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ELLIOTT ABRAMS

the weekly Standard

JUNE 27, 2011 • $4.95

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THE FDIC'S JOB POLICY

The Federal Deposit Insurance Company (FDIC) has trashed countless good-paying jobs, making hedge fund managers richer at the expense of America's economic recovery.

WASTE:

Taxpayer bailout money for failing banks was supposed to be used for loans to businesses, families and construction projects in local communities across America. Instead, much of that taxpayer money — millions of dollars a month — is being paid as "management fees" to hedge funds.

FOUL:

There's something rotten with the FDIC's accounting. In the case of one seized bank, hedge funds said the government would gain more than $1 billion from the sale of assets. Just one month later, the FDIC said it would have to take a loss of more than $1 billion on those same assets. That's a difference of $2 billion in taxpayer money— in just one deal!

GARBAGE:

The FDIC has created a perverse incentive for hedge funds tasked with managing the assets of failed banks. The more seized assets a hedge fund keeps on its books, the more taxpayer dollars the hedge funds receive in "management fees." While hedge funds profit, assets stay locked up, hurting local communities and shortchanging taxpayers.

If the FDIC keeps paying hedge funds NOT to make loans, construction projects will stay idle, workers will remain unemployed, and families will continue to struggle.

Call the **FDIC** at **877-275-3342** and tell them to

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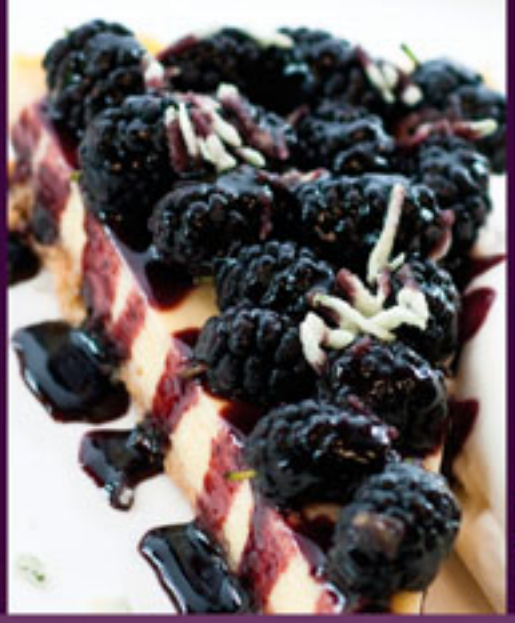


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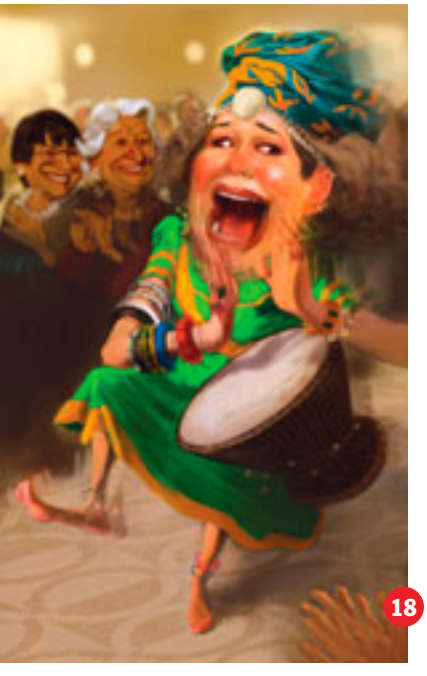


COVER: 'TENNYSON, ANYONE?' BY MARK SUMMERS

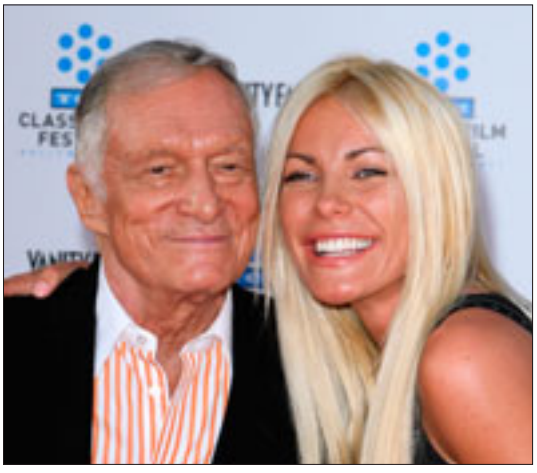
The Jilting of Hefner

In the midst of last week's installments of the Anthony Weiner saga—rehab, further revelations, resignation—another minor media episode played itself out, a little less spectacularly, on the televised stage: Five days before the ceremony, Miss Crystal Harris bailed out on her planned wedding to Mr. Hugh Hefner.

Everybody knows Hugh Hefner, of course: the founder of *Playboy* and professional bon vivant whose swinging bachelor lifestyle has been a staple of American pop culture since the Eisenhower era. But who is Crystal Harris? She turns out to be a 25-year-old ex-Playmate and aspiring singer—whose plans to wed, therefore, might not seem so remarkable, except that Hugh Hefner, at 85, is old enough to be her great-grandfather.

Which raises an interesting, if slightly discomforting, question: What is less edifying, the graphic spectacle of an exhibitionist member of Congress, or an elderly man whose taste in female companionship runs to women fresh out of adolescence?

In The Scrapbook's opinion, it's a draw. Anthony Weiner's conduct was so far beyond the historic norm of congressional misbehavior that it very nearly approached a category unto itself, made more comic (and simultaneously more appalling) by the advent of iPhones and Twitter. It will be a long time before anything remotely approaching the details of the Weiner affair will be seen again in Washington.



Hugh Hefner with ex-fiancée Crystal Harris

Or maybe not. All the ingredients that came together for Anthony Weiner—narcissism, sexuality, political power, social media, new technology—remain in place, and if history teaches us anything, it is that human nature is reliably constant and fallible.

In Hugh Hefner's case, by contrast, The Scrapbook almost feels compassionate: The notion that there's no fool like an old fool, and that Hef's well-advertised pursuit of hedonistic pleasure has long since graduated to pathetic status, was painfully evident here. No one can imagine that Harris was attracted to her doddering, octogenarian husband-to-be by his sexual prowess or irresistible charm; any way you looked at it, the Hefner-Harris collaboration was neither enviable nor touching, but merely cringe-inducing. And while Anthony Weiner's transition from rising political star to butt of late-night jokes was astonishingly swift, Hugh Hefner's descent into moth-eaten creepiness has been comparatively gradual.

The Scrapbook does, however, report one nugget of inside information with pleasure: One of the many reasons given for Crystal Harris's change of heart was not Hugh Hefner's resemblance these days to a reptile Lothario but an extracurricular friendship with the son of TV therapist Dr. Phil McGraw. The celebrity world is smaller than we think, and it's always fascinating how these people manage to find one another.

Perhaps, in due course, Anthony Weiner will bump into Crystal Harris on Dr. Phil's program, and the cycles will run, as it were, full circle. ♦

Dept. of Back Scratching

Last week *Politico* reported that all sorts of advocacy groups were queuing up to tell the FCC what they think about AT&T's proposed acquisition of T-Mobile. Organizations like the NAACP and GLAAD and the Columbia Urban League believe that it's vitally important that the FCC sign off on the merger. Why would these groups care about consolidation in the cell phone industry? Because—surprise!—they've all taken money from AT&T.

James McLawhorn, CEO of the Columbia Urban League, told the FCC, "In our work, we are often witness to the obstacles minority Americans face when trying to access mobile broadband and its associated benefits. This deal would help extricate the barriers keeping our members from attaining these benefits, working towards the end of the digital divide." (Columbia took $25,000 from AT&T in 2009.) GLAAD (the Gay & Lesbian Alliance Against Defamation) claimed that "the merger will increase functionality and speed, thus growing engagement and improving the effectiveness of the online advocacy work that is advancing equality for all." (AT&T gave GLAAD $50,000.) The Na-

NEWSCOM

tional Education Association Foundation said, "This merger will have positive and long-lasting effects, and America's students will be among the biggest winners." (They got $75,000 last year.) The NAACP was the first group to push the merger. In 2009, AT&T gave them $1 million.

