medical issues, and lost friends and relatives, but we left the active advisory role, unless solicited, to good therapists. And there was as well an unspoken commitment to confidentiality. What was disclosed went no further.

The real pleasure in our meetings was the conversation. Literature, politics, and history were our preferred métiers, but how could we fail to gossip too. It was like quaffing fine wine in small sips.

For the past twenty-five years, whenever one of us became parched for the other's company, we made the three-minute call to set up a lunch date at various restaurants on the East Side of Manhattan from Delancey to Ninety-Sixth streets. In prior years a good meal, a few glasses of wine in an unhurried, quiet venue where we could sit and talk to exhaustion, was often followed by a stroll through Central Park. Once, in our late sixties, he shamed me into a few rides on the Central Park carousel, two old men in overcoats going up and down on wooden horses, a throwback to our childhood rides on the Forest Park Carousel in Queens.

As we became old and sadly diminished, however, one of our favorite spots, an elegant art deco restaurant in Midtown, became too far away for my friend. Since he now had an apartment on Fifth Avenue in the Nineties, we settled on a small local French bistro which had excellent food and just a few outside tables. I usually got there first and watched him dotter over to the table on painful feet. The thirty-year-old who danced and pranced through the Shawangunk snows was unsteady now and used a cane. I have enough pipes in my heart to open a plumbing supply store. But, when we sat together at an outside table in forty-five-degree weather, all that fell away. The sidewalk in front of us was very active: women pushed strollers or walked young children by the hand; dog-walkers with their packs of pooches passed; older East Side couples strolled by. There are a couple of expensive private girls' high schools in the vicinity, so as we sat outside in even the coldest weather, there was a steady flow of young future ladies-who-lunch passing our table. Already slaves of fashion, they'd hiked their uniform skirts so inappropriately high they risked fanny frostbite for the sake of style. As we noted this passage of upscale humanity in all its diversity, youth, and beauty, we two aging boulevardiers commenced another two hours of conversation that ranged over friends, relatives, the current political situation (moan), and, even after fifty years, the poetry and prose of Dylan Thomas, but this time in much more respectable surroundings.

Many friendships, no matter how close at one point, peter out over time. That some have an expiration date is inevitable. People grow up, move away, begin to focus their attention elsewhere, become boring, or are offended by some well-meaning or careless comment. The reasons are infinite and the results unfortunate if a residue of resentment develops and the split widens. Very few friendships last a lifetime. But this is one of them.

I truly love my friend. When he goes into that black vinyl bag, all that history, that continuum we share, will be gone. There will be no one left who knew me as a child, then grew with me over the next seventy-five years. Like my mother so many years ago, I too, despite a loving spouse and caring sons, will be bereft and "all alone."

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BURNT ORANGE LOUNGE SUIT

BY TIMOTHY NEROZZI

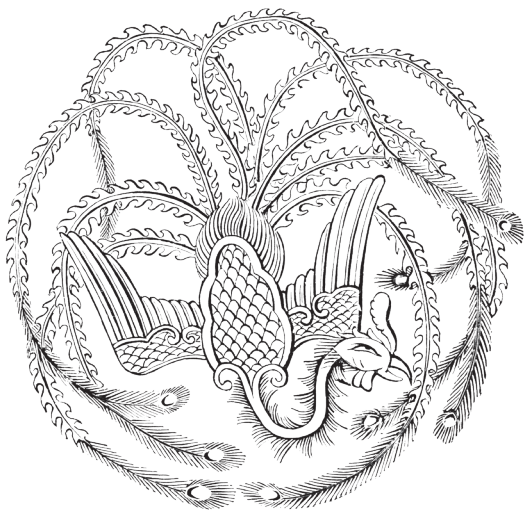
I'm not sure how common it is to remember the exact moment you fell in love with clothing. I assume some women can recall trying on a designer dress or buying their first luxury handbag. I'm sure there are plenty of finance types who remember getting their first Brooks Brothers or J. Press suit and feeling the sense of having "made it."

For me, there was a flashpoint in my childhood that I can say with confidence flipped a switch in my brain and granted me a crude consciousness of taste.

It happened at age fifteen, while I was working part time at a pair of car washes. After getting dropped off for work each day by my father, my first responsibility was dumping trash cans that had been filled to the brim with customers' used coffee cups and snack food wrappers as they vacuumed out their Buicks and Mazdas. Following garbage duty, I'd typically spend an hour or two hosing down the bays to remove the clods of mud left by F-150s and Dodge Rams. Then, I'd typically take a break and head to the Sheetz next door to spend a third of my wages on a soft pretzel, milkshake, fries, or other fried Pennsylvania delicacies.

The car wash was my first opportunity to make my own money. It put in perspective each dime that I spent on mozzarella sticks and the value of the many, many things I could not afford. One day, as my father dropped me off, we were greeted by the owner of the two car washes. He was in town from Florida, where he'd retired to years ago, just to check up on things. His outfit that day is seared into my brain like the burn from a cattle brand. In hindsight, it was utterly unremarkable—a flat cap, chinos, and an old but well-maintained golf jacket. On his breast, however, I glimpsed a symbol that would haunt, inspire, and at times control me for years to come: a tiny polo player, his mallet raised to swing.

I can't pretend to remember the exact series of events that followed. I have vague recollections of asking my father about the logo and getting an unsatisfying answer. (Fashion is perhaps the thing my father cares about least in this world.) I began browsing the internet. I found Ralph Lauren golf jackets for sale and gasped at their M.S.R.P. I wouldn't have been able to buy a brand new one with two of my paychecks combined. Then I began noticing the logo that had previously escaped my attention everywhere. I saw it on the left breast of higher-income classmates. Previously forgettable television advertisements with the iconic polo player on a bottle of cologne now meant something to me, though I couldn't articulate the feeling.

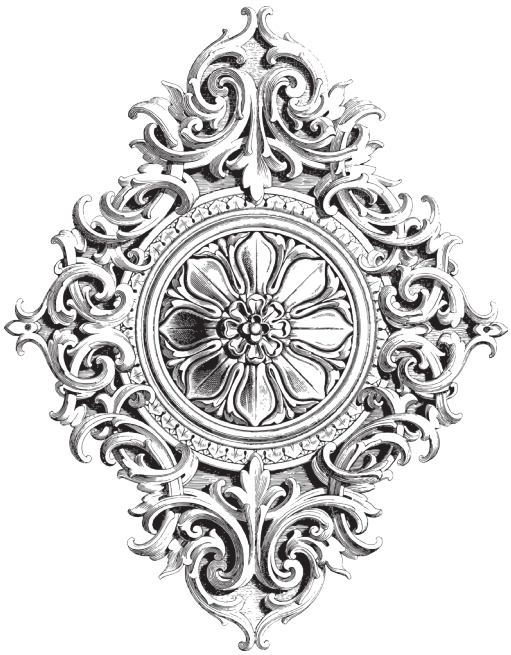


This struggle to recollect ends at age sixteen, after I had begun making the big bucks by working at the local McDonald's in addition to the car washes. Here, there is another moment clearly preserved in my memory: me in a graphic T-shirt and blue jeans at a T.J. Maxx, looking to score some Ralph Lauren like a junkie in need of a fix. After scouring the men's section for something, anything within my budget that could satisfy my cravings, I found it: a Ralph Lauren polo shirt, size medium, blue and white striped, extra long tail for secure tucking, and, of course, the polo player on the breast. Clearance priced. Thirty dollars.

Bringing that shirt home and putting it on in front of my bedroom mirror felt like an admixture of cocaine and ecstasy injected directly into my aorta. The cotton fabric, the well-manufactured collar, the detailed outline of the polo player's arms, and the finely stitched legs of his steed—I can recall it all with the sentimental nostalgia most save for reminiscing on losing their virginity. I tore through my brother's closet while he was away at university, looking for Ralph Lauren pieces I could confiscate as hand-me-downs. I browsed eBay religiously. I scoured several different Salvation Army locations on a weekly basis. I even searched the racks of the local flea markets hoping for a diamond amongst the Wildwood, New Jersey, souvenir hoodies and sports tees.

These childhood expeditions for second-hand, affordable luxury in bottom-of-the-barrel locations honed my tastes. They say to become a good writer, you need to write a million words. Well, to develop a unique fashion sense, I recommend you rifle through one million second-hand garments at your local garage sales looking for dress shirts and sweaters. I was no longer just looking for Ralph Lauren. I became acquainted with his many mid-market luxury friends—Calvin Klein, Tommy Hilfiger, Joseph Abboud, René Lacoste, Alexander Julian, Steve Madden.

These experiences taught me more than a little about class and income. Unlike my other childhood interests, clothing had clear and defined income levels. During one trip with my friends to the mall, I hung back from GameStop and FYE to instead browse the department store men's section alone. I observed another boy about my age with his girlfriend. As I looked over the folded tennis shirts, forlornly wishing I could afford any of them, the couple pointed at the display mannequin and laughed—he was wearing the same exact Big Pony Polo Ralph Lauren off-black rugby shirt with a white collar. After they left, I scurried over and looked at the price tag on the mannequin. It was more than one hundred dollars. (A decade later, I'd pick up a similar Ralph Lauren piece in mint condition from a Goodwill location for five bucks.)



My family was never particularly poor, but the idea of conspicuous spending on clothing was never a consideration. As I said, my father was never a fashionista. He has always been and continues to be a Mets cap and jeans kind of guy. My mother, raised dirt poor in a two-bedroom house with six siblings, dressed us well on a sensible budget. She showed me how to build a wardrobe. For back-to-school shopping, we started at Old Navy for T-shirts and socks, browsed the Banana Republic outlet store for more thoughtful sweaters and shirts, then dug through Marshalls racks for stand-out pieces. When I got to high school she let me dress myself in the truest sense—mistakes and all; by my senior year I had become one of the most insufferable archetypes of culturally confused American youth—the kid who wears a blazer and necktie to his public high school. (In my defense, it was only on occasion, and, looking back, I didn't do a bad job: blue blazer, khakis, white shirt, casual tie, loafers—classic, nerdy and bizarre to be sure at a school more accustomed to Mossy Oak camouflage hoodies and Carhartt jackets, but classic.)

My relationship with fashion evolved rapidly while I was attending college, but I never escaped the necessity of second-hand shopping. I worked assiduously during the spring and summer breaks to save up enough to live on during the school year. With a tight budget, exorbitant clothing purchases were a non-starter. Unable to afford the preppy aesthetics that originally drew me into the world of fashion—and freshly exposed to music, movies, art, and subcultures I'd never experienced—my second-hand clothing habit became a series of costumes for me.

I got an undercut and began wearing all-black outfits with strategic silhouettes. I tried normcore for a week. I became addicted to knit sweaters worn with tasteful dress shirts underneath—just their collar showing. An old New York Mets jersey I owned, once only something to wear to a baseball game, became an outfit-defining centerpiece. I purchased a series of increasingly tight pants that became so painted-on that I still fear manhood may be permanently compromised.

In addition to my job waiting tables, I picked up shifts at the same T.J. Maxx where I had bought my first Lauren shirt. I needed the additional income, but more than that I needed the generous employee discount on good clothes. I began browsing the racks in the storage area for hidden gems, then hiding them in the toy section so I could come back later and purchase them after I clocked out. After college, my income increased and I lived abroad in Japan for several years. I picked up brands I'd never heard of from a consignment store in the train station named Mode Off. At six-four and two hundred ten pounds, I found that clothing in my size was rare. But there I bought my first ever Burberry piece—a cream-colored cardigan. This period of my life also opened me up to trying clothing entirely foreign to me. I received several traditional robes from friends. At summer festivals and cultural events I donned yukata, kimono, and jinbei with glee. The same people who gave me the clothes taught me to wear them with precision, and I earned many compliments from strangers in the style of, "Wow, you wear kimono well for a big white guy." Meeting their low bar for approval steeled my self-confidence.

At twenty-five, I moved to Washington, D.C., and—with a subconscious desire to dress like a mentally ill senator—I began snatching up suits online. I weaponized the Make an Offer function on eBay to send offers so low that the sellers had every right to spit (digitally) in my face. But sometimes they took the cash.

At this point in my life, I don't have many financial or personal barriers to wearing the things I like. I've grabbed beautiful tailcoats for pennies from rental shops that need to make room for new stock. I've picked eBay clean of Dior double-breasted jackets, Ralph Lauren Purple Label shirts, and Hudson Bay winter capotes. I've worn tailored, pinstripe business suits with suspenders and a power-striped necktie to the office—stockbroker-core. I've worn a burnt orange lounge suit with a crisp white pocket square to cocktail hour—no tie, three open buttons, stiff collar. Very modern. Very breezy. I've worn a fur Stetson to weddings and I've worn a French beret to some of the most up-their-own-ass social clubs in Washington. I don't rent tuxedos for events because I have several of my own that I need an excuse to pull out. After seeing an evening news segment about the Dukes of Cambridge and Sussex attending royal events in full morning dress, I pieced together my own daytime ensemble via eBay—ascot-cravat and all. I wear it whenever I can, regardless of how insane I may look.

My closet is a wonderland of sartorial schizophrenia. Wrangler denim bomber jackets. French cuff dress shirts. Bass Oxford shoes. Suede loafers. Chippewa boots with the metal American flag flourish on the laces. Versace turtlenecks. Pendleton flannels. Yves Saint Laurent pullovers. Rose-colored sunglasses. BAPE hoodies. Continental ties. Silk ties. Bolo ties. Tie clasps. Tie pins. Suspenders. Waistcoats. Margaritaville Hawaiian shirts. Straw hats. Varsity jackets. Seersucker suits. And, of course, lots of Ralph Lauren. Almost none of it is new.

Given that most of my clothing is second-hand, none of this is a boast about income or refined taste. You, the reader, probably make more than I do. You probably also dress better than I do by any widely accepted standard. But if I were wealthy enough to buy fine clothing on a whim, and self-aware enough to dress respectably, the magic would probably dissipate. Also: I am under no illusion that I am "fashionable" per the judgement of anyone who matters. My tastes can be ostentatious, flamboyant, and bordering on absurd. Like a child with a dress-up set, I get more joy out of putting on the costumes and playing pretend than I do impressing others or sculpting an "image" or "brand" as better-dressed fashionistas do. To put it another way—if I started an Outfit of the Day account on Instagram, my followers would be scarce.

But I don't care. I sit atop my pile of second-hand grails and bargain basement treasures like a man in nirvana. I've made it out of the brand-worshiping ghetto to find a wardrobe that lets me—brace yourself for a saccharine platitude—"express myself" in a meaningful way. Perhaps naïvely, I don't consider myself a particularly consumerist person. Ralph Lauren and his majestic polo player logo may have brought me into this world, but I hold no rigid allegiance to him, nor to any other designer. I do not wait around for the Fall/Winter collections to drop. I don't worry about resalability, and I certainly don't worry about keeping up with the latest hypebeast trend. I'm free. The pursuit of the next piece is never over. Each acquisition means as much to me as the last, whether I bought it for five dollars or saved up for months. It's all just chasing the high of that blue-and-white polo from the clearance rack at T.J. Maxx.

Timothy Nerozzi is a reporter for Fox News.

CORMAC McCARTHY, 1933–2023

For decades, Cormac McCarthy was the generally agreed upon candidate for greatest living American novelist. Throughout his nearly sixty-year career, he consistently received the highest critical acclaim and collected nearly all the important book awards. Not that these mattered much to him. McCarthy lived an intensely private life. He rarely gave interviews, and, when he did, he usually dismissed writing as "way, way down at the bottom of the list" of his interests, although he clearly had a way with words. Nor did it seem to matter to McCarthy that in the second half of his life, he won a massive and devoted following for his westerns, which treated darker and more difficult subjects than his earlier, Southern work. His reticence only made fans more fervent. Upon his death, McCarthy's novels, as well as his strange, scrupulously cultivated persona, deserve much discussion as he takes his place among the great eccentrics of American letters.

Charles McCarthy was born in Providence, Rhode Island, on July 20, 1933, the third of six children and the eldest son. When he was four, the family moved to Knoxville, Tennessee, where his father became a lawyer for the Tennessee Valley Authority. McCarthy attended Catholic schools and was an altar boy at his parish. Most of his childhood was spent taking on new hobbies—"there was no hobby I didn't have, name anything, no matter how esoteric, I had found it and dabbled in it"—although, in his telling, he did not read much then. He studied physics and engineering at the University of Tennessee, but his interests shifted when an English professor asked him to re-punctuate a collection of essays initially published in the seventeenth century. He dropped out of college in 1953 to join the Air Force. While stationed in Alaska, isolated in the cold and dark, McCarthy read copiously. Upon

his return, he changed his name from Charles to Cormac, a childhood nickname from his Irish aunts, and began writing.