But before you get the wrong idea, the head of the NAACP's North Carolina chapter, William Barber, was quick to explain, "one of the unique things about the NAACP is that financial support does not determine our civil rights positions." ♦

Gloria in Excelsis Allred

After it was announced that Gloria Allred, the celebrity-chasing lawyer, and Ginger Lee, the porn star caught up in the Anthony Weiner scandal, would be holding a press conference, The Scrapbook couldn't help but chuckle upon learning the event was held in the Milton Berle room of the New York Friars Club. (Like a great many details involving Representative Weiner, decency prevents us from explaining why exactly the invocation of Milton Berle was particularly amusing.)

Unfortunately, the press conference was a boilerplate Gloria Allred my-client-is-a-woman-wronged affair that's about as tired as a Henny Youngman joke. Lee, for her part, stood mostly silent, wearing a black turtleneck and gray pants so as to present a highly atypical demure appearance, while the combative Allred did most of the talking.

Allred explained that she had been retained by Lee because, among other things, the constant press attention had made it difficult for a humble working girl to get back on the job. Here Allred was also at pains to emphasize that Lee is no longer a porn star, but rather a "feature dancer"—meaning she headlines strip clubs around the country. Far be it from us to suggest that her newfound, uh, exposure might actually prove to be terrifically lucrative for a confident woman in control of her own career, such as Lee.

In any event, there were a few interesting details that emerged from the press conference—including Lee's cogent assessment of the congressman's behavior. "I think that Anthony Weiner should resign because he lied. He lied to the public and the press for more than a week," she said. "If he lied about this, I can't have much faith in him about anything else." Lee also says that she never reciprocated any of Weiner's lewd messages. Given that the (former!) porn star is obviously far more transparent when it comes to her sexual modesty, we believe her.

But perhaps the most revealing tidbit was that Lee said she began corresponding with Weiner because she admired his staunch support of Planned Parenthood. After all, who can think of two more upstanding role models for the kind of sexual behavior that keeps Planned Parenthood's abominable business brisk?

Nonetheless, given that the press conference was held at the epicenter of one of America's great comedic traditions, we remain disappointed that the whole thing wasn't a ruse for the long overdue Weiner roast. ("So, then he produces a picture of his genitals and announces he has no plans to resign. The talent agent says, 'What do you call your act?' Without missing a beat the congressman says, 'The Aristocrats!'") The Weiner roast in the Milton Berle room would have undoubtedly been one for the ages had the Friars Club risen to the occasion. ♦

Quotation of the Week

We've bashed inane, politicized commencement speeches on more than one occasion in these pages. So a tip of The Scrapbook's homburg is owed to Conan O'Brien for his fine tribute to George H.W. Bush at the Dartmouth College graduation ceremony on June 12:

> Before I begin, I must point out that behind me sits a highly admired president of the United States and decorated war hero while I, a cable television talk show host, have been chosen to stand here and impart wisdom. I pray I never witness a more damning example of what is wrong with America today. ♦

Help Wanted

The Weekly Standard has a full-time position available for a staff assistant. This is an administrative position working with the editors. Duties will include answering phones and emails, updating our website, research, and record-keeping. Candidates should address a cover letter and résumé to twsjob@gmail.com. ♦

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Two Fathers and a Wedding

There is an apple tree in my parents' backyard. Its bark is blackened, limbs reaching unevenly and feebly into the sky. If an art-house filmmaker needed a metaphor for resilience in a war-ravaged country, he would choose this tree. It looks like it's growing in spite of something, straining against some great force.

That great force is my father.

Ever since I can remember, the flora of our backyard has shrunk in the face of his single-minded determination to mold natural growth to his exact specifications.

I remember the day the apple tree met its match. One moment, my seven-year-old brother was huddling in its branches in a round of hide-and-seek. The next, he was left sitting, stunned, atop a bare stubby shrub that afforded no cover.

My mother went inside to slice up a few apples for the kids and came back to find her tree incapable of bearing fruit for the next five years.

My father's standard response was to impose upon the act an air of nonchalance and inevitability.

"What's the big deal? This is just undergrowth. You gotta get rid of that."

My father's proclivity for what I call "power-gardening" has many upsides. It comes with a well-manicured lawn, a fruitful garden, and brothers trained in the arts of raking and mowing.

So I did not hesitate when my dad offered to help with yard work before my wedding. A hare-brained scheme to have the ceremony in my backyard put a rush on home improvement.

He drove up and popped the trunk on an arsenal worthy of the John Dillinger of lawn maintenance. I imagined him hurtling toward my peach trees, riding the running board of a Studebaker with hedge-trimmers in place of a tommy gun.

I knew I was in trouble when I saw the groom's eyes light up. Jake's father, too, is a power-gardener and had trained him since boyhood to tame an acre of tall Tennessee grass into the clean lines of Comiskey.

Realizing there was a growing threat, I asked—perhaps ordered—that no branch be removed from any tree without my express permission and supervision.

ZACH FRANZEN

Under this strict rule, all flower-planting, weed-whacking, and mulch-laying proceeded without complication.

The week of the wedding, my father-in-law arrived and joined the battle against a holly bush the size of a box car and buzzing with every bee species native to North America. It's times like these that you thank the power-gardeners in your life because you don't have to distribute decorative, stenciled EpiPens as wedding favors.

The two fathers recognized in each other brothers in arms. I should have known not to leave them alone. But the day before the wedding, I went on a last-minute Costco run.

When I got back to the house, tents had been hoisted, grass mowed, seats arranged, the sun was shining. I walked down what would be the aisle, admiring my vision.

Mr. Bluebird was on my shoulder, everything was satisfactual . . . until I turned around.

I don't remember much after this point, but my brothers tell me I took on the voice of Zuul.

There, where I had envisioned my walk down the aisle would begin under a graceful lovers' arch formed by the limbs of two peach trees, were two bright white, freshly sawed sand-dollar sized circles where two branches had been. They gaped at me like sad eyes, pools of sawdust on the lawn like tears.

The dads responded with an air of nonchalance and inevitability (though I noticed it sounded a little unsure in the face of my reaction).

"Really, those were dead. They could have hurt someone."

"Yep, had to come down."

No mere nuptials can stop the trimming of two power-gardeners. In the wake of my Bridezilla moment, I got several explanations of how exactly two limbs got lopped off the ceremony trees the day before the wedding.

My favorite describes the scene as one engulfed in an unstoppable, fatherly force, a moment under the influence of the purest, combined need to prune that this world has ever seen. In this scenario, our helpless siblings and mothers tried to stop it, but were drawn in by the sound of the saw. Manipulated *Matrix*-style, the universe turned words of objection into words of assent, and resistance was futile.

That may have been the moment when our two families truly joined—when all the pride, work ethic, determination (and, yes, occasional stubbornness) our wonderful dads taught their kids came to bear on a pair of poor, defenseless peach trees.

The incident did not, of course, scar the ceremony, and the scars on my peach trees stand as a symbol of all we love about our dads and all they've given us—both literally and figuratively.

And, if I ever forget it, Jake's there to remind me, standing on the roof, with a chainsaw.

"Yep, these maple branches are too low. Gotta get rid of these."

Mary Katharine Ham

the weekly Standard

Reagan Was Right

We at The Weekly Standard have had plenty of advice for Republicans on how to criticize (and occasionally to support) Obama administration foreign and defense policies. But as the GOP presidential campaign heats up, it seems that some candidates are more tempted to imitate the foreign policy orientation of George McGovern or John Kerry than of Ronald Reagan. So we thought it might be useful to remind them of what Reagan said when he took on and defeated a Democratic incumbent. Here, then, are excerpts from Ronald Reagan's acceptance speech to the 1980 Republican Convention:

The nominee addresses the Republican National Convention, July 17, 1980

AP IPHOTO / RUSTY KENNEDY

When we move from domestic affairs and cast our eyes abroad, we see an equally sorry chapter on the record of the present administration. . . .

America's defense strength is at its lowest ebb in a generation. . . .