McCarthy was single-minded in his work. His first wife walked out on him when he demanded that she get a job to support him. His second wife only sighed, recalling, decades after their divorce (in all, McCarthy would be divorced three times), that he ignored all else while he sat at his desk. "Someone would call up and offer him two thousand dollars to come speak at a university about his books," she said. "And he would tell them that everything he had to say was there on the page. So we would eat beans for another week." McCarthy preferred it this way; his early novels, *The Orchard Keeper*, *Outer Dark*, *Child of God*, and *Suttree*, never sold more than a few thousand copies—and he lived strangely when he wrote them, on the road, in motels, in an uninsulated barn.

In 1985, McCarthy completed what is generally regarded as his masterpiece, *Blood Meridian, or The Evening Redness in the West*, a book of shocking and often hilarious violence. Harold Bloom called it "the major aesthetic achievement of any living American writer," and compared the novel to *Moby-Dick* (McCarthy's favorite). *Blood Meridian* was followed by a trilogy of westerns that won McCarthy a massive audience in the 1990s. His sudden propulsion from obscurity to fame was in part due to a film adaptation of the first in the series, *All the Pretty Horses*, but also to changes in the industry that prompted McCarthy's publisher to heavily promote his work. Around the same time, McCarthy gave his most substantial interview, in which he stated that he looks down on anyone whose work doesn't palpably "deal with issues of life and death." He was free in his criticism. "I don't understand them," he remarked of Proust and Henry James. "To me, that's not literature." In his mind, there were four great novels against which everything else should be measured: *Ulysses*, *The Brothers Karamazov*, *The Sound and the Fury*, and *Moby-Dick*.

In the last decades of his life, McCarthy continued to write, but increasingly he became perplexed by the scientific questions he had probed during his youth. He took up a residency at the Santa Fe Institute, where he wrote a scholarly essay on the nature of consciousness. Two of his most popular novels, *No Country for Old Men* and *The Road*, were published in the 2000s. Both were adapted for film. His final novels, *The Passenger* and *Stella Maris*, which were sold as companion pieces, were published eight months before his death. It was rumored that McCarthy had struggled with them for decades.

ROBERT WYLLIE

Blood Meridian and *The Road* establish Cormac McCarthy's legacy as a powerful storyteller of violent escapades. An epigraph to the former describes death as the "life of darkness" that swallows all sorrow. A line in the latter describes "salitter drying from the earth." Both are nods to Jacob Boehme, the early seventeenth-century German shoemaker whom Hegel called the first German philosopher. Sal nitre is the heavenly gunpowder that produces lightning according to Paracelsus's conjectures, from which Victor Frankenstein learns to zap life into dead matter. Salitter—the spelling makes McCarthy's nod unmistakable—is Boehme's analogy for divine powers deep in the Father, some of which, he writes, were spoiled by Lucifer. The necessity of the Fall in Boehme's mystical writings allows philosophers like Hegel and Schelling to consider the possibility of a deficiency in God that is progressively revealed through human experience. For this reason, Boehme interests scholars who note affinities between modern philosophy and Gnosticism. Traces of Boehme suggest how deeply McCarthy read about all hell breaking loose in our minds on earth.

Dark, but learnedly so. Yet this overlooks the good-humored McCarthy. On the subject of gunpowder, who can forget the Judge exhorting the Glanton Gang to micturate "for their very souls" to concoct explosives to blow up their Apache pursuers? (The saltpeter in that case is derived from bat guano, not the heavens or urine.) Gene Harrogate's escapades with watermelons, pigeons, bats, and payphones, often wearing pants as a shirt, with his head poking out from a hole in the crotch, ensure that parts of *Suttree* rank among the funniest moments in the great comic novels of the 1970s, when writers still dared to make their readers laugh aloud, and could. McCarthy trotted out "thieves, derelicts, miscreants, pariahs, poltroons, spalpeens, curmudgeons, clotpolls, murderers, gamblers, bawds, whores, trulls, brigands, topers, tosspots, sots and archsots, lobcocks, smell-socks, runagates, rakes, and other assorted and felonious debauchees" for grand comic effect. He could also laugh at himself. In *The Sunset Limited*, we find Black, an ex-convict, listening patiently to (Professor) White's lament that all Western values "went up in smoke" at Dachau, only to respond: "You a culture junky."

The unlikely philosophical dialogue between the ivory tower and the everyman's tenement is the clearest example of McCarthy's search for hope despite the hopelessness of high culture. Hegel foresaw the fullness of revelation in human consciousness; in hindsight, McCarthy sees "Auschwitz and Hiroshima, the sister events that sealed forever the fate of the West." Black's humble Pentecostalism tries to hold out against White's academic nihilism and the soul-crushing disappointment of Boehme's Gnostic heirs (he can, I think). And the graying McCarthy tried to as well. He was a culture junky in recovery, a visionary writer of the agnostic apocalypse, one you don't need to decode any abstruse tomes to see coming.

Oddly for a wordsmith, McCarthy insists there is something more to knowledge than words can convey. He was fascinated by the origin of language. What was the mind like for a million years before words were spoken? McCarthy never wrote this question off as unthinkable, or simply accepted that humanity is coeval with language. His only published essay invites us to reflect upon the "Kekulé Problem." In the spring of 1862, the story goes, August Kekulé dreamed of the ouroboros, the mythical snake that eats its tail, and awoke with the insight that the benzene molecules which he was studying had a ring structure. Why does the dreaming mind continue to think in images and symbols, McCarthy wonders, rather than language?

McCarthy's final, interlinked novels, *The Passenger* and *Stella Maris*, explore whether there is hope in the enduring mysteries of the universe that are sometimes given to mathematicians and scientists in dreams. In the latter, Alicia Western speaks to her psychiatrist about their beauty and monstrosity. One character who attempts to tell the whole story is a "roué" and a "bounder" from Knoxville, John Sheddan, an old friend of Alicia's brother, Bobby. While his antics and misanthropic rants approach *Suttree*-level hilarity, he is not an idiot savant like Harrogate. Instead, Sheddan's archaisms and elaborate style (he

invites Bobby to "dismember a brace of crustaceans" with him) indicate that to some extent he is a characterization of vintage McCarthy. He studies Bobby: the Caltech physics Ph.D. dropout, race-car crash-out, bathophobic deep-sea diver. Sheddan wants to tell the story of Bobby and Alicia, the children of parents who worked on the atomic bomb, as a last classical Greek tragedy of incest and suicide in a doomed world. But he cannot tell the whole story.

McCarthy was a wannabe believer. Some part of him is like Bobby, who lacks both Sheddan's garrulous flair and his ability to "travel light" in the world. Bobby remains too infatuated with his mathematician sister. What is the allure of mathematics, McCarthy wonders also, that it drives so many brilliant minds insane? This theme is beyond Sheddan's classical tragedy. Bobby, the "last pagan on earth," is different from his forebears. At the end, with a bodega barkeep in the Balearic Islands (were McCarthy lived in the late 1960s), Bobby envies those who died in the Spanish Civil War "for a cause that was just for a people that he loved and the fathers of those people and their poetry and their pain and their God." These beliefs are ghosts for Bobby and the barman. After atom bombs and death camps, no credible beliefs can zap life and hope into the masses. McCarthy's pessimism seems duty-bound, as if the consolations of faith would prevent his witness to the victims of the stupid, vicious, utterly unremarked post-apocalyptic barbarisms, after humanity screws up the destruction of the world. McCarthy's "withershins allegor[ies] of despair" (*Suttree* again) make him like the last of the modernists who felt responsible for the world, and for whom the "death of God" was a fresh loss. Yet he asks with honest introspection, what is the value of literature, then? McCarthy dove with trepidation for hope deeper than words.

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STEVE KNEPPER

ormac McCarthy had little trouble imagining a future in which his books were unread flotsam: some poorly understood catastrophic event leaves a library on the outskirts of Knoxville ransacked, the windows shattered and books unshelved and strewn, copies of *The Road* and *Blood Meridian* spilled alongside

the Bible, Shakespeare, and abstruse mathematical treatises, but also tumbled together with chipper self-help books, dieting manuals, and Nicholas Sparks novels. Sparks once complained to an interviewer that he was a better writer than the "horrible" and "pulpy" McCarthy and that he, writing in the ancient tradition of Sophocles, deserved to be treated just as seriously. Therefore, let *The Notebook* sit alongside, even on top of, *Suttree* in the kindling pile that the illiterate marauders heap in our hemorrhaged library when they camp there for the night. Let us watch the pages of these two timeless classics fade into gray and then curl into indistinguishable ash together. McCarthy could be a hilarious writer. He deserves a mordant wake.

McCarthy's novels almost always claim or suggest that the end is nigh, that "the slaughter to come is probably beyond our imagining," as Malkina says in the closing lines of *The Counselor*. Yet McCarthy wrote books to last. His novels read as if they were hewn "out of solid rock," like the water trough on which Sheriff Ed Tom Bell meditates in *No Country for Old Men*:

> Just chiseled out of the rock. And I got to thinkin about the man that done that. That country had not had a time of peace much of any length at all that I knew of. . . . But this man had set down with a hammer and chisel and carved out a stone water trough to last ten thousand years. Why was that? What was it that he had faith in?

Good questions. McCarthy's protagonists frequently happen upon ruins, especially wind-whining churches full of forlorn statuary and long-unrung bells and shards of stained glass. Usually, these ruins strike readers with a sense of God-forsaken ephemerality, of the uncanny fragility of human hopes and dreams. We are

shadows that can build things out of the more substantive stuff of the world. But to what purpose? McCarthy's plays and novels often question whether we have any credible purpose at all. They often suggest that our striving amounts to a perennial fool's errand in which we try to shore up the levee against death. We confuse material solidity—good, solid rock—for existential solidity.

But in this passage of *No Country for Old Men*, Sheriff Bell sees something more hopeful in our rock-chiseling ways. He doesn't think his trough carver was under any illusions that humans would suddenly change for the better. He does not think that his carver was a gullible and naïve innocent. How could any farmer be that? Why then did he carve?

> And I have to say that the only thing I can think is that there was some sort of promise in his heart. And I dont have no intentions of carvin a stone water trough. But I would like to be able to make that kind of promise. I think that's what I would like most of all.

I suspect McCarthy chiseled his novels because, at least some of the time, he had that kind of "promise in his heart." Perhaps, given his Catholic upbringing, he wouldn't even squirm too much if we said he was graced with such promise, with such hope. I doubt he thought people would heed his warnings for the future, even as they heaped praise and accolades on his novels. (But never the Nobel. Alas.) I doubt he thought that society even *could* heed the warnings in some kind of large-scale way, not with all of its built-up momentum. One should not downplay the consistent bleakness of his vision. But it was not unremittingly bleak. Perhaps he could also imagine humanity picking up the pieces after the cataclysm, attempting to build once more, perhaps for a while chastened by the hubris and waste and callousness that led to so much destruction: a society of ascetics, perhaps, who collect a library from the earlier world, who urge their initiates, when they are ready, to read the grim prophecies that Cormac McCarthy carved on the page. "But this man had set down with a hammer and chisel and carved out a stone water trough to last ten thousand years."

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JOHN WILSON

I first read Cormac McCarthy because Guy Davenport reviewed *Suttree* (with his customary élan) in *National Review*. In those days of yore, if you read about a new book and wanted to read it, you went to a bookstore to acquire it. In Pasadena, we had the long-established Vroman's (still going today, astonishingly). I came home with the novel and read it, keeping my two-volume compact edition of the O.E.D. (with magnifying glass) close at hand. There were parts I found opaque and parts I didn't like, but I was exhilarated by the novel, and I hunted down McCarthy's previous books. Results were mixed. I read only a little of *Child of God* before abandoning it, for instance, but *Outer Dark* was extraordinary; it remains one of my favorites (perhaps my first choice) among McCarthy's novels, along with *Suttree* and *The Road*.

Misgivings began to set in with *Blood Meridian*, which included many extraordinary passages but which also seemed to be deformed by portentousness. Then came the Border Trilogy. In a lifetime of reading, I can recall very few experiences as dispiriting and baffling. Before I was even halfway through the first book in the trilogy, I felt as if I were reading a parody. What had happened to McCarthy? I'm not sure why I kept going; I had such respect for his gifts, I felt I must be missing something, coming at this new project from the wrong angle.

I didn't read McCarthy again until *The Road* came out, and then not at first. Sometime after its initial reception, I read a longish review of it that prompted

me to reconsider. Shamefully, I can't recall who wrote the piece or where it appeared, but I bought the book, read it, and read it again. Despite a few bits that veer into self-consciously portentous mannerisms, it is (so I think) a great achievement.

Then came a long time in which no new books appeared, but after a while, now and then, there were distressing bulletins about McCarthy's connection with the Santa Fe Institute, his musings on quantum mechanics (an infallible sign, alas, of intellectual quackery and presumption), and so on. Given that lamentable trajectory, I had no stomach for the paired novels that appeared after his long hiatus, nor do I have any intention of reading them now.

McCarthy's death has prompted an outpouring of praise beyond anything I would have expected, even given the rapturous reception of his last books. Some of this strikes me as absurdly hyperbolic (he was, you see, beyond doubt, America's "greatest writer"). But I will leave it to others to theorize what this signifies.

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GREGORY WOLFE

As a long-time resident of the Southwest, Cormac McCarthy was undoubtedly familiar with the figure out of Native American mythology known as Kokopelli—the god of fertility, but also a trickster, a humpbacked god who played the flute to entice the springtime to return. I was put in mind of Kokopelli—who shows up on T-shirts and bumper stickers throughout the region (and, incidentally, above Walter White's swimming pool in *Breaking Bad*)—with the news of McCarthy's death. That's because of all the things readers tend to think when it comes to his fiction—the violence, darkness, cruelty, and cosmic pessimism—they tend to miss the humor, playfulness, and above all the art of deception and concealment.

Fiction presents us with the challenge of discerning what literature teachers in my youth used to call the difference between "appearance and reality." The problem with most judgements of McCarthy's achievement is that they tend to be superficial, to focus on the surface rather than the artfully hidden depths. In an interview with the *Paris Review*, Joy Williams says: "What a story is, is devious. It pretends transparency, forthrightness. It engages with ordinary people, ordinary matters, recognizable stuff. But this is all a masquerade. What good stories deal with is the horror and incomprehensibility of time, the dark encroachment of old catastrophes."

Admittedly, few of McCarthy's books deal with "ordinary matters," but deviousness is fundamental to his fictive method. McCarthy, no less than Jane Austen, presents a world where our pride tempts us to give in to prejudice. Like all great writers he positively encourages us to misread him, leaving only the faintest of trails off the beaten path—just enough cognitive dissonance and counter-evidence to encourage us to backtrack and revise our opinions.

Take, for example, the cowboys featured in his Border Trilogy. John Grady Cole and Billy Parham represent in many ways the crowning virtues of the American hero: closeness to nature and her ways, self-reliance, an innate desire for justice, and a willingness to take action to right the wrongs they encounter. But the moment they cross the border into Mexico, they find themselves enduring various forms of brutality and injustice. As readers we naturally feel for John Grady and Billy—and whether we admit it or not, we're tempted to think of Mexico as a place of sloth and lawlessness.

Having been lulled into the very worst and most clichéd prejudices against this alien culture, the reader may or may not cotton on to another aspect of Mexican life revealed by McCarthy's narrative—its hospitality, its emphasis on the communal "we" (*nosotros*) rather than the "I," its capacity to endure suffering and hardship, and its deep appreciation for life as something given rather than earned.

Both cowboys experience misfortune because of a tragic flaw: blindness to the differences between these two cultures (and to the relative merits of each), which steers them toward disaster. They are under the impression that injustice can be "fixed" by direct action—the redistribution of property rights, you

might say—only to run into insuperable obstacles beyond their control. As the Dueña Alfonsa tells John Grady: "In the end we all come to be cured of our sentiments. Those whom life does not cure death will. The world is quite ruthless in selecting between the dream and reality, even where we will not. Between the wish and the thing the world lies waiting."

In the Border Trilogy and elsewhere, McCarthy makes the atomic bomb the ultimate metaphor of hubris, of trying to harness the power of nature by forcefully splitting what has been given apart—the ultimate version of "you break it, you buy it." The detonation at the inaptly named Trinity site becomes the unholy sacrament at the heart of the Black Mass celebrated by modern technology.

The fact that McCarthy spent his later years hanging out with the physicists at the Santa Fe Institute might seem odd in the light of his obsession with the atom bomb. But there's no contradiction here. One clue to why this might be so comes from one of the rare interviews McCarthy granted soon after he received a Macarthur "Genius Grant." Asked about the gala event he attended, he said: "The artsy crowd was all dressed and drugged and ready to party. . . . I just started hanging out with scientists because they were more interesting." Another, more blunt way of putting it is that McCarthy was thumbing his nose at the solipsism and facile talk about the "constructedness" of reality among the "artsy crowd" in favor of people who actually worked with the stuff of reality (individuals acutely aware of the elusiveness and mystery at the heart of nature).