Our . . . allies, looking nervously at the growing menace from the East, turn to us for leadership and fail to find it. . . .

Adversaries large and small test our will and seek to confound our resolve, but we are given weakness when we need strength; vacillation when the times demand firmness.

The Carter administration lives in the world of make-believe. Every day, drawing up a response to that day's problems, troubles, regardless of what happened yesterday and what will happen tomorrow.

The rest of us, however, live in the real world. It is here that disasters are overtaking our nation without any real response from Washington. . . .

I'll tell you where I stand. I do not favor a peacetime draft or registration, but I do favor pay and benefit levels that will attract and keep highly motivated men and women in our volunteer forces and an active reserve trained and ready for an instant call in case of an emergency.

There may be a sailor at the helm of the ship of state, but the ship has no rudder. Critical decisions are made at times almost in comic fashion, but who can laugh? Who was not embarrassed when the administration handed a major propaganda victory in the United Nations to the enemies of Israel, our staunch Middle East ally? . . .

Who does not feel a growing sense of unease as our allies, facing repeated instances of an amateurish and confused administration, reluctantly conclude that America is unwilling or unable to fulfill its obligations as the leader of the free world?

Who does not feel rising alarm when the question in any discussion of American foreign policy is no longer, "Should we do something?" but "Do we have the capacity to do anything?"

The administration which has brought us to this state is seeking your endorsement for four more years of weakness, indecision, mediocrity, and incompetence. No American should vote until he or she has asked, is the United States stronger and more respected now than it was three-and-a-half years ago? Is the world today a safer place in which to live? . . .

We are not a warlike people. Quite the opposite. We always seek to live in peace. We resort to force infrequently and with great reluctance—and only after we have determined that it is absolutely necessary. . . . But neither can we be naïve or foolish. . . . We know only too well that war comes not when the forces of freedom are strong, but when they are weak. It is then that tyrants are tempted. . . .

Let our friends and those who may wish us ill take note: The United States has an obligation to its citizens and to the people of the world never to let those who would destroy freedom dictate the future course of human life on this planet. I would regard my election as proof that we have renewed our resolve to preserve world peace and freedom. This nation will once again be strong enough to do that. . . .

Reagan's unapologetic defense of American strength is as timely today as it was three decades ago. Which Republican candidate will make a name for himself (or herself) by delivering a suitably updated version of this message?

—The Editors

Mourning in America

Trying to stay upbeat? Avoid the business section. Unemployment stands at 9.1 percent. Growth is narcoleptic. The housing market hasn't hit bottom. Fears of a Greek default are roiling markets. The deficit is running more than a trillion dollars for the third year in a row and won't be shrinking anytime soon. A U.S. fiscal crisis may be only a few years (or months) away. President Obama, meanwhile, seems to think our problems would be solved if only we banned ATMs and built solar-powered bullet trains. His "propellerheads"—Geithner, Bernanke, Sperling, et al.—are spinning to the ground. Alert the authorities: Stop these men before they stimulate again.

The Republican presidential candidates have a powerful case to make against the Obama economy. A year ago, on June 17, 2010, the White House kicked off "Recovery Summer" by sending Joe Biden to home weatherization sites across the country. The headline for Timothy Geithner's August 2, 2010, *New York Times* op-ed was "Welcome to the Recovery." Geithner, it turns out, was about as honest with readers as he was with the IRS.

Normally, America goes into overdrive as it exits a recession. This time we've been limping along. Why? Because the president is more concerned with tax-and-spend politics than aligning incentives to promote innovation, productivity, efficiency, and debt reduction. Obama's stimulus failed on its own terms, his health care plan hangs like a sword of Damocles over small business, and his regulatory agencies—from the EPA to the NLRB to the Federal Reserve to the Consumer Financial Protection Bureau—have become economic uncertainty machines.

The president's one good decision was agreeing to maintain current tax rates through December 2012. But he undercut his own policy by immediately pledging to raise taxes on incomes, dividends, capital gains, and estates at the first opportunity. Now it's left to Republicans not only to prevent a major tax increase, but to remove, repair, and mend the fiscal and monetary damage left in Obama's wake. The job won't be easy.

The worst thing Republican presidential candidates could do is be timid and uninspired in their proposals for American renewal. Rather than pledge to lower the corporate tax, for example—big corporations actually seem to be doing pretty well—they'd be better off aligning themselves with small businessmen, many of whom file as individuals, and other entrepreneurs and venture capitalists. Researchers at the Kauffman Foundation have long pointed out that most net job creation in the United States comes from firms less than five years old. Why not embrace policies such as reform of the individual tax code, permanent cuts in payroll taxes paid by employers, and reductions in bureaucratic red tape that make it easier to start a company? Reducing inefficient tax breaks could be the trade-off for substantial increases in the child tax credit. The GOP would be on the side of startups and young families. Obama would be left in the cold.

Energy is another issue on which Republicans can't afford to flinch. Economic upswings have tended to occur during periods of cheap and plentiful energy. So any true recovery would be encouraged by policies that increase the supply of fuel. For starters, there's Rep. Devin Nunes of California's Roadmap for America's Energy Future. The Nunes plan expands production, opens new areas for drilling and exploration, and creates an innovative reverse-auction that would award grants to alternative energy producers on the basis of merit, not connections. A winning GOP candidate would marry Nunes's Roadmap to a deregulatory agenda that got tough on the EPA, expedited leases for oil and natural gas, and eliminated barriers to hydraulic fracturing for oil shale. The greens would be angry, for sure. They'd also lose.

Congressional Republicans displayed courage by embracing the fiscal reforms contained in Paul Ryan's budget. Similar boldness on other long-term challenges, like education, would elevate the discussion and demonstrate the seriousness with which conservatives face the future. Going after the unions isn't enough. A radical expansion of home-schooling opportunities that took advantage of new technologies, for instance, would jolt the system and rally a growing political constituency. Funding students and not schools would be a similar disruption to the status quo. And a renewed interest in the moral and civic dimensions of education is necessary when young people exhibit a dreadful ignorance of U.S. history.

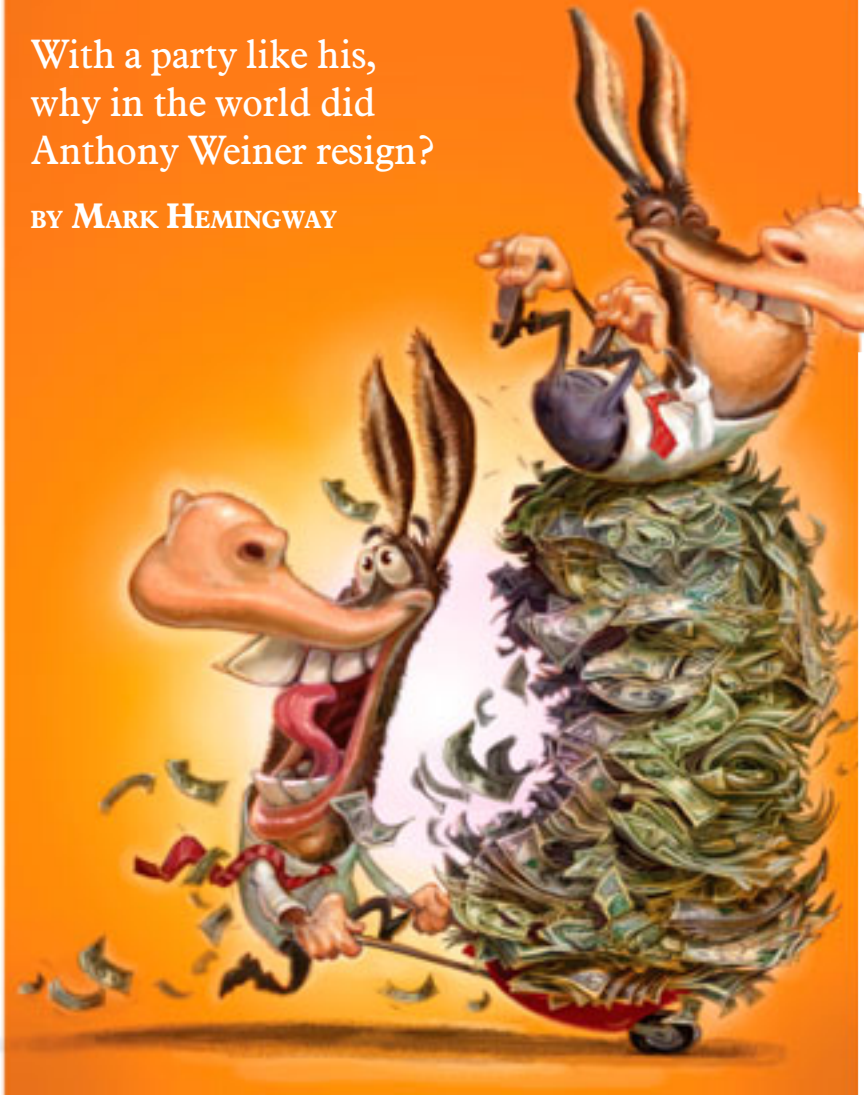
For the past two and a half years, the country has been trapped in an extended master's class on the failures of liberalism. The way out is a Republican victory in 2012. Getting there will take imagination, bravery, authenticity, and the ability to connect with the people against the elites. The candidate who can do that will give us all reason to begin to smile again.

—Matthew Continetti

The Democrats' 'Culture of Corruption'

With a party like his, why in the world did Anthony Weiner resign?

BY MARK HEMINGWAY



Anthony Weiner undoubtedly felt pressured these last few weeks to resign his House seat over his dishonesty and online sexual indiscretions. The leaders of his party, everyone from President Obama to House minority leader Nancy Pelosi on down, were publicly in agreement that he should go.

But from Weiner's vantage point, the question must be asked in all sincerity: Why should he be the one to resign?

The recent history of congressional scandals suggests Weiner had little reason to bow to party leaders, and every reason to stick it out. The Democratic leadership has shown an amazing capacity to tolerate and even encourage corruption that far exceeds Weiner's misdeeds.

Remember Rep. Charles Rangel? A quick recap of his rap sheet: The one-time chairman of the House Ways and Means committee, which writes the nation's tax laws, was guilty of massive tax evasion. The Sunlight Foundation catalogued "28 instances in which Rangel omitted assets worth between $239,026 and $831,000 that were either purchased, sold, or held from his financial disclosures."

He further solicited millions for the Charles B. Rangel Center for Public Service at City College directly from his congressional office—even from a number of interests that had business before his powerful committee. There's also his illegal use of rent-controlled apartments and the House parking garage, as well as other infractions too numerous to name. Rangel has been reelected and is still in office after being censured by the House Ethics Committee.

And what about Rep. Maxine Waters? The House Ethics Committee charged the California Democrat with three violations for helping secure a $12 million TARP bailout for OneUnited Bank, even though her husband was a former board member and had a substantial financial interest in the bank. The president of OneUnited was also revealed to be a cocaine abuser, and the foundering bank was paying for his $6.4 million Malibu home and Porsche even as Waters was securing his bank a taxpayer bailout.

After the scandal broke, Waters was unrepentant. She sent members of her staff to protest at an event featuring Nancy Pelosi, where they held up signs that read "Let's fight for Maxine Waters." Questioned about the tactic, Waters blamed her persecution on racism. "It's about black people . . . These signs will show up wherever large numbers of African Americans gather," she said.

Waters's ethics trial was supposed to begin last fall, but it was postponed after new evidence emerged that she had been dishonest with congressional investigators. She

ILLUSTRATIONS BY GARY LOCKE

Mark Hemingway is the online editor of THE WEEKLY STANDARD.

has yet to have an ethics trial, and the Democratic leadership has been largely mum on the matter.

In January, Paul Magliocchetti was sentenced to 27 months in prison for campaign finance violations. Magliocchetti was the head of the PMA lobbying firm, best known for funneling $2.3 million to the late John Murtha, the Democrat from Pennsylvania who secured millions in earmark spending that benefited PMA clients. The PMA scandal had been dragging on for years, and Murtha's legendary corruption dated all the way back to his role in the Abscam scandal in 1980, when the FBI videotaped him saying he was open to taking a $50,000 bribe. Despite this, Murtha died in office last year as the House's top defense appropriator.

Then there's Rep. Gregory Meeks, another New York Democrat, who was under investigation by a grand jury and the FBI last year for a secret $40,000 personal loan from a wealthy businessman in his district. Meeks was also investigated for promoting a charity for Hurricane Katrina victims that can't account for almost $30,000 of the $31,000 it raised.

Following reports he was stashing his yacht in a tax haven, Democratic senator John Kerry of Massachusetts paid up only after the matter became public last year, even though his wife has a net worth surpassing that of a good many island nations. West Virginia Democratic senator Joe Manchin was under federal investigation for corruption last fall. After raising millions for the Clinton and Obama campaigns, Democratic fundraiser Hassan Nemazee was sentenced last July to 12 years for bank and wire fraud. And multiple lawmakers were caught last year directing Congressional Black Caucus scholarship funds to friends and relatives.

Obama may have said that Weiner should resign, but when it comes to ethics, the White House is a glass house. It may well have violated a number of laws in the last election by dangling jobs before Rep. Joe Sestak and Andrew Romanoff in order to entice them out of their Democratic primary races in Pennsylvania and Colorado respectively.

Last year, Democrats tried to replace Illinois senator Roland Burris, accused of buying his seat from now-convicted former governor Rod Blagojevich, with Illinois state treasurer Alexi Giannoulias, famous for running his family bank into the ground. In 2006, Giannoulias oversaw millions in loans to Michael "Jaws" Giorango, convicted bookmaker and prostitution ring promoter, that went to casinos allegedly connected to the mob. He later lied repeatedly about the loans after being questioned by the press. Despite this, Giannoulias, an old friend of Obama's, was invited to the White House. Obama endorsed his unsuccessful Senate candidacy, saying, "You can trust him."

House minority leader Pelosi also called for Weiner's resignation, though she's been oddly silent on all of the previously noted scandals—especially her own. Last year, it was revealed that the former speaker was ferrying around her grandchildren in military aircraft at taxpayer expense. More recently, it appears that Pelosi went out of her way to secure Obamacare waivers for businesses in her district.

Recall that Democrats assumed control of Congress after the 2006 election by campaigning against a GOP

"culture of corruption" in the wake of scandals surrounding Majority Leader Tom Delay, lobbyist Jack Abramoff, and Rep. Mark Foley. It was a damning and fair charge.

Prior to assuming the speakership in 2007, Pelosi famously promised to "drain the swamp" in order to create "the most ethical Congress in history." When House majority leader Steny Hoyer was asked whether Democrats had in fact "drained the swamp" heading into last year's election, he demurred, saying, "I didn't use that term."

While the Republican party is hardly free of corruption, the sheer amount of Democratic scandal in the last few years is breathtaking. (Note that the words "unions" and "John Edwards trial" haven't even been mentioned to this point.) The only casualty? Eric Massa—another New York Democrat!—who resigned after physical harassment allegations arose involving a male coworker. (Massa initially admitted to groping the aide but later said he only "tickled him until he couldn't breathe.") Otherwise, the Democratic leadership has been content to let everyone skate.

And oddly enough, no one in the media ever talks about a Democratic "culture of corruption." In 2006, *Time* and *Newsweek* offered 15 pages and cover stories dedicated to the Mark Foley scandal (i.e., his harassment of underage pages) in the first 12 days after the story broke. During the first 12 days of the Weiner scandal, those same magazines devoted about 160 words to the matter.

NBC Nightly News host Brian Williams said he wouldn't cover the Weiner story because it was crowding out more important news stories—such as the release of nearly 25,000 pedestrian emails from Sarah Palin's tenure as Alaska governor, which *NBC Nightly News* promptly covered.

Democratic party leaders had no real moral standing to forcefully condemn Weiner's behavior. Assuming he didn't care about personal honor and shame—this is Congress, after all—what reason did Anthony Weiner really have to resign? ♦

Cutting off Granny

Medicare? Thanks, but no thanks.