In any case, while McCarthy's flawed protagonists often struggle with despair at the apparent meaninglessness of a cruel world, it is often his minor characters who offer alternative interpretations. True to his trickster ways, he presents these characters in forms that are disconcerting or unappealing: they are often ragged prophetic figures, like the "starved and threadbare buddha" Ely in *The Road*. Or consider the delightfully named Debussy Fields from *The Passenger*, a transgender friend of the protagonist, Bobby Western. Fields has certainly experienced vulnerability, rejection, and self-doubt—and has plenty of reasons to despair. But then, after getting sober and reading Pascal, Fields comes to a conclusion—and responds to it: "If something did not love you you would not be here," Fields says. "And I said okay." After Bobby leaves, he thinks to himself "that God's goodness appeared in strange places. Dont close your eyes."

No doubt Cormac McCarthy was speaking through the Dueña Alfonsa when he dismissed the dreams and wishes we cling to because he believed that we ought to face reality in all its complexity and mystery and sorrow. After all, it is fiction's job to help cure us of our sentiments. But that did not prevent the trickster in him from leaving hints of God's goodness in the strangest of places. Don't close your eyes.

Gregory Wolfe is the publisher and editor of Slant Books. He also founded the literary quarterly Image, *as well as the M.F.A. in Creative Writing at Seattle Pacific University. His own books include* Beauty Will Save the World, Intruding Upon the Timeless, *and* The Operation of Grace.

JESSICA HOOTEN WILSON

There's only one writer still worth studying: Cormac McCarthy." So explained one of my graduate school advisors after I had notified him of my interest in writing on Fyodor Dostoevsky and Flannery O'Connor. The depths of these two literary greats had been mined, apparently, but in McCarthy there was still a treasure trove. I wrote my first book on Dostoevsky and O'Connor anyway. Then I turned to McCarthy for pleasure reading.

I was late to the party. The first book of his I read was *The Road*. By the time I picked up that novel, both *All the Pretty Horses* and *No Country for Old Men* had been adapted for the screen; the latter won dozens of awards, including an Oscar for Best Picture. *The Road* was chosen for the Oprah Book Club. McCarthy had even agreed to be interviewed by Oprah.

The public appearances and bestselling status were a flash in the pan. McCarthy disappeared again, as he had in previous years, even as his celebrity increased. The social media world clamored for his presence—for a profile that would share tweets—but every "verified" account proved a fake. McCarthy continued to type quietly on his Olivetti Lettera 32, spurning the computer, the internet, and all speaking engagements. The sixteen-year silence was broken by his long-awaited duology, *The Passenger* and *Stella Maris*, published only a month apart in 2022. Less than a year later, he died. He was the author of twelve novels, and the winner of a National Book Award, the Pulitzer Prize for Fiction, and a MacArthur Fellowship—all the marks of a great American novelist. He never fizzled out, and some have suggested (and this author agrees) that his last two books were his greatest.

When we try to mull over what made McCarthy so great, we can point to his life, his style, his themes. We will not be able to put together a formula to follow,

but we might see some gestures worth imitating. His first book was sent unsolicited to Random House because it was the only publisher that he knew. *The Orchard Keeper* was discovered in a bin by Albert Erskine, the editor for William Faulkner and Robert Penn Warren, and it did not sell well, but Erskine continued publishing McCarthy's novels anyway. It would be decades without strong sales before McCarthy would be recognized for his talent.

But his obscurity was a blessing: instead of getting caught up in fame or being pushed to create a platform, McCarthy could dedicate his time and energy to his work. He lived in a motel for part of that time, eating beans, ignoring requests for interviews or media performances. Is it even possible anymore to produce an author of McCarthy's caliber? The best authors must follow suit, heeding Flannery O'Connor's advice not to read reviews because the praise and censure are both bad for the writer. No great American novelist can waste time regularly checking Amazon to see if her latest work gets three or five stars.

McCarthy would never cater to a contemporary audience, but he did lap up the wisdom of the past without succumbing to the anxiety of influence. In his first national interview with Richard B. Woodward for the *New York Times*, McCarthy admits, "The ugly fact is books are made out of books. The novel depends for its life on the novels that have been written." To me, the way McCarthy takes freely from the tradition is what makes his novels rich. I've noted elsewhere that *The Road* can be best understood when read in conversation with Virgil and Ray Bradbury. *Stella Maris* is a dialogue between a psychiatrist and his suicidal patient, reminiscent of Walker Percy's *Lancelot*. The questions about existence and meaning echo Camus's *The Stranger* and dialogues from Dostoevsky's novels.

In the aforementioned interview, McCarthy claims that *Moby-Dick* is his favorite novel and credits Dostoevsky and Faulkner for their influence on his writing. One can see all three in his style. He abhorred the semicolon and rarely employed any punctuation that he found unnecessary, including quotation marks and even apostrophes. His dialogue looks taken from the pages of a screenplay, lacking normative speaker tags. Robert Alter, in his study of the King James Bible's influence on the prose of Melville and Faulkner (*Pen of Iron*), concludes with the example of McCarthy's *The Road*. The simple declarative sentences, polysyndetons, and parataxis make McCarthy's prose sound biblical. The stark simplicity of his style carries the weight of revelation.

Rather than stories with the moral "Go and do likewise," McCarthy's novels are cautionary tales with brief glimmers of hope. When readers find the violence in his fiction overwhelming, I paraphrase O'Connor's observation: "you have hold of the wrong horror." For McCarthy, violence is not an end in and of itself. Ironically, it is the grim potential of every living thing that never considers its own penchant for violence. McCarthy pushes all of his characters to the extreme, to see their lives in light of their death. You do not read a McCarthy novel to be patted on the back; you read McCarthy to remind yourself of the fragility of existence, the mystery behind the ordinary, the sensible world that matters as much as any abstract thought.

Recently I tried to explain to a friend why McCarthy would still be read a century from now: "His novels do not placate you, but they challenge you and stick with you." I think McCarthy was like the best of poets. He named things for us—not only the nightmares that we try to brush under the bed but also the light, even when it is so faint and distant and ephemeral that we're not sure it's light at all. McCarthy can at once make you shudder and break your heart. But then, you cannot stop meditating on the way he did it.

When McCarthy died, readers did not merely share his book covers and titles online. They shared their favorite lines. For it was the sentences that he left us with, words threaded along like music, and truths so poignant and succinct that we finally knew what questions to ask. I may have been late to stumble upon McCarthy, but I still have a lifetime to spend reading what he gave us.

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SAM SACKS

A line from Cormac McCarthy's *Blood Meridian* that still makes me laugh appears at the demise of Captain Glanton, head of a gang of scalp-hunters that had been robbing and murdering Americans, Mexicans, and Yuma tribesmen at a ferry crossing on the Colorado River. The Yuma chieftain Caballo en Pelo catches the bandit unawares in his bedroom, at which point "the old man raised the axe and split the head of John Joel Glanton to the thrapple."

"Thrapple" is an old Scottish word meaning windpipe, usually used in connection with animals. Its etymology is uncertain: It may derive from "thropple," which comes from a Middle English contraction of "throat-boll," but it also sounds like a mixture of throat and Adam's apple. In either case, it's a great word, fun to say and funny to the ear, and it lends an outrageous flourish—much more than if McCarthy had written "windpipe" or "gullet"—to the Looney Tunes image of a man having his skull cleaved in two.

Though it loosened up a little in his later years, McCarthy's reputation has always been forbidding, that of an Old Testament prophet of violence with dogmatic views on punctuation, author interviews, and the worthlessness of Henry James. I should acknowledge that this is the side of him—the glowering purist, the doomy visionary—that makes me the most doubtful ,and whenever I sense that his novels are trying to impress some lesson upon me about human nature and the lawlessness of the universe I tend to grow impatient. The McCarthy I like is the fox rather than the hedgehog: the magpie collector of words and literary styles (to mix my metaphors, as McCarthy was prone to doing). The novels I enjoy best are *Suttree* and *The Passenger* because they're the most ranging and gregarious, but in all the books there are variegated riches to be mined on the level of the paragraph, or the sentence.

A rare academic study that can be recommended to all readers is *Books Are Made Out of Books*, by Michael Lynn Crews, who pored over McCarthy's archives in the Whittliff Collection at Texas State University and took note of every title or author he referenced in drafts or correspondence. The result testifies to a magnificently diverse cornucopia of influences, from Saint Augustine to Emily Dickinson, but the fascination lies in the specificity of these borrowings. Crews finds McCarthy citing a line from Tim O'Brien's Vietnam War classic *Going After Cacciato* in his notes for *Blood Meridian.* The line, from a description of mountains, is "pink coral and ferric reds," and as Crews points out, the note tells us nothing of McCarthy's thoughts about O'Brien's treatment of combat. All it indicates is that he really wanted to use the word "ferric"—which makes sense, given his own novel's repeated evocation of redness. This is what he came up with:

> They crossed the blackened wood of a burn and they rode through a region of cloven rock where great boulders lay halved with smooth uncentered faces and on the slopes of those ferric grounds old paths of fire and the blackened bones of trees assassinated in the mountain storms.

When you pick "ferric" out of all that you see that it has been cannily used to modify "ground," creating a near-homophone of "fairground"—a neat little double meaning for a novel in which, according to the wicked Judge Holden, "war is the ultimate game." So saith the Judge, but to McCarthy, the ultimate game is language.

But there's deep pleasure, too, in ideas, or maybe more simply in the knowledge of things, from quantum mechanics to the proper way to prepare turtle soup. When you start to think of McCarthy as a kind of dilettante polymath, if such a person is possible, you can relax a little amid all the baroque exordiums about sin and fate. His interests seemed to be inexhaustible. In *The Passenger* there's a peculiar chapter in which a side character explains, apropos of very little, what actually happened in the assassination of John F. Kennedy. (As in Don DeLillo's *Libra*, it was the C.I.A.) If you strain you can find themes that connect this interlude to the rest of the novel—something to do with secret levels of reality—but its true justification is pretty obviously that McCarthy finds it fascinating to contemplate. J.F.K. assassination conspiracies make up an entire esoteric branch of study with numerous competing theories and a rich, bespoke lexicon. Like,

for instance, the history of the American Southwest, it's an autodidact's dream subject.

This roving curiosity is what gives McCarthy's fixation with the apocalypse its emotional heft. The end of the world can only be tragic if you were in love with it to begin with. But in a strange way, Armageddon is in itself fascinating, yet another thing it's fun to put one's mind to. In a rare interview from 2009, McCarthy said that it was a favorite topic for small talk: "I have these conversations with my brother Dennis, and quite often we get around to some hideous end-of-the-world scenario and we always wind up just laughing." Laughter at conception and enjoyment in craft seem to lie at the source of his novels, and can be felt radiating through their darkness. I have no doubt that doomsday was a sincere preoccupation for McCarthy, but I bet he also loved its vocabulary.

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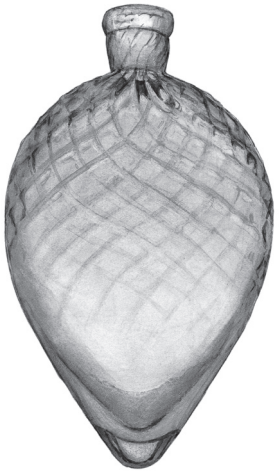
PAUL MARIANI

Of all of Cormac McCarthy's novels, the one I kept coming back to for my class in God and the Imagination, which I taught at Boston College for a decade until my retirement, was *The Road*, that post-apocalyptic novel of a father and his young son as they make their way south to a dead Atlantic Ocean, hoping to find a way to survive in a landscape of hellish desolation, where gangs of deranged survivors roam the desolate highways in search of humans to eat piece by piece, arm by arm, leg by leg, stored in abandoned antebellum cellars as if they were prosciutto di Parma. It's a gray-black world, where ash covers everything, the land, the rivers, the wandering pilgrims themselves. And there's the Interstate, lined now with the charred remains of cars, their passengers mere shriveled corpses. Snow is falling and winter is coming on and the father (nameless, about forty years old) and the son (also nameless, about ten, brought into the world just after the nuclear catastrophe that turned everything to ash) are heading south, sleeping wherever they can, building fires where they won't be seen, to a nameless destination, hoping to find a way to go on living.

The boy's mother gave up years ago, committing suicide to avoid facing rape and cannibalization, and scorning her husband for not doing the same. When



the boy is nearly caught by a cannibal, the father blows the man's brains out, explaining to the boy that God wanted him to protect his son. And when he washes the man's brains out of his boy's hair, he thinks of it as "some ancient anointing" and his son as a golden grail. When there's nothing else, the father has come to see, it is better to "construct ceremonies out of the air and breathe upon them" than to give in to despair. Which I have found is one of McCarthy's signature moves, and which makes a great deal of sense to me. Recall that Cormac McCarthy was raised in a Roman Catholic family, served as an altar boy at Mass, and attended a Catholic high school in Knoxville. Those were his Catholic roots, and they keep appearing throughout his work. Fascinated as he is with the darkness of the human species, signs of hope keep cropping up, and nowhere more than in *The Road*, which he dedicated to his own young son.

In the novel, the father has the task of reassuring his boy that, in spite of the bleak evil everywhere now, somehow things are going to be O.K. It's a mantra he keeps repeating, like some minor prophet, and he constantly affirms what the boy keeps asking:

> We would never eat anyone, would we?
> No, we wouldn't.
> Because we're the good guys, right?
> Yes, we're the good guys.
> And we're carrying the fire, right?
> Yes.

The style is tight, lucid, dramatic, unlike the prose of his earlier novels, especially *Blood Meridian*. And this leaner style works. Less Faulkner this time around, and more Hemingway. In *The Road* McCarthy brings us back to the central questions once again. What, finally, matters now in a post-apocalyptic world, where everything has turned to ash: money, power, education, civilization, a sense of home, even a place in the sun. And we meet the prophet Elijah—Ely—a destitute

man wandering the same road, who tells them there is no God and we are His prophets and there is only death and annihilation to look forward to.

And yet, and yet. And so the father and son travel on, as the father, exhausted and coughing up blood, finally dies. But, as he promised his boy, there is goodness out there somewhere, and in the end (or the beginning?) the boy is taken in by another family. And from time to time, the mother explains that, if the boy finds it hard to talk to God, he can still talk to his father, through whom God lives on.

It's something. A ray of hope, the recalling of the father's spirit—the one who took care of his boy as best he could. In McCarthy's cold, bleak world that continually faces evil and the effects of that evil, a glimmer of light shines through. Which is why I have read and re-read *The Road*, and taught it year after year as time itself unraveled as it will.

Paul Mariani is the University Professor of English emeritus at Boston College. He is the author of twenty books, including biographies of William Carlos Williams, John Berryman, Robert Lowell, Hart Crane, Gerard Manley Hopkins, and Wallace Stevens, as well as nine volumes of poetry.

JOSEPH BOTTUM

By the end of his long career, Cormac McCarthy was an icon—which is a vexation for those who have suffered their way through his work, since icons are more gestured at than quoted, more genuflected at than read.

But how else do we face up to the grim honesty of the man? His novels are awful, in both senses of that over-gnawed-on word. The more one reads, the more awe-inspiring his talent seems. And the more one reads, the more appalling his novels become. You can work your way through Dostoyevsky chronologically, setting down one book and taking up the next. You can consume Kafka seriatim, if you try. But no one ever read McCarthy that way. You'd break down in Chapter Four of his fifth novel, the 1985 *Blood Meridian*, with the description of the "legion of horribles" as they swarm in the desert. "Oh my god, said the sergeant," as he watched. And oh my god, indeed.

The temptation—to which obituary writers and literary journalists, banging out the day's take on the day that the eighty-nine-year-old McCarthy died, nearly all succumbed—is to call McCarthy a nihilist or a pessimist, those dismissals in the mode of praise from the self-congratulatory and self-satisfied. A better take is that McCarthy, the Catholic altar boy from Knoxville, was actually some kind of grim theologian. He knew just how fallen the world is. He just didn't much believe in the redemption of that world. He was half an Saint Augustine, understanding and facing, as few have, the depravity of human beings—and thereby understanding, as few have, the horror to which Christ is the answer. The only part McCarthy didn't accept, or at least fully accept, was the Redeemer part. The world is too broken for him to see how even God could fix it.

Such half-Augustinianism is something literature has seen before. It's the world of King Lear, deliberately set in pre-Christian Britain: a cosmology in which there's justice, perhaps, but no mercy, and affliction does not signal redemption—and so Lear, despite his sufferings, must walk back on stage with his dead daughter in his arms. Oh, he set the whole thing in motion with his foolish attempt to remain a king while giving up the responsibility of actual power, so maybe that's justice, but it sure as hell ain't mercy.