BY JEFF BERGNER

In a few months my wife and I will turn 65 years of age. I guess we're the proverbial grandpa and grandma that our political leaders aim to protect. Our mailbox has been full lately with brochures describing the Medicare enrollment process, offering supplemental health coverage, and helpfully answering in advance any questions we might have. One question, however, hasn't been answered: Why must we enroll in Medicare and give up our current health insurance? Why can't we simply keep our current insurance coverage when we turn 65?

If we could, we would retain our existing coverage and opt out of Medicare altogether. Our current insurance plan is one with which we are thoroughly familiar; in one or another form we have had this type of insurance our entire adult lives. We're familiar with its premium costs, its benefits, its copays, and even its shortcomings. We wish its dental coverage were better (though Medicare doesn't look so good in that regard either), but on the whole we are reasonably satisfied with its pluses and minuses.

Why must turning 65 be so different from turning 63 or 64? Why is our health insurance plan adequate and appropriate when we are 64 but not when we turn 65?

It seems to be a given in all Medicare reform plans, including the Ryan plan, that the current Medicare program should not be touched for anyone age 55 or older. Perhaps it's just too politically difficult to reform a major program like Medicare all at once. I appreciate that political reality. It is also sometimes said that there is some sort of "pact" or "promise" for seniors approaching age 65 that Medicare must remain in its current form, with no changes at all. About this I am less certain. Is there really a

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"right" to a program which is financially unsustainable? While it is reasonable to expect that some sort of program to provide adequate health coverage for seniors should exist, there is no entitlement for us seniors to the precise Medicare program that is now in place.

Indeed, over time—whether under the Ryan plan's vouchers or the Obama plan's board-mandated service reductions—Medicare will have to change. If our elected officials want to phase in these changes over time, I suppose that's fair enough. And if under the Ryan plan, I and other seniors my age were to be reimbursed for some or all of our monthly health insurance premiums when we turn 65, I suppose that would be fair enough too. Indeed, switching over to a voucher plan strikes me as far easier and less complex than enrolling in Medicare and having to decide which among the mind-boggling array of supplementary plans should accompany it.

One gets the impression that some of our elected officials think that seniors are too old or too dumb to be able to live out their lives under market-based health insurance plans. They seem to think that only complete and guaranteed coverage is appropriate for seniors—though from what I can tell Medicare's coverage is not all that complete in any event. One could almost take offense about this implication.

I do not take as given that seniors cannot function under a market-based health insurance regimen—which many of us have done our entire lives. Nor do I take it as given that those of us 55 years or older have a "right" to Medicare in its current form.

What I would say is this: Thank you, Representative Ryan, for your concern for those of us between the ages of 55 and 64. But could you do us one more favor? Could you redraft your plan to allow those of us 55 and older the choice to decline our special grandfathered status, to opt out of Medicare, and to join voluntarily the same program you have proposed for those who are under age 55? ♦

Follower in Chief

Lead? President Obama would prefer not to.

BY FRED BARNES

Who's in charge? The president with Harry Reid and Nancy Pelosi in 2009.

We've had strong presidents and weak presidents, skillful presidents and incompetent presidents, mediocre presidents and just plain poor presidents. Barack Obama stands alone as the first president who simply declines to lead.

On almost every major issue since he took office in January 2009, Obama has dumped responsibility on someone else, merely paid lip service, or let the issue quietly fade away. Just this year, the issues that have gotten the no-leadership treatment from Obama include: the deficit, the debt, Medicare, Social Security, Medicaid, energy, corporate taxes, medical liability, immigration, and Libya.

The president set his pattern of negligible leadership early on in his administration. Rather than draft his own proposals on economic stimulus, health care, cap and trade, and Wall Street reform—his top priorities—he delegated the job to Democrats in Congress.

Even Jimmy Carter, one of our weakest presidents, didn't do this. And strong presidents, like Lyndon Johnson and Ronald Reagan, never considered deferring to Congress in that way. They followed the traditional practice of drafting specific legislation—two major tax bills and a military buildup in Reagan's case, civil rights and Medicare in LBJ's—and pressing Congress to ratify their recommendations.

Why is Obama so leadership averse? For one thing, it gives him flexibility since he's not tied irrevocably to what congressional Democrats come up with. And it limits his accountability. He's free to attack Republican proposals without attaching himself to an alternative that Republicans could attack.

Obama is comfortable talking about a range of issues. But more often than not he adopts a vague or

Fred Barnes is executive editor of The Weekly Standard.

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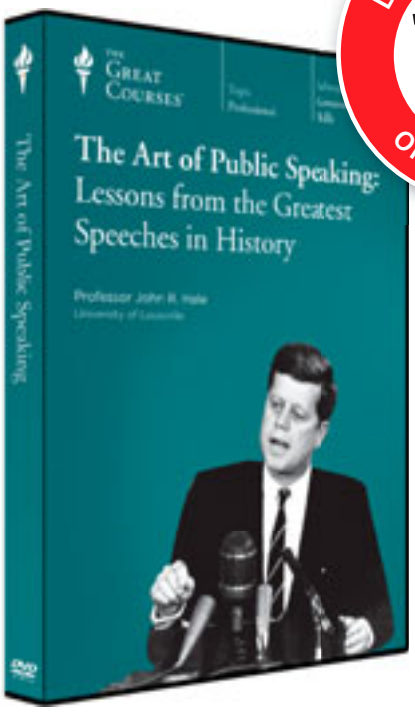

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equivocal position (or no position at all) and fails to lean on Congress to take action. Obama has frequently advocated a cut in the corporate tax rate this year, for example, then done nothing to achieve it.

The one specific proposal by Obama this year was a federal budget for 2012, submitted to Congress in February. But after it was widely criticized for failing to tackle the critical spending and debt problem, Obama jettisoned it. He replaced it, in effect, with a nebulous plan lacking in specifics such as a spending baseline or 10-year time frame. At the same time, he denounced the scrupulously specific Republican budget passed by the House for "changing the basic social compact in America."

The normal procedure in the Senate, once the House has approved a budget, is to pass one of its own, followed by a Senate-House conference to iron out the differences. However, Majority Leader Harry Reid has refused (for the second straight year) to pass a budget, prompting Minority Leader Mitch McConnell to note that "we had [two] competing versions" of a budget in the Senate, both offered by Republicans. Democrats voted down both.

On Medicare, the program's trustees have projected that the program will run out of money in 2024. The Congressional Budget Office puts the date at 2020. Responding to this, the House budget would replace traditional Medicare with "premium support" for seniors to purchase health insurance.

Neither Obama nor Senate Democrats have proposed an alternative for saving Medicare, though Democratic senator Chuck Schumer of New York said it must stay in its "current form with no cuts to seniors' benefits." This is the path to bankruptcy.

In the current bipartisan negotiations on raising the debt limit by $2 trillion, it's unlikely the White House and Democrats will agree to any serious Medicare reforms. On the contrary, they're eager to exploit the Republican plan as a campaign issue in the 2012 election. The closed-door negotiations, by the way, are appropriate for a nonleader, allowing Obama's minions to argue for specific policies without ever advocating them publicly.

At fundraising events, Obama insists he's ready to take on Medicare and Social Security. "Yes, we've got to make changes so that Medicare and Social Security are there for future generations," he said at a Democratic National Committee event in Miami last week. Yet the White House has privately told Republicans not to bring up Social Security in the current talks.

A bolder and quite public tack was taken by President George W. Bush in 2005. He spent the year talking up the broad outlines of a plan to insure the long-term solvency of Social Security, without success.

In late 1997, President Bill Clinton agreed, in private, to a compromise with House speaker Newt Gingrich on modifying Social Security. At the last minute, Clinton backed away when the Monica Lewinsky scandal broke.

But the terms of the compromise—slowing the growth of benefits for the well-off and slightly raising the ceiling on income subject to the payroll tax—are still relevant. They were basically embraced by Obama's debt commission in December, but not by Obama. He's proposed no solution to Social Security's looming breakdown, once again declining to lead.