The 1940s had Rebecca West's unbearably brilliant, unbearably grim 1941 travelog *Black Lamb and Grey Falcon*, about an irredeemable Balkans landscape, and E. M. Cioran's bleak philosophical aphorisms in the 1949 *Short History of Decay*, both seeing clearly the vileness in our human bones. But it wouldn't be as surely revisited in literature till Cormac McCarthy came along and decided not to flinch.

That's what gave him his ability to describe violence as just that: violence. Even in *All the Pretty Horses* (1992), his most popular book—and *The Road* (2006), the most hopeful of his later books, if hope is allowed in the nightmare of a post-apocalyptic land—violence is not a symbol or a plot device. It's just the way people are. "You can find meanness in the least of creatures, but when God made man the devil was at his elbow," as an old hermit tells the unnamed kid, the central character, in *Blood Meridian*. There's "an ill-contained horror beneath the surface of the world and there always had been," as he wrote in his last book, *Stella Maris*.

McCarthy's move in 1976 from Tennessee to El Paso gave him something he needed. To start with, it provided a break from the cradle of Southern Gothic that had held him. Reviewers often compared his early books to Faulkner's—which didn't seem to help his sales before *All the Pretty Horses*. But William Faulkner and Flannery O'Connor were not exactly what he needed. If the South was god-haunted, as O'Connor said, he had to find the god-absent. McCarthy had to find the desert.

Partly that was so the theological elements that make unpredictable appearances throughout his

fiction would be not revelations of the ground on which his characters walked but strange and unlikely flashes in the darkness. Even more, the South was too green, too rich, too moist for his fiction. He needed the dryness and the sparseness of the Southwest, even for *The Crossing*, the 1994 follow-up to *All the Pretty Horses* in his Border Trilogy.

And perhaps most of all, he needed the desert to strip away from his prose the presumption of redemption that gave a shape, an overarching design, to English literature. The notion of a time of good men building order in the Old West, and the expectation of the triumph of virtue—held by Sheriff Ed Tom Bell in *No Country for Old Men* (2005)—have to be exposed as delusions. Authority figures in McCarthy's fiction, especially the police, are often corrupt, but even when they aren't, they are incompetent, for a good social order is simply a tale the self-deceived tell themselves—a story we use to console ourselves when we flinch and refuse to see the violent reality of someone like Anton Chigurh, the relentless pursuer in the novel. The event that starts off *No Country for Old Men*, the spark that sets the plot rolling, is an act of mercy. Llewelyn Moss has found nearly two and half million dollars and gotten away clean in the opening pages, until a scruple about a dying man asking for water compels him to return to the scene—and get spotted, putting the hunters on his trail.

Cormac McCarthy gave us Christian fiction, shoving it down our throats. Oh, it's grim, ugly, violent half-Augustinian stuff. But without a watchman turned to the darkness, showing us the world as it is, how could we see that Christ is needed as an answer?

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WILLIAM GIRALDI

In 2018, after Harold Bloom read a piece on Cormac McCarthy in my collection of critical essays, he emailed me a note that contained these lines: "I hope Cormac, whom I find personally benign, reads you on not being influenced by him. He might enjoy it." That *he might enjoy it* was enough to let me know that Harold, usually made happy by my work, was not at all happy now. The phone call that followed was another lecture for me by a man I called Teacher and Mentor. This lecture consisted of the ways in which my own novel, called *Hold the Dark*—a book that couldn't be reviewed without the name "Cormac McCarthy" rearing its divine head every other paragraph—assimilated Melville, Faulkner, and Flannery O'Connor *by way of* McCarthy.

You see, I had forgotten the *by way of* part in my essay. Harold didn't like to see any forgetting of this sloppy sort. He also didn't approve of my contention that my novel owed more to *Heart of Darkness* directly than to any book by McCarthy indirectly. "Dear," he said, "just whom do you think you're reading when you read McCarthy? Conrad is there next to Melville." And when I blundered into saying that the female character in my novel was another Medea, I had to find a chair and listen to all the ways I was wrong about Euripides.

Harold and I didn't disagree about much; Updike and Nabokov were our chief points of dispute. ("Let's not quarrel, dear," he'd say, by which he meant: *You aren't going to win this one*.) But whereas Harold saw McCarthy's outsized abilities and bewitching talents in his masterwork, *Blood Meridian*, as sharing "more profoundly in Melville's debt to Shakespeare" than in McCarthy's own debt to Faulkner, I saw the crucial influence to be Melville's debt to Milton. I've argued elsewhere that *Moby-Dick*'s actual agon, insofar as Ahab is concerned, is not with Shakespeare's Macbeth, Hamlet, and Lear, but with Milton's Satan of *Paradise Lost*, the pure embodiment of poetical insurgence. If that's accurate, then McCarthy's anxiety of influence with Judge Holden in *Blood Meridian* is with Melville by way of Milton. Judge Holden, in his powers of poetical reasoning and in his penchant for theatrical grandstanding, calls up Milton's Satan more than Iago. Holden yearns to vanquish the living in an attempt to live forever himself, an ageless albino vampire for whom the meridian of cosmos and earth must remain bloodied. By blood he dances; by blood he fiddles; by blood his own blood pulses always.

Holden, like Satan, is "self-begot, self-rais'd / By [his] own quick'ning power."

Harold dubbed Judge Holden "the most frightening figure in all of American literature . . . the Will Incarnate." Although Harold never had Gnosticism far from mind when thinking of Will, by his use of "Will" here I take him to mean a grotesquerie of Schopenhauer's Will, the blood-level urging that underpins and animates all among the living. (Whitman: "Urge and urge and urge, / Always the procreant urge of the world.")

Judge Holden, as with Lester Ballard in *Child of God* and the slaughterous, enigmatic, and nameless trio in *Outer Dark,* is a postlapsarian aberration whose evil is Augustinian in that it derives from complete estrangement from God. These characters scratch and stalk through their worlds in a willfulness of doctrinal despair, the soul-killing sin of refusing to acknowledge the grace of God, or even His spiritual existence. God? What God? In *Child of God*, a deputy asks an old man: "You think people was meaner then than they are now?" And the old man answers: "No . . . I don't. I think people are the same from the day God first made one." And on that day God first made one, He made him berserk. What else to expect from a deity Himself berserk?

Judge Holden and the berserkers in *Outer Dark* are hell-bent on their own demonic apotheosis. But Lester Ballard is in some ways more terrifying than Judge Holden or the trio in *Outer Dark*. Holden is a demoniac theologian and raconteur, a malefic Übermensch with the sophistications of logic, and the trio in *Outer Dark* are male Eumenides dispensing judgement in the American night, whereas Ballard is a smear of sinister impotence. Holden adheres to a code of blood, and the male Eumenides of *Outer Dark* are avengers for the sins of men, whereas Ballard is blind diabolism, terrifying precisely because all logic has been lost to him.

If Holden is more murderous, a walking calamity in search of ruin and woe, at least he speaks, and through speech as accomplished as his is the possibility of comprehension, if only a comprehension of our own destruction. (Holden himself, remember, is beyond destruction; when he again meets "the kid" at the end of the novel, twenty-eight years after their maniacal scalping raids, he has not aged a day.) The male Eumenides are nameless just as "Yahweh" unhelpfully means "I am" or "I will be," and there is some comprehension to be grasped for there—all of Judeo-Christian belief is a veritable grasping after the unknowable (and Harold would wince at that hyphenated term, so separate were they to him). But with Ballard there is no possibility of grasping at all, and so no hope of comprehension. You must take his depravity for what it is: inexplicable, utterly unable to be reduced to psycho-spiritual assessment. McCarthy knows his pedigree; there is no psychology in Homer and Virgil; there are only the gut-born deeds of gods and men and their repercussions. After orgies of slaughter, men sit down to their wine and their meat and wake at dawn to do it all again.

Blood Meridian is a horrifying vision from John of Patmos, an apocalypse whose Manicheanism has lost its good, its light, its love, and nosedived into a fearsome, darksome red of their opposites. Judge Holden is one horseman made of four: War, Death, Conquest, Famine (or, alternately, in Ezekiel: Sword, Famine, Beast, and Plague). The story's butchery is unequaled except in Homer—recall Achilles at the River Scamander, the undulating water supplanted by the bodies and blood of the Trojans he massacred. I once described *Blood Meridian* as "an unholy and antinomian masterwork engined by all those otherworldly sentences," and I'll stick by that. In 1992, a profiler of McCarthy for the *New York Times* labeled McCarthy's work "morbid realism," which misses the point somewhat on purpose. It is, rather, the realistic morbidity of myth.

So many of McCarthy's people are dispossessed almost by choice and disembodied from what passes for civilization. Anton Chigurh in *No Country for Old Men*, referred to in the novel as "a psychopathic killer" and "a goddamn psychopath," is more fittingly a sociopath denuded of conscience, an untethered persona of perfect malaise, and does not even pretend that the world contains or has ever contained a moral order (Judge

Holden declares: "Moral law is an invention of mankind for the disenfranchisement of the powerful in favor of the weak"). Lester Ballard in *Child of God* is a deadened demiurge who communes with the wholly dead just as the rest of us commune with the partial living. Our civilization is such that living is not living, but earning, getting, having, and McCarthy's fiction has no nexus to what you and I know to be society. His fiction proclaims society more than irrelevant; his fiction proclaims it nonexistent. In *The Road*—whose style might be described as Revelation written by Hemingway—society has been made literally nonexistent, replaced by disconnected, unseen isolatoes with no way home. What home? The apocalypse has vanquished all sense of it.

Here are extraordinary lines by McCarthy in the *New York Times* profile of 1992:

> There's no such thing as life without bloodshed. I think the notion that the species can be improved in some way, that everyone could live in harmony, is really a dangerous idea. Those who are afflicted with this notion are the first ones to give up their souls, their freedom. Your desire that it be that way will enslave you and make your life vacuous.

McCarthy means that every utopian effort ends at Auschwitz, in Mao's Great Famine, in Stalin's *Dekulakization*. But by the above lines you see why McCarthy's work has too often been mistakenly tagged *nihilistic*. The tag is depthless, just as it's always been depthless to tag Nietzsche *nihilistic* (and Nietzsche is more present in McCarthy than has been noticed). Neither *Suttree* nor the *Border Trilogy*—a real contender for the laurel of Great American Novel—moves or concludes in the nihilistic night. Brotherhood, loyalty, community, enchantment, Emersonian self-reliance, the possibility of deliverance: these are some of what we encounter in those novels.

McCarthy must have grown exhausted by the incessant Faulkner comparisons, especially with his first several books, and most especially with *Suttree* (which stands alone among McCarthy's works for its humor and relative mildness). Orville Prescott, reviewing *The Orchard Keeper*, McCarthy's first novel, in the *New York Times*, titled that piece "Still Another Disciple of William Faulkner." It pays to remember what Walker Percy said of writers who attempt to co-opt Mississippi's Shakespeare: "There is nothing more feckless than imitating an eccentric." And McCarthy, I hope it goes without saying, was constitutionally incapable of fecklessness. He told the author of the *Times* profile that "books are made out of books. The novel depends for its life on the novels that have been written," and that of course includes Faulkner's novels. (And you see Harold's liking for McCarthy's method and aesthetic, which tap deeply into the anxiety of influence.) No one questions whether or not Faulkner had decisive effects on McCarthy's storytelling sensibility or on the particular pitch of his syntax, but I want to point out that the books from which Faulkner made his own books were also on McCarthy's shelf. Harold wouldn't approve of this, but the anxiety of influence is a complex tapestry that resists unweaving. When McCarthy assimilated Faulkner he was also hard at work assimilating what Faulkner had assimilated: not only Homer and Virgil, but the Bible and Shakespeare, Dante and Milton and Melville especially.

Harold will never read McCarthy's final two novels, *The Passenger* and *Stella Maris*—Harold died in 2019, aged eighty-nine, the same age as McCarthy at his death on June 13 of this year—but I think I know what he'd say about them: "If there is a pragmatic tradition of the American sublime, then Cormac McCarthy's fictions are its culmination." Not a bad epitaph, and all the more so because it's true.

William Giraldi is author of the novels Busy Monsters, Hold the Dark *(a Netflix feature film), and* About Face, *the memoir* The Hero's Body, *and a collection of literary criticism,* American Audacity.

ARTS AND LETTERS

A HUGE LAUGH

MEL BROOKS: DISOBEDIENT JEW
Jeremy Dauber
Yale University Press
pp. 216, $26.00

BY JOSEPH EPSTEIN

Mel Brooks has claimed that his true interest is "reality." By reality I take him to mean the truth that lies behind social customs, false norms, everyday etiquette. Reality in this reading means what we really think and feel, not what we are supposed to think and feel. The first stage of reality, in Brooks's interpretation, turns out to be the rejection of good taste. Jeremy Dauber, in his recent study of Mel Brooks, a volume in the Yale University Press series of Jewish lives, refers to Brooks as the "poète maudit of bad taste."

As for that bad taste, a brief sample is on display when, in 2001, at the outset of an interview with Mike Wallace on *Sixty Minutes*, Brooks asks Wallace, "Is that a hundred-dollar watch?" When Wallace tells him it's a forty-dollar watch, Brooks replies, "What a cheap son of a bitch you are." After a brief pause, he next asks Wallace, "What did you pay for your jacket?" and they are off. The bad taste of these questions is redoubled by the fact of Brooks being a Jew, a people, as the stereotype has it, obsessed by money. But, then, in the realm of bad taste, Mel Brooks, in his movie *Blazing Saddles*, may go down in history as the man who brought flatulence to the big screen.

Born Melvin Kaminsky in Brooklyn in 1926, to parents of Russian–Ukrainian–Jewish heritage, Brooks later took up an abbreviated version of his mother's maiden name of Brookman. (Another notable Kaminsky, though no relation, was David Daniel Kaminisky, later Danny Kaye.) His father died of tuberculosis when Mel Brooks was two-and-a-half years old. He had three older brothers. He was small, and soon discovered the best guard against being bullied was creating laughter that brought defenders to his side. During the Great Depression, Brooks found movies a great solace and took especial pleasure in those of Charlie Chaplin, the Marx Brothers, and Buster Keaton. A boyhood friend was the brother of the great drummer Buddy Rich, and to become a drummer was Brooks's first ambition. Most people in his extended family worked in the garment district. Not him. At the age of nine, he reports in his autobiography, *All About Me*, he told an uncle that "I am going into show business and nothing will stop me!"

The Jewish resorts in the Catskills, also known as the Borscht Belt, that great training ground for comedians, were where Brooks, like so many other comedians—among them Henny Youngman, Jackie Vernon, Mickey Katz, Myron Cohen, Jackie Mason—learned his trade. Playing to tough audiences, in the role of tummler, which Brooks defined as "a resident offstage entertainer, mostly after lunch," Brooks learned early to pull out all stops. One of his schticks was to stand on the edge of a diving board, in a derby and alpaca coat, toting two cardboard suitcases loaded with rocks, crying out: "Business is no good. I don't wanna live!" and then jump into the pool. "It always got a huge laugh," he writes. Throughout his life huge laughs were, for Mel Brooks, the point of his being, the name of the game.

Brooks, a New Yorker and Jewish, incorporated in his manner and style both the brashness of the former and the point of view of the latter. The brashness of the New Yorker is perhaps best

captured by the old joke that has a Hoosier, on the second day of his visit to New York, stop a New Yorker on the street and ask, "Can you tell me how to get to the Statue of Liberty, or would you prefer I go screw myself?" The Jewish point of view is best incorporated not by any single statement of Brooks, but by my mother when driving me as a boy around Chicago and pointing out the city's restricted (for Jews) neighborhoods. "It's restricted," she would say, her voice implying how unjust this was yet also suggesting sentiments along the lines of "Who in any case would want to live among such dreary people."

Brooks's movies are liberally sprinkled with Yiddishisms. In *Blazing Saddles*, Madeline Kahn plays Lili Von Shtupp; in *Men in Tights*, Sir Robin of Loxley marries Maid Marian of Bagelle, forming the combination, of course, of lox and bagels. The word "putz" comes up; so, too, schvartze. You don't have to be Jewish to enjoy Mel Brooks's movies, but it helps.

Remarking on Brooks's Jewishness, Dauber, who is a professor of Jewish literature and American studies at Columbia, notes that "Jewishness provided the roots of Brooks's comedy. . . . It helped him to look backward, for his source material and otherwise, and to look forward, to stardom and artistic success—just as historical longing and utopian optimism have always been the stalwart poles of not just Jewish comedy, but Jewish identity." Brooks's own well-known definition of comedy has it that "tragedy is when I cut my finger . . . comedy is when you fall into an open sewer and die."