A talking point in Obama's fundraising speeches is the need for "a smart immigration policy in this country." That's true, but he hasn't proposed one. In Miami, the president criticized the practice of attracting foreign students and forcing them to leave the United States after they "get Ph.D.s in engineering and math and science." Has he sought to change the rules to allow them to stay here? Take a guess.

An Obama aide told Ryan Lizza of the *New Yorker* that in foreign affairs the president favors "leading from behind." That means he scarcely leads at all. On domestic policy, it's the same, only worse. ♦

Return to Sender

A foolish letter from 'wise men' on the Middle East

By Elliott Abrams

There is never a shortage of Middle East peace plans, and another has recently been proposed by a set of Washington luminaries—some with considerable Middle East experience and some with none at all. This new plan, dated June 23 and published in the *New York Review of Books*, appears to be a reaction to President Obama's speech at the State Department on May 19.

In that speech the president adopted a new policy: Israeli-Palestinian negotiations should be based on the "1967 lines" with agreed land swaps. This position had previously been that of the Palestinian side, and Obama's adherence to it undermined Israel's negotiating position. It means, for example, that the Western Wall of the ancient Temple, Judaism's holiest place but conquered by Jordan in 1948, is to be regarded as legitimately part of Palestine, such that Israel must trade some of its own pre-1967 territory to keep it.

But the president did not propose any actions: no conference, no new envoy, no invitations to Washington, nothing. He did not even dispatch Secretary of State Hillary Clinton to tour the area, in the traditional substitution of motion for progress. There was, as Rob Satloff of the Washington Institute for Near East Policy has explained, "a policy without a strategy. It is no surprise, therefore, that others have begun to fill the vacuum—a development that is almost always unwelcome."

Satloff describes recent efforts to fill the vacuum, the first of which was a nasty op-ed by the former Saudi intelligence chief and (briefly) ambassador to Washington Turki al-Faisal, who threatened "disastrous consequences for U.S.-Saudi relations if the United States vetoes U.N. recognition of a Palestinian state." We have all heard those threats before, and this one, from someone not even holding a government job, is less scary than most. Surrounded by the Arab Spring and the menace of Iran, the Saudis are about as likely to break with us over this matter as the French were to break relations with the United States and the United Kingdom in 1940.

The French recently made an effort to fill the perceived Middle East vacuum with a conference, and that effort was dismissed so quickly by Secretary Clinton that Israeli prime minister Bibi Netanyahu didn't even have time to send an Israeli rejection. More recently the EU foreign minister, Lady Ashton, proposed a new Quartet initiative, presumably because the EU is part of the Quartet and this would give the European chancelleries a piece of the action. For that reason alone this initiative is unrealistic and doomed, although it may prove useful if it provides EU member states an additional excuse to vote against the Palestinian statehood resolution in the U.N. General Assembly.

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And now comes the open letter to President Obama from a group including many famous names: Zbigniew Brzezinski, Lee Hamilton, Frank Carlucci, Thomas Pickering, Sandra Day O'Connor, and James Wolfensohn are just a few. Their letter proposes fierce pressure on Israel, and they know this is a tough sell, so the final paragraph sympathizes with the president and tells him how he can do this:

> We understand, Mr. President, that the initiative we propose you take to end the suffering and statelessness of the Palestinian people and efforts to undermine Israel's legitimacy is not without political risks. But we believe that if the American people are fully informed by their President of the likely consequences of an abandonment of U.S. leadership in a part of the world so critical to this country's national security and to the safety of our military personnel in the region, he will have their support.

So the message seems to be that supporters of Israel aren't going to like this proposal one bit, but you can beat them. You can beat them especially if you say that the lives of American troops are at risk as a result of our policy of

Elliott Abrams, senior fellow for Middle Eastern studies at the Council on Foreign Relations, was a deputy national security adviser in the George W. Bush administration.

supporting Israel. This is a terrible argument for many reasons; for one thing it suggests tacitly that the pro-Israel community is not part of "the American people" to whom the policy must be explained. Moreover, it suggests that those who might be tempted to disagree are simply ignorant and not "fully informed." In so doing it smacks of the arguments that our policy is the product of the "Jewish lobby" and that it is supported merely by Christian evangelicals who are uneducated and know no better.

So what does this letter actually propose that will present the president with "political risks"? It proposes that the United States give up on the "peace process" and impose conditions of our own, and threaten dire consequences should Israel balk.

First comes the analysis:

> Left to their own devices, it is the vast disparity of power between the two parties rather than international law and fairness that will continue to prevail. The experience of these past two years has surely not suggested any other possible outcome.

So, the problem is that Israel is blocking progress. The Palestinians, who since January 2009 have refused to come to the negotiating table, are exempted from any criticism.

The Israelis now face what they "perceive to be a global movement that seeks their country's delegitimization." They perceive wrongly, the letter argues:

> But it is not the State of Israel within its 1967 borders that is being challenged. It is Israel's occupation, the relentless enlargement of its settlements, its dispossession of the Palestinian people in the West Bank and in East Jerusalem, and the humanitarian disaster caused by its blockade of Gaza that are the target of international anger and condemnation.

Again, it is Israel and Israel alone that is to blame for the failure to reach peace. And the terminology here is emotive: *relentless*, *dispossession*, *disaster*. The argument is odd. This "relentless enlargement" did not prevent Ehud Olmert from offering more land to the Palestinians in 2009 than Ehud Barak offered in 2000. Gaza has a border with Egypt that not only the Mubarak regime but the new Egyptian government as well patrols carefully and does not allow to be opened fully, yet only Israel is blamed for conditions in Gaza. Moreover, the notion that "international anger and condemnation" are caused by the settlements and the Gaza situation is a bizarre one coming from the signers, who are old enough to remember the wars of 1948, 1956, and 1967 before there was one single settlement—and to recall the U.N.'s "Zionism is Racism" resolution in 1975, which received 72 votes in the General Assembly.

Given this analysis that Israel is to blame for everything, the proposed framework is logical. There are six points.

(1) "The United States will oppose any effort to challenge or undermine the legitimacy of the State of Israel within internationally recognized borders," which suggests that we will not oppose undermining Israel today or tomorrow, when it has no such borders.

(2) "The United States will work for the establishment of a sovereign and viable Palestinian state based on the 1967 borders, subject only to agreed, minor and equal land swaps to take into account areas adjoining the former Green Line heavily populated by Israelis . . ." President Obama's suggestion of using the 1967 lines as a base was not enough, and the United States should further undermine Israel's negotiating position by demanding that any swaps be "minor" and that any settlement not right on the Green Line, such as Ariel (population 18,000), be abandoned.

The letter proposes that the United States give up on the 'peace process,' impose conditions of our own, and threaten dire consequences should Israel balk.

(3) Any solution to the refugee problem cannot flood Israel with Arabs and destroy its character as a Jewish state, so that "proposals for unlimited entry of Palestinian refugees into the State of Israel will be opposed by the United States." But this formulation of course suggests that proposals for "limited entry" would not be opposed, meaning that an Israeli policy of refusing any such entry is likely to be viewed as obstructionist—yet another Israeli obstacle to peace.

(4) As part of a peace agreement, "the United States will support the presence of a U.S.-led multinational force to oversee security provisions and border crossings." It is a surprise to see this proposal for yet another overseas military commitment at a time when there is so much pressure for withdrawal of forces from Afghanistan and Iraq and cuts in the defense budget. And given the nature of the terrorist threat to Israel, how an effective multinational force could be organized is mysterious. In an analogous situation, the international force in Lebanon has failed completely to restrain or disarm Hezbollah.

(5) Jerusalem will be divided between Israel and Palestine and "each side" will control its own holy places. Among many other problems, what this means for the Christian holy places and the entire Armenian Quarter is not specified.

(6) "The United States will encourage the reconciliation of Fatah and Hamas on terms compatible with these principles and UNSC Resolutions 242 and 338." So there is no precise call for Hamas to adhere to the Quartet Principles, requiring it to abandon terrorism, recognize Israel's right to exist, and adhere to previous agreements. Instead, the United States will move from treating Hamas as a terrorist group, which it is a crime to support, to "encouraging" Fatah to reconcile with it.