Dauber is excellent on the rise of Jewish comedy in this country from the 1950s on. A key figure was Sid Caesar, on whose writing staff Mel Brooks worked, who broadened and raised the consciousness of comedy generally. Mike Nichols and Elaine May were significant figures, as Woody Allen and Jerry Seinfeld would later be. Dauber tosses the Philip Roth of *Portnoy's Complaint* into the mix. "Comedy is," Dauber writes, "either about recognizing the familiar—the basis of all observational comedy . . . or cutting the epic, the pretentious, the unselfconscious down to size." The Jewish comedians gave twentieth-century comedy their own spin. In Mel Brooks's case he added what Martin Scorsese, when presenting him with the American Film Institute Life Achievement Award, called his "uniquely manic sensibility."

Two items in Brooks's early career were the making of him: his job on Sid Caesar's staff and his later work with Carl Reiner on his comic skit *The 2000 Year Old Man*. The latter began as a bit the two men did at parties. Everyone who heard it was knocked out by it; many begged them to record it, which of course they eventually did, in four different recordings. Cary Grant is supposed to have bought scores of copies. What *The 2000 Year Old Man* shows, along with a highly amusing comic idea, is Brooks's genius for on-the-spot improvisation. The recording also took Brooks out from the wings as a writer for other men's performances and established him as a comedian in his own right. "This was a turning point for Mel," Reiner said. "It gave him an identity as a performer for the first time."

Brooks's true breakthrough came through five movies, most of which were made in the Seventies: *The Producers*, *Blazing Saddles*, *Young Frankenstein*, *Silent Movie*, and *High Anxiety*. (In 1970 he also wrote and directed *The Twelve Chairs*, based on a Soviet novel by Ilya Ilf and Evgeny Petrov, which was an outright flop.) These movies brought him fame and fortune, and an endless array of awards, beginning with an Oscar in 1968 for the best original screenplay for *The Producers*. He was well on his way to achieving his ultimate ambition to be regarded as the world's funniest man.

Laughter was always Mel Brooks's goal—the sentence "It got a huge laugh" recurs throughout his autobiography—and in his movies farce was his means of attaining it. Farce has its fascination, but also its limitations. "Farce does not compromise, neither is it kind," wrote Irving Howe. "It hits below the belt. It flattens out the refinements that sensitive people value. It is a sort of fart among genres. It levels us all to an ultimate equality: man on his ass. There are few metaphysical consolations or ennobling ends in farce, certainly nothing like those we impute to comedy; there is only the putdown or the social demolition which gleefully levels the world. . . . Farce brings pleasure through humiliation—knock him down, throw him into the water, hit him again. And then, a sort of magical cancellation: Fatty Arbuckle gets

up, blinking with good humor, and the world is restored."

If his movies are ultimately farcical, farce in the form of parody, he, Brooks, insisted they were also made out of love for the genres he was parodying: the western in *Blazing Saddles*, the horror movie in *Young Frankenstein*, the Chaplin–Keaton–Lloyd era in *Silent Movie*, Alfred Hitchcock in *High Anxiety*. "I was satirizing specific genres," he wrote, "but I was also paying tribute to them at the same time."

Brooks also used his movies to attack the prejudices of his day. At the heart of *Blazing Saddles* is the fierce attack on racism. In his movie *History of the World: Part I*, he goes after anti-Semitism, in one portion doing a Busby Berkeley–like number on the Spanish Inquisition in which he sings and dances the lead part of Torquemada. The crudities of capitalism, with its love of money over art and love itself, is everywhere mocked. "Comedy," he wrote in his autobiography, "brings religious persecutors, dictators, and tyrants to their knees faster than any other weapon." Many of the things Brooks does in these movies might not, under the reign of political correctness, be allowed today.

The comparison is often made between the comedy in the movies of Mel Brooks and in those of Woody Allen. In photographs Brooks is often laughing; I have never seen Allen smile. Woody Allen's humor is of course subtler, more introverted, much of it about Allen himself. Brooks sought a wider public. Dauber quotes Gene Wilder, who played key roles in some of Brooks's movies, remarking: "What Mel wants is to set off atomic bombs of laughter." Brooks himself noted: "I went into show business to make a noise, to *pronounce myself*. I want to make the loudest noise to most people. If I can't do that, I'm not going to make a quiet, exquisite noise for a cabal of cognoscenti." The name Woody Allen isn't mentioned here, but clearly it is Allen to whom Brooks is comparing himself. I myself prefer the quieter humor in the films of Woody Allen, whom I much admired until he officially became a genius.

Still, one has to admire the amplitude of Mel Brooks's talent. He was able to make movies that went against the grain of their day. He not only produced but wrote and directed these movies, composing some of the music and lyrics that were central to them. In later years, he began his own production company, Brooksfilms. He perfected the art of the comic talk-show television interview.

In a 1976 review of *Silent Movie*, Roger Ebert wrote that "Mel Brooks will do anything for a laugh. Anything. He has no shame. He's an anarchist; his movies inhabit a universe in which everything is possible and the outrageous is probable." Ebert added that the movie "made me laugh a lot." Mel Brooks is now ninety-seven, and one likes to think of him still laughing and continuing to dream up what for the rest of us will be, in his words—yes, you will have guessed it—yet another huge laugh.

Joseph Epstein's latest book is The Novel, Who Needs It?

NOT THERE TO SHIELD YOU

MACBETH
Giuseppe Verdi
Canadian Opera Company
April 28–May 20, 2023

BY JANE STANNUS

"'What's Verdi got to do with it?' Peppone interrupted. 'Verdi's no artist; he's just a man with a heart as big as this—'

"And he threw out his arms so eloquently that they cut a wide swathe all around him. Don Camillo wasn't agile enough to get out of the way, and received a blow in the stomach. But out of respect for Verdi he said nothing."

So concludes Giovanni Guareschi's short story "A Country Priest's Diary," from *Don Camillo's Dilemma*, wherein Don Camillo and Peppone join forces to regain for their village the honor due to the birthplace of Giosue Scozza, (fictional) composer. The town of Torricella, their hereditary rival, has always claimed Scozza for its own. But one day Don Camillo unearths a seventeenth-century diary

with incontrovertible evidence that Scozza is not, as per the locally loathed periphrasis, "the swan of Torricella," but was born in their very own village, departing with his family to Torricella at the advanced age of three.

Torricella folds like a cheap suit before the proof. A successful negotiation to repatriate Scozza's expensive marble monument ensues, and Peppone brings an orchestra from the city to celebrate with a twelve-piece program by the long-lost son of the parish. But the musicians have barely completed the third selection when the crowd begins to shout, "Verdi! Verdi!" And Verdi takes over the program, to universal rejoicing.

As the evening winds down, Don Camillo and others attempt to resolve the tension between village loyalty to Scozza and village preference for Verdi, when Peppone cuts in with, "What's Verdi got to do with it?" He means that the two can't be compared. Verdi is not to be ranked with artists who require background and analysis to be understood, for Verdi speaks in the language of the heart.

Doubtless many qualified professionals would beg to differ, or at least offer nuance! But after attending a recent performance of Verdi's *Macbeth* by the Canadian Opera Company, this (unqualified) writer believes Peppone is onto something.

Macbeth is one of the bleakest tales in English literature, and the ubiquitous Sir David McVicar, whose opera productions have been darkening stages from the Met to the Royal Opera for decades, played up the gothic effects, using black and gray sets, gruesome props, and three off-kilter witch children to build an alienating and disturbing atmosphere. The opera was set in the Victorian period, and the costumes offered little relief to the eye: Lady Macbeth wore severely cut dresses; Macbeth, Banquo ,and Malcolm were in nearly identical dark uniforms; and the large chorus of witches were in gray. (Instead of Shakespeare's three individual witches, Verdi divides a large chorus of women into three musical parts; McVicar's three silent witch children were a nod to the Shakespearean characters.)

Much of the action took place in a ruined chapel that switched directions during scene changes, sometimes with the pews facing the audience, sometimes facing away from the audience towards a stark black altar with what appeared to be a Bible placed open in the middle (which Banquo's murderers would flip through later on, searching for sections they didn't like and tearing them out). "Fair is foul, and foul is fair"—but there wasn't much fair about McVicar's vision.

And yet in a tour de force, the kind of thing that only happens once in a blue moon, the musicians, singers and orchestra, broke free from McVicar's vision and simply gave the audience Verdi. Where McVicar seemed determined to disturb and darken, Verdi's music soared with beauty and pathos. Lady Macbeth (Alexandrina Pendatchanska) refused to be the de-humanized psychopath the sets seemed designed for; instead, she was charming, determined, manipulative, and wicked, at one moment ruthless, at another wracked by suppressed guilt, especially in her sleepwalking scene with its famous aria *Una macchia è qui tuttora*, "Out, out, damned spot. . . ."

Macbeth (Quinn Kelsey) sang magnificently, his voice changing across his character arc—warm but weak at first, anxious to earn his wife's admiration; then groggy, his mind clouded by unresisted temptation, in *Mi si affaccia un pugnal!* "Is this a dagger that I see before me?" with a trailing, effective emphasis on the line "You lead me down the unclear path of my intentions . . ." as he stumbles blindly

after a dagger carried by one of the witch children. From the discovery of the murder to the end his voice gradually hardens in keeping with his increasing brutality.

Although the production intended to present a cold and alien universe, both Macbeth and his wife are entirely human, compelling empathy even as their misdeeds degrade their personalities. They were supported by Speranza Scappucci, an Italian conductor with an easy command of both orchestra and chorus. Perhaps the finest musical moment was towards the end of Act 1, the duet between a bloody-handed Macbeth and his wife after the king's murder, beginning *Fatal mia donna.* The section is about ten minutes long, and it is both sung and played almost entirely *con voce repressa* or *sotto voce*—essentially in a whisper—which requires great technical discipline from both singers and orchestra. The story goes that in the original production, Verdi had his two leads

rehearse this scene one hundred fifty times, and then once more—to their fury—on opening night. The effect is one of overwhelming horror at what has been done, mingled with building suspense as the moment of discovery approaches. Macbeth describes how, as he crept away from the King's room, he heard the courtiers praying in their sleep, "God be with us always," and he wanted to say "Amen," but could not. *Perché, perché,* he repeats over and over, in an incredibly beautiful moment of the duet: why, why, could he not say "Amen"? The beauty of the music and the truth of the vignette float lightly around him like a proffered grace of repentance—but he does not answer his own question, and the moment passes.

One got the sense that McVicar wanted to play up the ugliness and shock value of evil while isolating it in a kind of petri dish onstage, letting the audience look at it for entertainment but keeping it at a safe, clinical distance. But Verdi's music is designed to do the exact opposite. Aided by the excellence and chemistry of the performers, McVicar was, like poor Giosue Scozza, outclassed.

Verdi leads the spectator down the pathway of weakness, to the moment of crisis, to the horror of unrepented guilt and through evil's destructive consequences. It is a deeply personal journey in the sense that each spectator will relate differently to the inner struggle between good and evil. But Verdi also points to the universal impact of sin on society. Strangely—and no doubt accidentally—McVicar's staging hinted at a parallel between Macbeth's murder of innocents and our own state-sanctioned murders, especially of the unborn.

A gory prop in the witches' scenes represents a stillborn infant, the "bloodstained child" that prophesies to Macbeth that no man born of woman can harm him. Once that visual appears, the agonizing guilt of having "murdered sleep" takes on new associations. Then a strange bit of silent acting brings a small white box, like a baby's coffin, on stage. The three witch children peer inside and, unexpectedly humanized for a brief moment, run away lamenting. Is the box intended to represent the burial of Macbeth's cherished hopes? In any case, the image of tragic infant death is inescapable.

After that, the famous chorus *Patria oppressa,* bemoaning the oppression of the homeland, becomes doubly poignant: "We cannot give you the sweet name of motherland, now that you have become a tomb for your sons. . . . At each new dawn a cry goes up to outrage heaven." The country ruled by murderous tyrants slays those it ought to protect, both in fact and fiction. There was palpable tension in the audience during this scene, and its aria, movingly sung by Macduff (Matthew Cairns), was met with thunderous applause: *Ah, la paterna mano*, expressing the grief of a parent who could not protect his children from violent death: "A father's hand was not there to shield you, my dear ones."

"The heart has its reasons of which reason knows nothing," Pascal tells us—not in justification of sentimentalism, but to describe the heart's unique role in movement towards good and against evil. In *Macbeth*, Verdi gives a powerful lesson on how the heart should react to evil—an attitude adopted by the musicians themselves in the teeth of a tediously dehumanizing production. McVicar may be an artist, but Verdi is a man with a heart as big as *this*.

Jane Stannus is a contributor to the Spectator, *the* Critic, *the* Telegraph, *and other publications.*

NO HANDS

ON THE MARBLE CLIFFS
Ernst Jünger
trans. Tess Lewis
New York Review Books,
pp. 144, $14.95

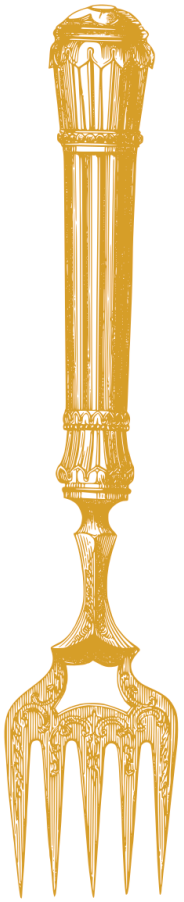
APPROACHES: DRUGS AND ALTERED STATES
Ernst Jünger
trans. Thomas Friese,
ed. Russell A. Berman
Telos, pp. 406, $29.95

BY JASPREET SINGH BOPARAI

Ernst Jünger suffered the misfortune of becoming renowned as a major literary figure in his mid-twenties, and spent the better part of three-quarters of a century doing little other than reading, writing, and thinking, even when he was an army officer in Paris during the Second World War. Jünger's work bears not a few unmistakeable characteristics of second-rate literature. As a writer of prose, Jünger tends to be humorless, self-absorbed, and derivative; his books often seem to have been made out of other books; he expects his readers to have read all his previous work, and know it well; in general he makes outrageous demands on the time, patience, and attention spans of his audience. Worst of all are certain of the mannered "artistic" effects and "literary" flourishes and a pretentiously "intellectual" air. He is a terrible showoff, yet seems reticent to reveal anything of his personal life or emotional experience: he is too concerned with presenting a carefully constructed image of himself.

Despite all this, Jünger managed, against the odds, to write a few first-rate books; at least two may justly be considered masterpieces. Even his worst prose can be perceptive, insightful, and fiercely intelligent. True, he did not always know how to digest his literary or philosophical influences. But he understood how to combine them in unpredictable ways, and generate interesting discussions that others could pick up and run with; his work is unusually provocative in this respect. Jünger lived many lives: he was a war hero, adventurer ,and world-traveler who was also comfortable as a sedentary café intellectual. As he aged he developed self-consciously into a sort of warrior-mystic who flirted with religion as well as psychedelic drugs. His enthusiasts have never quite known what to make of his half-century-long dance with Christianity, which ended with his being received into the Catholic Church at the age of one hundred and one, a little under a year and a half before his death.

There is no English writer quite like Jünger, who seems in some ways like a cross between Patrick Leigh Fermor and Cyril Connolly, combining Fermor's soldierly bravado and panache with Connolly's Francophilia and self-absorption. Also, both writers' lack of formal discipline in organizing their material has something in common with Jünger's anti-classical approach to literary structure. But Jünger is far deeper a thinker than either; his oeuvre is serious and often solemn as no good English writer's could hope to be. Perhaps only the German literary tradition can accommodate Jünger's peculiar combination of poetic aspiration and philosophical ambition, which have begun to attract increasing interest, thanks in no small part to Telos Press and now the New York Review Books Classics series.



For almost a century, Jünger's name has been associated with fascism and related political movements. Perhaps the best exploration of Jünger's relationship with these matters in general is Elliot Neaman's study *A Dubious Past: Ernst Jünger and the Politics of Literature after Nazism.* His precise views are difficult to discern: Jünger was a slippery character, to say the least. He certainly *seemed* like a fascist, and was close to a number of openly fascist intellectuals; yet he also cultivated friendships with communist intellectuals and other such figures who ought to have been his enemies, most famously Brecht. For the most part, Jünger studiously kept his distance from day-to-day political issues; he preferred to live in an atmosphere where poetry, philosophy, and myth become indistinguishable from spiritual matters. Of course, to have your head in those particular clouds is often the mark of a fascist. There were few obvious liberals among his friends.

Jünger stayed aloof from Nazi leaders, who in any case tended to view him with suspicion, from the late 1920s onwards. He returned the favor, and regarded National Socialism with fastidious disdain, partly on doctrinal and philosophical grounds, but mainly out of aesthetic distaste: he thought the Nazis coarse, vulgar, and brutal. Yet Hitler is known to have admired him, and even protected him from other Nazis. Jünger did not reciprocate, and indeed was implicated in the famous Stauffenberg plot to assassinate Hitler. But the authorities could pin nothing on him. Nobody ever could. Jünger's friend Jean Cocteau, who was himself never free of suspicion with respect to his conduct in German-occupied Paris, famously remarked: "Some people had dirty hands, some had clean hands, but Jünger had no hands."