These proposals would cause the president political damage, not political risk. Further damage would be caused were he ever to adopt not only these positions but in addition the threatening attitude that is proposed. In his cover letter, Lee Hamilton explains:

> Prospects for the implementation of these principles depend entirely on an understanding by both parties that there are consequences for their rejection. . . . In his speech, President Obama omitted reference to consequences. We believe the cost-benefit calculations of neither party will be changed without that understanding.

So these are not to be American proposals, but an American ultimatum to Israel. It is striking that the toughest language, about "consequences" and changing Israel's "cost-benefit calculations," is found not in the letter to the president but only in the introductory description from Lee Hamilton. Whether all of the signers agree with this approach cannot be certain, but it must be assumed that all of this was hashed out in advance.

The analysis and the proposals made in this letter reveal that many of America's most experienced former senior officials now blame Israel alone for the freeze in Middle East peace negotiations. And they believe that Israel should be forced into compromises and sacrifices under enormous American pressure, even if the vast majority of Israelis oppose them and view them as dangerous. This is, to use State Department terminology, "deeply disturbing," even if the likelihood that any president would accept this advice is small.

No doubt the signers of the letter are frustrated that, in the age of the Arab Spring, there is no visible progress toward ending the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. But as we all celebrate the demands for democracy in Arab lands, we can be thankful that American democracy remains strong. This fact ensures that neither the president nor Congress would ever accept the demands made here: to blame Israel alone for the failure to reach a peace agreement, threaten her, adopt positions that undermine her security, and abandon pledges made by American presidents of both parties. ♦

What Third World Women Want

According to first world feminists

By Charlotte Allen

Cambridge, Mass.

The good news about the conference earlier this year titled "Driving Change, Shaping Lives: Gender in the Developing World" was that no one said, "Women hold up half the sky." The bad news was that someone might as well have uttered this chestnut, reputed to be one of Mao Zedong's favorite Chinese proverbs and a perennial favorite of feminists.

The subtheme of the two-day event, sponsored by the Radcliffe Institute for Advanced Study, the women's studies think tank that occupies what used to be the campus of Radcliffe College before it merged with Harvard, was how colorful, if chronically impoverished, the developing world can be, especially its women. The conference program was illustrated by photographs of developing-world people clad in ethnic costumes taken by a Harvard freshman who had been lucky enough or rich enough to take trips far abroad while still in high school: a veiled female crusher of argan nuts in Morocco ("She works at a women's co-op," the text read), a child beggar in India tricked out like the god Krishna, a Buddhist monk in China working a cell phone (an illustration of what the Harvard-freshman photographer called cross-cultural "hybridity").

Most of the panelists at the conference and nearly all the audience of 150 or so was female. Indeed Asim IJaz Khwaja, a public policy professor at the Harvard Kennedy School and a rare male panelist, declared self-deprecatingly, "I take such pleasure in being a minority and being stymied by the intellectual ferment here." Some of the women wore hijabs, saris, and towering sub-Saharan headdresses that announced their developing-world provenance—but most of them wore the uniform of First World women in academia: sensible slacks, puffy vests, and backpacks. All but a few of the former group were government officials, parliamentarians, and NGO activists from the countries that their ethnic dress denoted. As for the latter group, they were mostly what they looked like: professors and graduate students in such fields as politics, international relations, and, of course, women's studies.

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No sooner had we settled into our seats and listened to some opening boilerplate than came . . . the praise poetry. The poet, a rangy young man who leaped and chanted exuberantly down the center aisle, was Siyabulela Lethuxolo Xuza of Johannesburg. Although brightly clad in a dashiki-like overshirt and headband, Xuza was actually a Harvard engineering major who as a high school student had won a top prize in Intel Corp.'s International Science and Engineering Fair and had an asteroid named after him—in other words, a typical résumé for a Harvard undergraduate. Swooping and whirling, Xuza chanted his praise poem in a lilting South African language that featured numerous tongue-clicks. He never got around to translating his poem, but he did assure his audience that it was relevant to the conference: "This is about gender issues and cultural issues. I tried to use my act to entertain you on issues of gender."

"Wow!" exclaimed Swanee Hunt, a lecturer at Harvard's Kennedy School. Hunt chairs the Institute for

Charlotte Allen is a contributing editor to the Manhattan Institute's Minding the Campus website. She wrote about the revolutions in Tunisia and Egypt in our March 14 issue.

THOMAS FLUHARTY

Inclusive Security, a think tank based in Cambridge and Washington that, according to its website, promotes "the vital but often unrecognized role" women play "in averting violence and resolving conflict." As Xuza swirled gracefully to a final round of applause, Hunt rhapsodized, "I love the energy—isn't it great?"

The first speaker was Valerie M. Hudson, a political science professor at Brigham Young University, leading off a panel titled "Shifting Populations." Hudson delivered a genuine population-shift shocker: In China and India, which between them account for about 40 percent of the world's 7 billion people, women, who in the West slightly outnumber men because they tend to live longer, are outnumbered by the male sex to the tune of 33 million in China and 28 million in India. The reason? As Hudson explained, it was the female-lethal combination of sex-selection abortion following the advent of fetal ultrasound during the 1980s and China's longtime one-child policy, which has resulted in widespread female infanticide along with many forced abortions. As she rattled off disturbing statistics—120 boy babies for every 100 girl babies in China in 2005, and 121 for every 100 in India—Hudson pointed out that sex-selection abortion and female infanticide are illegal in both countries, but the laws on the books have failed to dent the cultural phenomenon of "son preference" in Asia, in which sons are valued because they're expected to support elderly parents, whereas daughters often cost dowry money. "That's 90 million missing women," Hudson said.

In 2004 she and Andrea den Boer, a lecturer in politics and international affairs at the University of Kent, had published a book, *Bare Branches*, about the negative repercussions for a society, such as in China, that produces large numbers of surplus young men who cannot find wives and form families. "Those who don't marry tend to have no skills and no education," Hudson explained. "They are already at risk for violent behavior, since young men without stable social bonds tend to commit most violent crimes. They tend to be targets for military recruitment, and societies with surplus males tend to be marked by an aggressive foreign policy and ethnic groups pitted against each other."

Maybe it was because abortion makes women's studies people skittish, but Hudson's ominous statistics—and indeed her entire presentation—were promptly forgotten, submerged in what might be called the Battle of the Filipina Hostesses. The combatants were Hudson's two fellow panelists, Rhacel Salazar Parreñas, a sociology professor at the University of Southern California and self-described former Filipina hostess, and Amy O'Neill Richard, a senior adviser in the State Department's Office of Trafficking in Persons, a priority project of Secretary of State Hillary Clinton. During the 1980s and 1990s tens of thousands of young women were imported into Japan by labor contractors from the chronically impoverished Philippines to sing, dance, flirt with, and coax drink purchases from stressed-out salarymen in bars and nightclubs—until a 2005 crackdown by the Japanese government reduced the hostesses' numbers by 90 percent, from 80,000 in 2004 to 8,000 in 2006. Few of the Filipinas, it seemed, had any training as the professional entertainers that their visas said they were. The Japanese government maintained that most of them were actually prostitutes or near-prostitutes, pushed into long hours of dubious servitude by the contractors and the clubs, many of which had ties to yakuza mobsters. A spate of brutal murders of hostesses—along with some murders committed by hostesses of their pimps—fueled the drive to clamp down on the hostess business and send most of the women back to the Philippines.

Parreñas went on the warpath. She announced that she had no intention of abiding by the 10-minute presentation limit for panelists and then proceeded to read a fiery 20-minute paper that blasted the hostess crackdown as part of 'a U.S.-backed war' against 'sex work' fueled by 'moral imperialism and conservative values.'