Jünger was born in Heidelberg on March 29, 1895, the eldest of six children. An indifferent student, he was at once dreamy and rebellious. In 1911 he joined the Wandervogel, a nationalist youth movement devoted to traditional folk songs and long hikes through ancient forests. It would be misleading to compare this group to the Boy Scouts: the Wandervogel was inspired more by the legendary "wandering scholars" of the Middle Ages, or by Romantic-era perceptions of them. Amid the camaraderie of the group, Jünger developed a taste for a more independent sort of adventure; at seventeen he ran away from boarding school to join the French Foreign Legion. His adventures in northern Africa were anticlimactic: he tried to desert from training camp, was captured, and narrowly avoided being raped by a group of mercenaries. In the end he was discharged through the intervention of his father and the German Foreign Ministry. His secretly proud

father insisted that he be photographed in uniform before coming home, and promised to send him on a mountaineering expedition in Tanzania if he finished school. But then the Great War broke out.

Jünger volunteered for the army as soon as he could. He was wounded in battle fourteen times, and earned decorations including the *Pour le Mérite*, the German Army's highest honor. He was not merely courageous, but completely unflappable under fire. And the war was the making of Jünger as a writer. He kept extensive diaries and found time for amateur entomological studies as well as extensive unsystematic reading. In addition to the usual Nietzsche and Schopenhauer, he immersed himself in Lord Byron's hilariously anti-heroic *Don Juan*, and the comical epic poetry of Ludovico Ariosto. After the war ended, Jünger continued to serve as a soldier while working on his first book, *Storm of Steel*, a vivid memoir of his experiences in battle. It made him nationally famous.

Storm of Steel may be the finest literary memoir of the Great War in any language. Throughout there are grim, shocking depictions, not merely of battlefield death and maimed bodies, but the sheer exhaustion, monotony, and discomfort of trench warfare. Soldiers console themselves with little pleasures: hot coffee, good food, cigarettes, card games, alcohol, jokes, bizarre pranks, newspapers, letters to and from home, the occasional flirtation or brothel visit, and (above all) sleep—where they can find it. But their greatest single pleasure turns out to be the exhilaration of war itself.

Unlike the most prominent English war poets and memoirists, Jünger was neither disillusioned by his experiences nor transformed into a pacificist. He found battle thrilling, even in its anti-chivalrous modern form. To him, war was an inescapable condition of life. The Prussian military theorist Carl von Clausewitz conceived of war as "an act of force to compel our enemy to do our will," or "merely the continuation of policy with other means." Jünger's vision was darker: he saw war, like death, as an inescapable reality of life.

Jünger developed his ideas on modern warfare and military problems in a series of technical articles and treatises, as well as philosophical essays and short books. Indeed, he spent most of the 1920s and 1930s trying to make sense of his experience. After leaving the army, he tried studying biology, zoology, botany, and philosophy, but was too intellectually restless for university life. He was developing greater ambitions.

It was these ambitions and the literary gifts with which he pursued them that would make Jünger one of the key figures in the so-called "Conservative Revolution," a movement that began in the wake of Germany's defeat in the First World War and collapsed after Hitler's rise to power. His work makes little sense outside of this peculiar context, which itself makes little sense except to those who have studied it for a long time. Received opinion suggests that the "Conservative Revolutionaries" were far-right intellectuals who cynically tried to exploit the Nazis for their own ends, but underestimated them catastrophically and were wiped out as a result. There is some truth to this; but the movement is (like Jünger's own views) difficult to define or elucidate, and might best be thought of as a loose, vague, generally ill-coordinated nationalist intellectual movement united (more or less) by opposition to communism, socialism, liberalism, and democracy, as well as a vague sympathy with Nietzsche. Implicitly or explicitly, Conservative Revolutionaries tended to turn their back on Christianity, except insofar as the institutional Church retained some practical or expedient value in their eyes.

The best introduction to this milieu is Thomas Mann's *Reflections of a NonPolitical Man*, published in 1918, though it is undoubtedly Mann's worst book. It reveals the inability even of a great writer to orient himself in the chaos that emerged from the First World War. Mann did not participate in any fighting, yet seems to have composed his *Reflections* amidst the "fog of war." As this book makes clear, he thought of himself as a "Conservative Revolutionary" for some time, without having a coherent idea of what the description entailed, beyond a potentially amusing superficial paradox. *Reflections* is an attempt at political philosophy by a man who could not write a straightforward expository essay if his life depended on it. But the tangle of reactionary romanticism, monarchist nostalgia, confused

sentiments, hysterical melancholy, and intellectual vanity that resulted in this inchoate mass of ill-digested, poorly organised ideas is the same emotionally charged mixture that led Mann to compose his greatest novel *The Magic Mountain*, as well as "Mario and the Magician," which remains the single most brilliant exercise in anti-fascist propaganda of the twentieth century.

Mann wrestled for almost a decade with one of the central dilemmas of the Conservative Revolution: how can you maintain reactionary aesthetic tastes and a generally conservative disposition in a world where these make no sense as a survival strategy, either for yourself or civilization? Mann wanted to preserve the stability, hierarchy, and comfort of the liberal-bourgeois society in which he was raised, but was unwilling to get his hands dirty fighting for it: he understood that this would involve compromising his fundamentally liberal principles. In the end he settled grudgingly for American-style liberal democracy as a vision of society that enabled him to live more or less guiltlessly with himself.

Jünger took a different path. His first attempt at fiction, *Sturm*, was published in April 1923. This novella is manifestly the work of a talented writer; but it lacks focus and artistic confidence. The main narrative conflict in *Sturm* is really the author's struggle to discover a means of recording his emotional experience of battle, and insert it in some sort of broader context where it has more than a merely personal significance. There is even a scene where the protagonist reads out his own writing to other literary-minded soldiers.

When he wrote *Sturm*, Jünger did not yet understand how to select or organize his insights; many of his ruminations in this novella resist being transformed into literary art. Also, like so many autodidacts, he lacked critical and emotional distance from the books he enjoyed reading, and could not always decide whether to discuss them at length or simply get on with telling his own story. Or was he even meant to be telling stories in the first place? Jünger was unable to discern whether he was an essayist, a novelist, a philosopher, or a prose-poet, and searched tirelessly for a suitable literary form.

Prose-poetry turned out to be another false start. *The Adventurous Heart* amounts to one of Jünger's bolder artistic errors. Although he was friendly with many German Expressionists, and adopted some of their techniques in *Storm of Steel*, he was more deeply influenced by French writers, not least Charles Baudelaire, particularly his prose poems. But he felt closer spiritually to the much wilder Arthur Rimbaud, who abandoned poetry at the age of twenty to become an arms dealer in Ethiopia. He was also interested in the eccentric "décadent" writers of the late nineteenth century, not least Joris-Karl Huysmans, the bachelor aesthete who flirted with Satanism before embracing ascetic Catholicism, and Léon Bloy, whose sincere devotion to the Church was often overshadowed by colorful temper tantrums.

What led Jünger astray in *The Adventurous Heart* was his interest in the Surrealists, particularly Louis Aragon, whose bizarre *Paysan de Paris* inspired Walter Benjamin to devote most of the last dozen years of his life to an insanely ambitious cultural history of nineteenth-century Parisian shopping malls. *The Adventurous Heart* is a series of seemingly unconnected short fragments, some of which are scientific in origin, but most of which feel like attempts to record memories of dreams, or half-conscious thoughts at dawn. Amid all the memories, perceptions, fantasies, and enigmatic anecdotes are gnomic utterances and hard-to-interpret allegories; the enigmas are generally impenetrable. Some of the imagery is arrestingly violent; yet Jünger's language is never less than cool, matter-of-fact, and emotionally disengaged. But what is the point of all this?

Jünger's personality and talents were unsuited to Surrealism, which is rooted not merely in zany randomness but in a rigidly materialist metaphysical position that could not accommodate Jünger's mysticism. Surrealist theory of the 1920s is often far more interesting than Surrealist art or literature because its basic premises are impossible to reconcile with one another. Also, Jünger's hierarchical, elitist, aristocratic vision of humanity could never be made to cohere with the egalitarian assumptions behind the Surrealist view of creativity and imagination.

The prose poems of *The Adventurous Heart* have their admirers, including the Swiss chemist Albert Hofmann, who first synthesised the psychedelic drug lysergic acid diethylamide (L.S.D.), and befriended Jünger in 1947 with a fan letter. Otherwise, Jünger was more successful as a philosophical essayist. His pamphlet *On Pain* was published in English by Telos Press in 2008; this is as good an introduction as any to this facet of his oeuvre.

Jünger's approach to philosophy is unsystematic. His work is often perceptive, and sometimes brilliantly insightful, but always erratic and undisciplined, and is best treated as a series of starting points to longer discussions. It takes some effort to transform Jünger's instinctive, sensitive meditations into something like a coherent set of propositions. Martin Heidegger thought that Jünger's ambitious volume *The Worker: Dominion and Form* was worthy of close study and annotation; he even held seminars on it at the University of Freiburg during the 1930s. But Jünger was

better suited to writing about his own experience, and transforming it into mythological symbols.

Jünger's experiments with journal-writing were better suited to his temperament: this literary form allowed him to combine guarded notes on his personal impressions with reflections on his reading, and meditations on his intellectual and social life, interspersed with random fragments of dream-images, and gnomic utterances that could be dropped in passing from time to time like *bons mots* at a dinner party. Jünger reveals less of himself in his journals than any other writer of his stature.

A German Officer in Occupied Paris: The War Journals 1941–1945 is the only English-language volume currently available of Jünger's journals. As an introduction to his work, it is far from ideal. Even as historical documents these journals are of limited value. Of course, Jünger was always concerned not merely with the judgement of posterity but also with the German censors of his time (he himself was working as a censor when he wrote these journals); but we are less interested in dry gossip about half-forgotten literary figures, or the fact that Jünger read the Bible cover to cover twice during the war, and more intrigued by the fact that he spent July 20, 1944, looking for butterflies in the woods around Saint-Cloud outside Paris, while his friend Colonel von Stauffenberg was carrying out his assassination attempt against Hitler.

With his 1939 novella *On the Marble Cliffs*, Jünger finally found a literary form that suited his talents. *On the Marble Cliffs* is a rich, poetic, allegorical dream-vision of the political turmoil of the 1930s that combines elements of self-mythologizing autobiography and Romantic fantasy. The narrator is a natural scientist who lives in seclusion with his brother, housekeeper, and illegitimate son in an idyllic cottage, the "Rue-Herb Retreat," which is situated atop "the Marble Cliffs," and overlooks an idyllic region known as "the Marina."

The Rue-Herb Retreat is a little too luxurious to be a cottage: it has a library and a laboratory attached. Its surroundings are something out of a folk tale, or operetta; there are even quaintly merry villagers in the neighborhood. The land is haunted by benign ancestral spirits who can sometimes be glimpsed at night, when the narrator is walking home from a village festival after a few bowls of wine; his son has a magical friendship with the vipers and lizards that frequent the steps leading up to the Rue-Herb Retreat—these creatures were first attracted there by a bowl of milk that the housekeeper laid out for them.

Jünger's ambivalent but friendly attitude towards Christianity is evident from the brothers' neighbor, the wise, noble, formidably learned Father Lampros, who lives in the Maria Lunaris monastery, and shares the men's passion for botany. He wears a signet ring adorned with a gryphon's wing and the motto PATIENCE IS MINE. Christians and pagans alike revere him. There seem to be more of the latter than the former: Jünger has created a world in which the Marina borders on a wild region of quarrelsome farmers and bellicose tribesmen who are all primitive pagans given to clan rivalries, blood feuds, and the worship of deities ranging from "garden gods" to "gods of fat and butter" who fill the udders of cows.

The delicate balance of this little world is upset by the rise of a rich, buffoonish, charismatic leader known as "the Head Forester." He has become popular through holding riotous feasts; but the narrator instantly notices "the archaic power that blew around him like a breeze from his forests." The Head Forester is cunning, strong, and gaining strength. Violence soon seems inevitable, and coming ever closer to the brothers' little paradise; but they carry on with their scientific work. Then one day, when they go out in search of a rare flower, they stumble across a barn decorated with human heads; there is a dwarf there who is busily occupied in flaying corpses. The brothers flee; thereafter they join the resistance against the Head Forester. But it is already too late to avert disaster.

The first two-thirds of *On the Marble Cliffs* amount to an artistic triumph: the blend of mythical, allegorical, autobiographical, and philosophical elements is perfectly judged. But the scene of the flayer's hut seems to have shocked the writer at least as much as the reader: from that point onwards, the narrative's tension grows slack. Jünger is curiously inept at writing

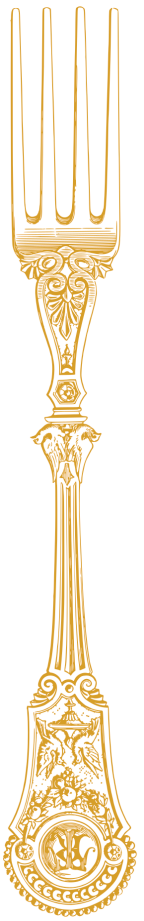
action scenes: his imagination is static rather than dynamic, and he is better at evoking still pictures than conjuring images of rapid motion. He is so visual and cerebral that he often neglects other senses. Perhaps surprisingly, Jünger is bad at writing scenes of battle or fighting. He seems similarly impatient with depicting political discussions. Also, in the final third of *On the Marble Cliffs*, Jünger loses his grip on his own allegory.

A cynical, nihilistic politician named Braquemart seeks the brothers' aid in resisting the Head Forester, who was once his ally. This appears to be an unflattering portrait of someone: Goebbels thought he recognized himself, and was not pleased. But at this point the novel begins to disintegrate because Jünger has not thought through the implications of his symbolism. *On the Marble Cliffs* caused consternation among the Nazis, who halted its publication in 1940, after forty thousand copies had already been sold; but to a modern reader it is not clear who or what Jünger is alluding to in this story. Is the Head Forester a version of Stalin, or Hitler, or something more distantly symbolic?

After the Second World War, Jünger settled in the village of Wilflingen, a ninety-minute drive away from Stuttgart. Here he began his half-century-long crawl towards the Catholic Church. At the same time, he also began regularly taking L.S.D.; he writes about these experiences in *Approaches: Drugs and Altered States*, which is not only his masterpiece but also the finest book ever written about drugs. Aldous Huxley's *Doors of Perception* and *Heaven and Hell* are weak and unilluminating by comparison. Jünger is in any case more influenced by Baudelaire's *Artificial Paradises* and Thomas De Quincey's *Confessions of an English Opium-Eater*, and surpasses even these models.

Jünger understood the fundamentally religious nature of drug-taking, and its origin in the thirst for some form of transcendence. He spent much of his life seeking escape from a monstrous, nameless, all-encompassing, homogenizing global tyranny that most of us now think of as modern American culture. Politics was only one means of escaping this; drugs were another; Jünger was trying to figure out whether intoxication and religion were complementary or incompatible. *Approaches* is an attempt to arrive at an answer.

In three hundred fifteen short numbered sections, Jünger outlines his experiences with intoxicants, including tobacco, caffeine, beer, wine—and indeed books and works of art. He associates ideas freely, suggesting that sex and crime are themselves sources of ecstatic intoxication. But not everyone seeks ecstasy: some seek dreams, sleep, isolation, and self-abnegation. Jünger has tried them all, from alcohol to narcotics to cocaine to opium to modern hallucinogens; his autobiographical reminiscences are charming and even laugh-out-loud funny from time to time.



In *Approaches* Jünger found a subject ideally suited for his idiosyncratic range of abilities and expertise. His accounts of taking L.S.D. and mescaline are particularly absorbing, because for once he finds ways of breaking through his own façade and setting aside his usual manner of presenting himself without losing face. Jünger was not merely seeking wisdom with drugs: he was also looking for thrills, and was getting too old for other, more exciting forms of danger. Let it not be forgotten that he was seventy-five when he published *Approaches.*

Jünger was remarkably prolific in old age: his other major literary work of the 1970s is the philosophical novel *Eumeswil*, which is a companion piece to his long essay *The Forest Passage*. Both *Eumeswil* and *The Forest Passage* center round the question of how to resist totalitarian authority. These books are difficult to encapsulate succinctly; not all readers will warm to them. This is not merely on account of their deeply illiberal, anti-egalitarian political standpoint: Jünger deliberately develops his ideas in a manner that makes them difficult to spell out, or transform into a series of proposals or policies.

Some readers cannot see the attraction in this elliptical sort of writing, which admittedly can seem a little pretentious to readers who are used to a more direct approach, and a lighter touch. Why could Jünger not set out his ideas straightforwardly in a conventional essay? Because his mind simply did not work that way. Also, conventional essays do not allow for plausible deniability: Jünger had

spent so long evading censors and looking over his shoulder while writing that the poetic, symbolic, mystical approach to making potentially seditious statements became second nature to him. For some, this approach to communication is simply frustrating. But by refusing to be blunt about what he really thought, or wanted to say, Jünger was not necessarily playing a game of chicken with the reader. Instead he was trying to provoke and inspire, not instruct. There may have been a genuine humility behind all of this. On the other hand, why bother writing at all, when you are merely sparking conversations for other people?

Jünger's output is unquestionably uneven. In his fiction, he could not create characters that were not barely disguised versions of Ernst Jünger, or his beloved younger brother, or others among the very small circle of people whom he seems to have cared about; his sense of narrative was also lacking—the only story he was interested in telling was his own life story. Yet he could create haunting, resonant images, and come up with piercing insights that escaped every other thinker of his time. Ultimately, Jünger was not a mere writer, but a seer. Admittedly an erratic, unreliable one who was often a bore; even so, his gifts in this respect were very real. Yet for all his well-attested physical courage, he can sometimes seem less intellectually fearless than his admirers tend to claim. This is particularly true when it comes to what he said about God—a subject on which he seemed afraid to think aloud.

Throughout the second half of his life, Jünger began openly to disdain atheism without ever quite spelling out what his own conception of God might be, or whether it had anything to do with the Holy Trinity. For all his apparent attraction to elements of the Catholic tradition, he seems to have been more strongly attached to liberal Protestant theology. His ruminations in interviews from the 1980s and 1990s are not those of a traditionalist Catholic; he sometimes sounds more like an esoteric "Traditionalist," or a member of the "Perennial School" in the vein of René Guénon. Yet in September 1996 he was received into the Church.

Ernst Jünger died on February 17, 1998, and was buried in a Catholic funeral four days later. Some commentators, particularly those who are sympathetic to esoteric Perennialism, maintain that Jünger's conversion was a mere practical convenience to enable him to be buried on consecrated ground: he wanted his body to be honured in an appropriately dignified manner when he died, and there was no Protestant parish nearby. If the Perennialist reading is true, then why did Jünger wait so long to convert? And why did he bother regularly to receive the sacraments during the last year of his life? It seems pointless, and perhaps even disrespectful, for Christians and others to litigate these mysteries, in the absence of decisive evidence that would support a satisfactory conclusion. All this side of Jünger's life must now remain his secret, and God's.

Jaspreet Singh Boparai is a former academic.

SOLEMN AND LONG

VATICAN II: A VERY SHORT INTRODUCTION

Shaun Blanchard and Stephen Bullivant
Oxford University Press, pp. 176, $11.95

BY MATTHEW WALTHER

On June 18, 1959, Cardinal Tardini, the secretary of state under John XXIII, sent a letter to the world's bishops asking them to propose topics for the upcoming ecumenical council. Some of the replies now make for curious reading. The archbishop of Gaeta, one Luigi Maria Carli, said that he would like to see something done about evolution; Bishop Geraldo de Proença Sigaud of Jacarezinho suggested that the Church's chief priority should be "counter-revolutionary combat" against communism and the French Revolution, the latter of which he evidently considered a live issue.

Yet another bishop, a rather moderate-sounding Frenchman named Marcel Lefebvre, called for

a wide range of practical reforms: changes to the annulment process that would allow for speedier decisions, wider adoption of clergy suits with Roman collars, an increase in the number of bishops (he proposed a cap of two hundred thousand on the number of the faithful in any diocese), decentralization of episopal decision-making, and, most strikingly, permission to celebrate evening Masses. Years later, in 1965, he would praise the new practice according to which the congregation sang the Ordinary along with the priest and the Collect, Epistle, and Gospel were read in the vernacular as "good reforms that give back to that part of the Mass its true finality."

These anecdotes do not appear in *Vatican II: A Very Short Introduction*, but they are very much in the spirit of this worthwhile book. Among the qualities that make Shaun Blanchard and Stephen Bullivant's entry in the first-rate series of primers from Oxford University Press stand out is its refusal to confirm established facile narratives. Rather than introduce readers to a familiar bestiary of progressive lambs and reactionary ogres (the adjectives might easily be swapped), they draw attention to the fact that Cardinal Ottaviani, the traditional hero of the eponymous "intervention" that would lead to a revision of the new General Instruction of the Roman Missal, was, even at the height of the Cold War, an opponent of nuclear weapons and, indeed, all modern offensive warfare. (This was among the reasons he found himself at odds with the American episcopate, for whom at least the tacit approval of their country's deadly arsenal was as important as an increase in the number of native African clergy had been for Lefebvre.)

This is not an historical work. The authors have organized the book along conceptual lines, with chapters given over to broad topics such as liturgy and ecclesiology. For some of us the opportunity of being reminded of all the old familiar gas about *aggiornamento* and the needs of modern man will not be a welcome one. But for those readers, Catholic or otherwise, who are unfamiliar with the conciliar documents and the context in which they emerged, it will serve as an effective introduction which avoids the caricatures and polemics that are unavoidable in many books with similar aims.

Even Catholics steeped in the history of the council and its debates will appreciate many of the authors' insights; the chapter on the liturgy, for example, begins with the interesting point (which I have never seen anyone else make) that unlike those of other major conciliar documents, the incipit of *Sacrosanctum concilium* does not lend itself to the assignment of "a fittingly symbolic title," such as that of *Lumen gentium* or *Inter mirifica*, but a rather pedestrian meta-reference to the existence of the council itself. This, they remind us, is of a piece with "how problem free the document's passage through the council was."

Other editorial decisions are equally inspired, such as the choice to refer in places to the two factions at the council as the "majority" (though "plurality" might have been a more precise choice) and the "minority" respectively rather than by the more familiar appellations of "liberal" and "conservative." What this reminds us is that the council was not (as participants on both sides of contemporary debates sometimes seem to suggest) an interminable struggle session between two powerful, opposed groups that ended with a narrow victory for one side. Indeed, most of the council fathers were mainly interested in issues that they saw as bearing directly on their home dioceses but otherwise unconcerned with the theological and other implications of the texts they approved. For this reason the loose grouping of idealists and timeservers who constituted the majority were barely hindered by the quixotic efforts of Ottaviani and a handful of others.

One thing this book accomplishes (perhaps unintentionally) is reminding us that Vatican II was, among many other things, virtually a *fait accompli*. It is almost impossible to imagine a world in which the limitless energy (and at times astonishing arrogance and condescension) of the dazzling young *periti* and the majority bishops on whose behalf they labored could have been overcome. Even those of us who are largely unsympathetic to their aims cannot help but look back longingly on those days of promise—to be young, to be steeped in existentialism and up-to-date biblical criticism, to be in the most beautiful city in the world thumbing one's nose at one's elders, who had never read so much as a syllable of Bultmann! This sense of inevitability—of alternating hopefulness and gloom—has been wonderfully captured in Rumer Godden's novel *In This House of Brede* and is also brought home here.

Otherwise, what I liked most about the book was its inauguration of what for me will be a delightful new parlor game. This comes in the form of a schema offered in its final chapter breaking down the four "paradigms" according to which Vatican II had been understood during the last half century. The first two paradigms are, in effect, twins: the "Traditionalist," according to which the council "erred or was dangerously ambiguous" and "did too much and changed too much," and the "Progressive," which considers the council a failure for rather different reasons. Of these the former is given fairly limited treatment here, perhaps because (as the authors put it) it is "academically marginal." (The latter, I

take it, is, or was, once academically ubiquitous.) The next two are more widely adhered to by both theologians and ordinary laypersons: "the Spirit-Event" paradigm, which sees Vatican II some kind of Hegelian unfolding of the universe's will, or, more humbly, simply as the Reason Everything Changed, and the "Text-Continuity," which is to say, making sense of the council as a collection of documents broadly in keeping with the Church's historic teaching. Both of these differ fundamentally from the other two paradigms in the sense that they are defined in formal rather than evaluative terms. For this reason, it might have made more sense to conceive of the four not as distinct paradigms but as the opposite ends of two perpendicular axes—with the X running from "Text" to "Event" and the Y upwards from "Progressive" to "Traditional"—upon which individual interpretations could be plotted. One can imagine a kind of graph, with Mel Gibson and the Society of Saint Pius V in the top right corner, George Weigel on the right but in the middle, the staff of the *National Catholic Reporter* firmly in the bottom right, sober Ratzingerians in the middle left, and someone like Thomas Pink (whose work on *Dignitatis humanae* might have warranted a brief mention in these pages) occupying a somewhat lonely perch in the top left quadrant.

While this is not the new book about Vatican II I have always dreamed of reading—why has no one produced the short, ironical, not quite error-free ribbing after the manner of Lytton Strachey that the council so richly deserves?—it is still a valuable one. This will be the case especially for non-Catholic readers rightly interested in the most influential event in the history of the Church since Trent.

Matthew Walther is editor of THE LAMP.

BAGATELLE

J. G. FRAZER CONSIDERS THIN LIZZY

BY STEVE LARKIN

Who does not know Thin Lizzy's "The Boys Are Back In Town"? Mr. Gorham's guitar riff, suffused with transcendent power in which the glorious Gaelic vocals of Mr. Lynott can craft visions of Paradise itself, and the twin-guitar attack at the end, soaring higher and higher towards the heavens, are dream-like visions of worlds faded away. But those who know it know it as merely a masterpiece of rock music of the 1970s, with its magnificent riff, brutal and majestic, introducing a tale of homecoming in which the awaited boys return to their former abode to enjoy those arts dear to the hearts of young men: drinking, fighting, and womanizing.

That Mr. Lynott's narrative is, at the very least, based in historical events requires no great demonstration. It should be enough to note that the recency of the story's origin mitigates against any alterations to the tale by slips of memory or careless scribes, that the particulars mirror well what facts are known about the life of Mr. Lynott, and that the details it contains would enable a curious hearer, should he be so inclined, to set out for the Gaelic country and confirm them for himself. The accuracy of the lyric having been established, we may now proceed to investigate what it is that the lyric says.

It opens with a shout of acclamation, the cry of those who have waited a long time for fulfillment and have now seen what they desired come to pass. The titular boys enter with little introduction, for it is clear that the inhabitants of the town, those to whom the song is addressed, are indeed familiar with the boys from their previous stays there. What comments the narrator does make about the boys are revealing: they are "wild-eyed," and he judges them to be "crazy." The choice of "boys" makes the picture still more clear. These are young men, not in control of themselves, and the narrator judges them to be, in some way, a threat to peace and order within the town, a fact quite salient to the interpretation of the lyric. The narrator also remarks that he has not "changed that much to say," revealing that, while the boys have been gone for a certain length of time, a length of time long enough for the absence of these boys to be noteworthy, it is not a long enough stretch of time for any significant transformations or major upheavals to have occurred in his own life.

The narrator then details what the boys will do now that they have returned to town. They will congregate at a specified place at a specified time: "Dino's Bar and Grill" on "Friday night." Here, they will intend to drink and engage in some kind of fighting—which kind and against whom the narrator leaves obscure. We may assume, however, that they will pursue the girl "driving all the old men crazy" whom they asked after in the first stanza

and who was exhorted to "spread the word around" of the boys' return. If necessary, they will fight the old men for her.It is also possible that the boys will fight each other for the girl, for, from what information is provided about the boys, it would seem not inaccurate to imagine them as animals fighting for mating rights. While engaged in their quest, they are "dressed to kill." The manner of their attire is of sufficient importance that it deserves a remark, even if the importance of that attire is not yet clear.

The final lines are the crux on which the interpretation of the whole rests. As their importance cannot be underestimated, I will here quote them in full:

> The nights are getting warmer, it won't be long
> Won't be long till the summer comes
> Now that the boys are here again

The grammar of these lines is the key to their understanding: "now" is being used conjunctively to mean "as a consequence of the fact." We are therefore told that the coming of summer relies on the return of the boys, and with this realization all impediments to our understanding fall away from our eyes and we at last see with what we are faced.

The boys, representing youth and virility, bring into the town the ability to make the crops grow, and their triumph over the old men, the fisher kings, symbolically drives out winter and the barrenness that comes with it. The girl, who yields to the force of the boys, represents the earth, which will yield to the acts of the farmers. In these ceremonial acts, the participants are drunk, in the style of the Bacchic rites, and the boys are "dressed to kill," wearing the appropriate ceremonial garb. Through these rites, fertility is restored to the earth, and the import of the earth-girl's spreading the word around is realized: the news of the return of the boys serves as the cue for the farmers to at last plant their crops, since the symbolic acts of the boys have made the earth able to again bear fruit after the sterile winter. The final interpretation of the work of Messrs. Lizzy is at last made clear. They have preserved some occulted Gaelic paganism, the rites of a fertility cult both ancient and abiding, skillfully and carefully hidden under the cover of mere boys who return to a mere town: but those who have ears to hear will hear.

Steve Larkin writes from Long Island, New York. He is a managing editor of the Washington Review of Books.

APPRECIATIONS

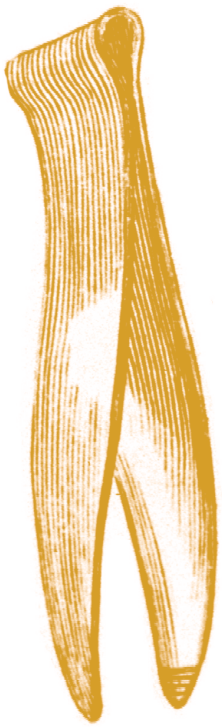
ORLANDO DI LASSO

BY AARON JAMES

Sometime in 1590, Regina di Lasso returned home to find her husband incapacitated: he could not speak and was unable even to recognize her. A court physician was sent for, whose treatment brought about some improvement, but Regina's husband never returned to his former self. He suffered from chronic insomnia and was unable to work. Most distressing was the change in his personality: "he has become gloomy and speaks only of death." Regina, in desperation, took it upon herself to write to her husband's former employers begging for financial assistance; she reminded them of his years of faithful service, suggesting that overwork had led to his physical collapse. We do not know if Duke Wilhelm V of Bavaria came to the aid of the Lasso family, but one certainly hopes that he did. After all, Orlando di Lasso had been the most famous musician in Europe.

It is always dangerous to use present-day medical categories to diagnose historical figures, and nowhere is there more possibility of confusion than in the changing descriptions of what we would call "mental illness." A modern physician might conclude from Regina's description that Orlando was the victim of a stroke, and that his subsequent symptoms were signs of clinical depression. Regina simply described his condition as a "true melancholy." For writers of Lasso's time—including Thomas Mermann, the doctor who attended him—melancholy was a physical substance, the black bile produced in the liver, which if found in excess could alter human character. Accounts differed on the exact mechanism by which an excess of black bile led to melancholic behavior, although all agreed that it had something to do with the balance of melancholy with the other bodily humors (blood, phlegm, and yellow bile). In one account, an overabundance of melancholy produced a black smoke that rose through the body and collected in the part of the brain that received and processed sensory images: the melancholic literally saw the world through a dark cloud.

It is easy to laugh at the fanciful theories of early modern physiology, but the physicians who wrote these things were grappling with something real. Generations of readers have paged through Burton's *Anatomy of Melancholy* with pleasure, and not merely for the elegance of the author's style: the old category of melancholy captures a whole spectrum of human experience that the modern reader still recognizes, ranging from a pleasurable state of sorrowful reverie to the most extreme realms of human misery. Because so many states of mind, with so many possible meanings, fell under the



umbrella of early modern melancholy (as too with today's "depression"), interpreters of Lasso's life and music have not agreed on how to understand his later-life treatment for melancholia. Was Lasso suffering from a physical ailment of the brain, a chemical imbalance that could have been treated with the aid of modern pharmacology? Was his melancholy an indication of a tragic flaw in his character, and therefore a sign of something diseased and unhealthy in his music? Or, on the contrary, was his melancholy the truest sign of his genius, an indication that he saw deeper than his frivolous contemporaries into the sorrows of the human condition?

This last view—Lasso as a doomed Romantic hero—is a tempting one, because his life story fits well into a familiar narrative of triumph and tragedy. We read first of a Lasso defined by his early international success—call him Young Lasso—who is prodigiously gifted, gregarious and sociable, and a master of all genres, sacred and secular. Young Lasso, perhaps, is too clever for his own good; his compositions are stuffed with little jokes, ingenious bits of text setting, references to the music of past composers. His letters reveal a man of high spirits, fond of puns, wordplay, and practical jokes. But then there is Old Lasso, depressed and miserable, physically worn by his painstaking work but persevering to pen a final, melancholy masterpiece for posthumous publication. (The *Lagrime di San Pietro*, published a year after Lasso's death, is a cycle of madrigals describing the penitence of Saint Peter after his denial of Christ.) It is probably not a coincidence that both Young Lasso and Old Lasso sound very much like Mozart—not Mozart the historical figure, but the preternaturally gifted child turned tragic victim portrayed in Peter Shaffer's *Amadeus*.

The most impressive piece of evidence in this narrative of Lasso the penitent libertine is the motet *Recordare Jesu pie*, which concludes his final published book of motets (the *Cantiones sacrae* for six voices of 1594). Commending his final works to his patron, the aged and melancholy Lasso describes these new works as "endowed with a weightier countenance" and liable to "afford a profounder pleasure to the mind and the ear of the critic": these works are to be understood as the quintessence of the composer's late style, overshadowed by Lasso's brush with death. And as a final valedictory gesture, the dying master sets to music the stanzas of the *Dies irae* that include his own name:

Recordare, Jesu pie
quod sum causa tuae viae:
ne me perdas illa die.
Quaerens me, sedisti lassus,
redemisti crucem passus:
tantus labor non sit cassus.

Remember, kind Jesus, that I am the cause of your going forth: let me not be lost on that day. Seeking me, you sat down weary; you redeemed me, dying on the cross; let not this great labor be in vain.

The invocation of Lasso's name is unmistakable: the composer used the Italian Lasso and the Latin Lassus interchangeably, and invariably employed the latter in his sacred music publications. In a performance of the motet, one hears the word "Lassus" dragged out over three full measures, stretched out almost beyond endurance, and then repeated a second time: you are meant to hear the composer speaking and naming himself. The lassitude evoked here is the weariness of Christ, exhausted by his work of salvation, but it is also the weariness of Lasso himself, broken down by years of painstaking work. The motet is an astonishing masterpiece, deeply moving and a perfect conclusion to the composer's career, and so it is disappointing to learn that it was not written by Old Lasso but by Young Lasso. The piece was written years before Lasso's attack of melancholia and seems to have been a long-standing favorite; he re-used its music in a setting of the Magnificat written sometime before 1590. With the sly sense of humor that we expect from Young Lasso, the music of the heartbreaking cry *sedisti Lassus* is used in the Magnificat for the words *dimisit inanes* ("sent away empty"); instead of portraying the exhaustion of the penitent composer, the music now describes the dispossession of the haughty rich.

If we have difficulty telling Young Lasso from Old Lasso, it may be because most musicians, even specialists in the Renaissance, don't know either of them particularly well. Students of music history are taught to name Lasso as one of the four great composers of the late Renaissance, along with Palestrina, Victoria, and Byrd, but

Lasso is by far the least performed, and he tends to be given short shrift in textbooks. More than two thousand of Lasso's compositions survive, and he is an intimidating figure to come to grips with. Much of his music has not been surveyed in any detail even by scholars: a complete critical edition of his motets was completed only in 2006. The vast majority of his music has never been recorded, and it is likely that some of his compositions have never been sung in modern times. The student of Lasso is faced with a bewildering variety of languages and musical styles, which reflect the composer's international and polyglot career: Latin Masses and motets, Italian madrigals, French chansons, German Lieder.

Adding to the difficulty in approaching Lasso is that much of his most frequently performed music seems uninspiring, functional rather than expressive. Many musicians will encounter him first through his book of two-voice Latin duets, simple pedagogical pieces designed as demonstrations of the most rudimentary forms of Renaissance counterpoint. More than many of his contemporaries, Lasso seems to have been willing to churn out large quantities of music to fulfill purely practical needs and was capable of setting liturgical texts in a style so businesslike and perfunctory as to be almost offensive. Some of his Magnificat settings are over so quickly that it would take more time to sing the text in unadorned Gregorian chant; meanwhile, Lasso's repertoire of Masses includes what may be the shortest Mass setting of the entire sixteenth-century, labeled *Missa venatorum* in most of its manuscript sources. (This title literally means "hunter's Mass," a label that persisted for centuries as a Bavarian slang term for a hastily and sloppily celebrated liturgy.) Because of its brevity and simplicity, the *Missa venatorum* is one of the most popular Mass settings among parish choirs worldwide, but there is something almost impudent about it; the Gloria and Credo are rattled off at top speed like a patter song out of Gilbert and Sullivan.

It is hard to know whether a sixteenth-century listener would have sensed unbecoming haste in this music; clearly the brevity of the *Missa venatorum* was intended to serve a practical function in situations where circumstances dictated that the music be short and simple. But it is clear that many sixteenth-century listeners were offended by the excesses of Young Lasso. In 1591, the Jesuit provincial in Bavaria issued a catalog of prohibited music, with seventeen pieces by Lasso at the head of the list. Most of the forbidden works turn out to be drinking songs with off-color texts parodying the style of liturgical Latin (*Vinum bonum et suave*, *Ave color vini clari*, and the like). One gets

the impression that the Jesuit provincial, bearing in mind increasing standards of literacy and clerical education in the aftermath of the Council of Trent, was targeting illiterate musicians who would sing any piece with a Latin text, ignorant of its actual meaning. (Among the pieces forbidden to be sung is an unknown work titled *Barbara celarent darii ferio*, which is not a sacred text but a mnemonic used to remember the kinds of syllogisms in Aristotelian logic.) But among the banned works by Lasso is one of the strangest and most puzzling pieces in the sixteenth century repertoire. This motet, if so it can be called, is a setting of the one hundred thirty-sixth Psalm, *Super flumina Babylonis*, which does not set the words of the Psalm but its individual letters and syllables ("S – U – Su – P – E – R – Per – Su – Per – F" and later "Ba–na–ba–mi–na–ba–by–na–ba–by–mi–na"). It takes eight pages of score for Lasso to babble his way to the end of one verse of the

Psalm; the effect in performance is bizarre. It is hard to imagine that Lasso really intended that anyone would use the piece liturgically, but it's not clear where it would have been sung instead; here, as so often in the sixteenth century, the historian has the impression of having walked in on a long-standing inside joke with no idea why the punch line is supposed to be funny.

It would seem that the impudences of Young Lasso must have been the sort of thing that the Council of Trent had in mind when they banished "extravagant and impure" music from the sacred liturgy: comic drinking songs in Latin, and compositions that reduced the text of the Psalms to disconnected syllables. And I have not even mentioned the Masses written by Lasso based on music from secular models, some with pornographic or scatological texts (Lasso's *Missa Je ne mange point de porc* sets the text of the Mass Ordinary to music based on a French song about how it is safest not to eat pork because of the pig's enthusiastic consumption of excrement). Yet the great paradox of Lasso's career was that, far from being sidelined in the aftermath of Trent, Lasso was hailed as the undisputed prince of music in the final decades of the sixteenth century, far exceeding his contemporaries in international fame. And when Lasso was the court composer to the Bavarian ducal court in Munich, he was employed by one of the most self-consciously Tridentine courts in Europe, one that prided itself on its loyalty to Rome and its obedience to the reformist program of the council.

Much scholarly ink has been spilled over this paradox, which goes far beyond the music of Lasso: in the years following Trent's injunctions against impurity and license in sacred music, composers continued to write Masses based on secular love songs in French and Italian, and to do so even in bastions of Counter-Reformation piety such as the Habsburg imperial court and the papal chapel itself. In Rome, Palestrina cheerfully continued to compose Masses on secular models after the end of the council; even the pious priest-composer Tomás Luis de Victoria could not resist writing a Mass based on the French song *La bataille* (a song describing a skirmish in one of the French proxy wars with Spain, consisting mostly of onomatopoeic battle sounds). Neither Palestrina nor Victoria could be accused of a lack of reverence for the liturgy or a failure of discrimination between suitable and unsuitable styles, so the modern listener is left trying to understand how such men could have seen no contradiction between their Tridentine loyalties and the freedom with which they quoted secular music in church.

One expert on Tridentine liturgical music, the musicologist David Crook, has approached this

paradox by adapting a distinction made in some patristic scholarship between the "secular" and the "profane." The realm of the "profane" names that which is opposed to Christianity, that which the convert must reject, but the "secular" names something more ambiguous and fluid: a shared space that does not belong exclusively to the realm of Christian religious practice but is not opposed to it either. This is the space in which members of the visible Church meet with those who are outside; it provides a shared point of reference from which the Church can adapt what it finds useful and appropriate for its own purposes. Understood in this way, the practice of post-Tridentine composers was to reject the "profane" but to retain the "secular": by allowing the music of Italian love songs or French battle songs to echo in the Mass, old points of contact between secular and sacred could be retained. Materials referring to the secular experiences of love or war could be repurposed to re-inforce the symbolism of the Mass. A few decades after Lasso's death, a musician at the Bavarian court recorded that the court typically sang his *Missa Puisque jay perdu* on Ash Wednesday, an association that revolves around exactly this sort of symbolic equation between sacred and secular: the song *Puisque jay perdu* ("Because I have lost my love . . . I have reason to sigh") redescribes in a secular register the same theme of renunciation that is given sacred shape in the Ash Wednesday liturgy.

To enter into this perspective requires an imaginative leap for most modern churchgoers; it means accepting much more porous boundaries between the sacred and the secular than apply today. And it would take a much more detailed analysis to show the care with which Lasso combines secular music with sacred texts, and to determine whether the expressive

gains were worth the risks. In the end, we might still conclude that it would be better not to have written a Mass based on a song like *Je ne mange point de porc*.

Perhaps Lasso's greatest strength was also his greatest weakness: he was willing to try anything once. He would write in two voices or in twelve voices, from the most complex experiments in chromatic harmony (the *Prophetiae Sibyllarum*) to the simplest exercises that any of his students could have written. (A whole volume of Lasso's complete works consists of harmonized Psalm tones and responses to litanies, some of the most rudimentary and unprepossessing music by any great composer.) Over the course of his career, he found new ways to revitalize standard liturgical texts like the Mass Ordinary and the Magnificat, but he also set a greater variety of obscure and unusual motet texts than any other composer of the Renaissance. Looking through the volumes of his complete motets, one finds Lasso practically ransacking the Scriptures to find new texts to set: a particularly memorable series of motets come from Ecclesiastes (*Vidi calumnias*; *Ego cognovi*; *Dixi ergo in corde meo*). He particularly liked to set complete narratives from the Gospels as multi-part motets, producing several large-scale works in which familiar stories are treated musically with great subtlety and sophistication (*Cum natus esset Jesus* for Epiphany; *Nuptiae factae sunt* for the wedding at Cana; *Missus est angelus* for the Annunciation). Some of Lasso's greatest expressive heights are reached in texts from the Pauline epistles, which were rarely set to music by composers of this period; *Cum essem parvulus* sets a famous passage from the first book of Corinthians, ending with an unforgettable setting of "faith, hope, and love."

Lasso, in other words, was an inveterate risk-taker. Some of his risks paid off handsomely, and others didn't; there are plenty of duds among his two thousand works, and sometimes one gets exasperated with Lasso for trying out yet another eccentric text or strange musical idea. Yet if this habit of risk-taking was a vice—if his sheer exuberance led him sometimes to cross the line into irreverence, and other times to pursue half-baked ideas—it was also a virtue, because it prevented him from settling into any merely routine gestures of musical piety. What critics always praise in Lassus is his hypersensitivity to the text he is setting, attentive to the expressive connotation of each word and phrase as it passes. This quality made him a favorite among the music theorists of the early Baroque, who saw him as the great progenitor of their ideas of musical rhetoric. But it also gives him a kind of intensity and concentration of expression that is very different from the other great composers of the Renaissance. Lasso ranges far more widely than does Victoria or Palestrina; he is guilty of gaucheries that would horrify them, but he also explores realms of expression different from anything that they attempt. Without risking Lasso's occasional descent into poor taste or sheer silliness, there is no way to reach the expressive heights of the great Passiontide motets which deservedly stand among the great accomplishments of sixteenth-century sacred music: *Ave verum corpus*, *In monte Oliveti*, or *Tristis est anima mea*.

No one could doubt that the tragedy of Lasso's final years gives a special poignancy to his last works: his final book of six-voice motets and the penitential *Lagrime di San Pietro*. But the melancholy depths of Old Lasso were already present in Young Lasso. The depressive comedian is a familiar archetype, and one does not have to look very far to find evidence of a tendency to morbid introspection beneath his youthful exuberance. The Italian form of his name (*lasso* in Italian means not only "weary" but also "miserable" or, as an interjection, simply "alas") provided fodder for any number of jokes, of which the most typical is his self-characterization as *lasso, ma di buon core* (sad, but of good cheer). And so his choice to place *Recordare Jesu pie* at the conclusion of his life's work was an appropriate one: the piece was not a new work, but the sadness expressed by that long *sedisti Lassus* had gained new urgency in the light of his physical and psychological deterioration.

It would be a mistake, however, to think of Lasso's piece merely as a personal swan song with no broader significance. The Anglican spiritual writer W. H. Vanstone noted that the verses of the *Dies irae* set by Lasso are a kind of Gospel in miniature, with the three rhyme-words expressing the characteristics of love: "the word *lassus*—'weary' or 'spent'—expresses the limitlessness of love's self-giving: the word *passus*—'suffering'—expresses the vulnerability of love: the word *cassus*—'in vain'—expresses the precariousness of love and the possibility that its outcome is tragedy and its work in vain." What Lasso contemplated in the last motet that he published, therefore, was nothing less than the mystery of Christ's identification with humanity in the Incarnation. Even in his final years of melancholy, this text reminded him that whatever his own suffering may have been, the suffering of Christ at least was not finally in vain. If he managed to bring across this serious message while still working in a final pun on his last name, there could be no more fitting epitaph.

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NUNC DIMITTIS

NARFIE NOODLE

BY MARK NAIDA

One night in my college dorm room, my best friend, looking a bit embarrassed, made a confession. No one had ever given him a nickname, and he wanted one. Another friend sitting nearby blurted out "Chip Whitley," and by force of will and constant repetition, we made it stick.

Chip was the first person I helped nickname. My family didn't often give out monikers, though my sister Monica did go by "Mon." My parents used "buddy" and other common pet names for me, but nothing unique ever stuck. My stepdad, a wonderful and caring man, called me "doofus" for a while, but my mom didn't let that continue for long.

In first grade, my teacher referred to me often as "Marky Mark and the Funky Bunch." I didn't get the reference and was perplexed as to why I would have a nickname that includes other people. When I typed the name into Ask Jeeves a few years later, I was confronted by a video of Mark Wahlberg dancing and rapping in only his underwear in front of a crowd at a basketball stadium. I've shied away when anyone has called me that since.

My wife, who is half Chinese and was born in the year of the pig, comes from a nicknaming family and has been fondly called "piggie" her whole life. I didn't realize how much her family's tradition would influence ours.

It's a theme of classic literature that learning a name allows one character to begin to understand another. Think of Adam naming the animals or the story of Rumplestiltskin. "Chip Whitley" became what we called my friend when he did something mischievous. It helped us name a part of his personality we hadn't fully appreciated before. Likewise, biblical figures such as Abram, Jacob, and Saul are renamed after they enter into a covenant with God. If the eyes are the window to the soul, a name can help reveal a person's identity.

We bought an Irish Setter in 2021 and named her Charley, an homage to John Steinbeck's blue poodle with whom he traveled America. We haven't called her that much. Like many pet owners, we have come up with a number of ridiculous names for her: Char-wee, Charley Barley, Charley Barley Puddin' Pop, Sweetie, Tweetie (because her nasal whining sounds slightly avian), Tweetie Bird, Tweeters, Captain Charley, and Costco (because she's a hot dog).

Her second birthday, after which most dogs are done growing and begin to act more mature, coincided with the birth of our twins, Arthur and George. We had bestowed new names on Charley as she grew from a puppy with pin-sharp fangs who slept under the couch to an elegantly feathered dog who now spends her days napping on top of it. But since the birth of our twins, we have given her less attention and unintentionally failed to give her a new nickname. Yet from our kids' days in the hospital we have given them nicknames at a breakneck pace.

Arthur's progression in the first six months of his life has been: Peanut, Archie, Arfie, Snarfie (he initially had narrow nasal passages and would snort when he cried), Bobcat (because at night he would wail like a bobcat trapped in a box), Narfie, Narf, Narfie Noo, and Narfie Noodle. It is currently "Noodle Poole," a call back to the final pages of Dr. Seuss's *Fox in Socks*, which features a poodle (oddly resembling Steinbeck's) eating a plate of spaghetti. George's has been only slightly more conventional: Georgie, George-O, Big Baby, Jojo, Joe, Joey, Joje, Joe-Jee, Doe-Dee. New names are certain to drift only further from their legal ones.

Like Charley before them, each time our kids enter a new stage of growth, they earn new names. My wife keeps the list in her phone. Each calls to mind an era of only a month or two when our babies were very different. It hasn't been intentional, but these names have served as time stamps. When we call our children names other than the ones by which we plan them to be known, we better appreciate them as they are now.

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