Taking the podium after Hudson, Parreñas went on the warpath. She announced that she had no intention of abiding by the 10-minute presentation limit for panelists and then proceeded to read a fiery 20-minute paper that she titled "Migration as Indentured Mobility: The Moral Regulation of Migrant Women." The paper blasted the hostess crackdown as part of "a U.S.-backed war" against "sex work" fueled by "moral imperialism and conservative values" (the U.S. government funds anti-trafficking programs in about 70 countries). In the crackdown the hostesses were "stripped of their livelihood," Parreñas lamented. "They go to Japan of their own volition—they're not drugged or forced to go. They find it empowering to be a hostess." Parreñas's theory was that "there are multiple moralities in society," and that some Filipinas' moral codes happened to permit "paid sex with the men they call their boyfriends." The

problem, as Parreñas saw it, was that many Japanese clubs tended to have a different "moral culture" from that of the hostesses who worked there, but the hostesses couldn't quit until their indentures were up. Nonetheless, Parreñas insisted, "most of them resent the United States, and they resent being rescued" from the hostess life by being kicked out of Japan. Her solution to the hostess problem: open immigration in the West for developing-world sex workers so they could get jobs in, say, the Netherlands, where prostitution is legal.

Parreñas proved to be a tough act to follow. Richard, the human-trafficking expert from the State Department, seemed dumbfounded. "I think America is a wonderful country," she said. She rattled off some information about the Victims of Trafficking and Violence Protection Act, signed into law by President Bill Clinton in 2000, along with some alarming-sounding numbers: 70 percent of the estimated 12 to 27 million human-trafficking victims in the world these days are women and girls, most of whom end up in bondage, often sexual bondage, in East Asia and the Middle East. Parreñas was having none of that. "It's quite tricky to lump all trafficked people together," she sniffed. "Most migrant workers are domestic workers, and many countries, including the United States, don't even count domestic work as an occupation." Nor did Parreñas have any positive words for Hudson and her bare-branches research. "Did you interview any of those single men you describe as psychopathic and poor?" Parreñas demanded of Hudson. "Did they see themselves as unmarriageable?"

The rest of the conference went more or less like that. There were more ethnic entertainments by Harvard undergrads featuring dancing, singing, strumming exotic stringed instruments, and beating on drums. Joyce Banda, longtime gender activist and vice president of Malawi since 2009 (although she is under a political cloud right now, having abandoned her socialist-leaning political party and started her own even more socialist-leaning political party in the middle of her term), said, "Gender and development are where my heart belongs." Banda, who was costumed dramatically in a multicolored dress and turban, larded her speech with such phrases as "change agents," "mobilized communities," and "taking ownership." She extolled a program she had started in which local chiefs pressure women in their villages to have their babies at medical clinics instead of at home as tradition demands. (So far the brand-new program has yet to make a dent: Malawi has one of the highest maternal death rates in the world, with 1,800 out of every 100,000 pregnant women dying during their infants' gestation or birth, compared with just 11 women out of 100,000 in this country.)

Another panelist was Mirai Chatterjee, an official with the Self-Employed Women's Association (SEWA) in India, a 1.3 million-member "holistic" organization that seemed to be a combination of women's collective, NGO, and lobbying headquarters on such issues as full employment and government-subsidized day care. Chatterjee showed many PowerPoint slides of SEWA activities: women in saris handing pamphlets to other women in saris and more women in saris holding meetings. "We are pushing forward for universal health care—in that respect we are ahead of the United States," said Chatterjee as the audience clapped in agreement. At the same time Chatterjee put in a pitch for Ayurvedic herb-based medicine, another SEWA activity. "We are reclaiming our tradition," she said.

Cecilia María Vélez, former education minister of Colombia (and a visiting professor at Harvard's education school), lauded her country's educational progress under her watch. According to Vélez, primary and secondary education in Colombia now revolves around "enhancing citizens' competencies," as well as "changing attitudes" about such issues as sex education, "gender equity," "how to identify and accept differences, and how to communicate feelings." "Violence comes from not accepting differences," Vélez declared. On the same panel as Vélez was Thuwayba Al Barwani, dean of the college of education at Sultan Qaboos University in Oman. If Vélez made Colombia sound like an educational paradise in gender-equity terms, Al Barwani made Oman sound like the third heaven. She praised her boss, Qaboos bin Said al Said, who assumed the reins of Oman in 1970, after ousting his father, the previous sultan, in a palace coup (or, as Al Barwani put it, "he took over from his father"). "The country has journeyed for 40 years away from the economic stagnation of that time," Al Barwani said. "Now, women wear the veil, but it is a matter of choice for them. In 2009 the sultan said that women should participate more in higher education in Oman, so now women outperform men. The university is now 50 percent women, so now Qaboos has agreed on rules to make it easier for boys to succeed in the educational system."

Ironically, even as Al Barwani was speaking, Omanis were demonstrating in the streets of the Gulf state's capital, Muscat, and other major cities against the 70-year-old Qaboos, who, progressive though he may be, rules as an absolute monarch. Humaira Awais Shahid, a parliamentarian in the Punjab Assembly in Pakistan (and former fellow at the Radcliffe Institute), argued that "true Islam" encouraged women's rights and tolerance of minorities—just a few days after Shahbaz Bhatti, Pakistan's only Christian cabinet member, was assassinated, apparently for criticizing his country's anti-blasphemy laws.

When the panelists weren't congratulating themselves and their home countries for advanced gender-directed thinking, they were promoting ideas for improving the lives of developing-world women, ideas that invariably involved prominent roles for professors, politicians, government officials, and NGO operatives—that is, people like the people on the panels. Microfinance was a favorite, touted by Banda for Malawi (where Banda had set up a microfinance unit), Chatterjee for India, and Shahid for Pakistan (Shahid had authored a 2007 law that mandates "Islamic" microlending—that is, interest-free loans). None of the three seemed aware of recent critiques of microfinance—tiny loans typically made to poor women in order to help them start businesses—which was so much the darling of development agencies just a few years ago that the U.N. designated 2005 as the "International Year of Microcredit," and Muhammad Yunus, whose Grameen Bank in Bangladesh fired off a microloan explosion, won the Nobel Peace Prize the following year.

Recently, though, scholarly studies have criticized microfinance for poor management by NGO-microlenders operating on donor startup capital, high default rates that have necessitated frequent recapitalizations, strong-arm collection tactics by the local "partners" who service the loans, and the general failure of microfinance to alleviate poverty. Many microborrowers, it seems, use their loan proceeds not for business ventures but to fund consumer goods and dowries, or, just as often, to pay off other microloans gone into arrears. Some economists have suggested that poor people in the Third World would be better off setting up microsavings accounts instead. Yunus himself was recently forced into retirement from Grameen amid never-proven charges of corruption. Still, it was all microfinance cheerleading at the Radcliffe Institute: "Microfinance empowers women," declared Banda.

Esther Duflo, the Massachusetts Institute of Technology poverty-alleviation professor, MacArthur "genius grant" winner, and celebrity on the developmental-economics circuit (she was always surrounded by a retinue of admirers) argued, as part of a "politics" panel, for expanding mandatory gender quotas in elections. The quotas, already in place in India and Rwanda, would require a fixed percentage of legislative seats to be "reserved" for women, presumably so as to advance such "women's issues" as access to drinking water and improved roads.

On a technology panel, blonde, smartly dressed Kristine Pearson, CEO of Lifeline Energy, an NGO that distributes solar-powered radios in sub-Saharan African villages, made a pitch for "empowering women through power." She showed slides of sub-Saharan men tuning in avidly to world news and gospel music on their own battery-powered radios—nearly their sole connection to the outside world in the large African areas that lack grid electricity—to which their womenfolk, not having cash earnings or status in the household, lack access.

"We call sisterhood the alternative grid," said Pearson. She showed off one of the Lifeline radios to the conference audience: a royal blue, lunchbucket-size plastic contraption that on the minus side looked ugly as sin but on the plus side looked indestructible (and it was). Yet it turned out that the 215,000 radios that Lifeline has distributed since 2003 in Rwanda and elsewhere, paid for by Lifeline donors, don't go directly to individual women. Indeed, the Lifeline website explicitly warns that the royal blue radios "are not for individual purchase."

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"They're made for group settings," Pearson explained to me in a telephone interview a few days after the conference when I expressed puzzlement over Pearson's claim that a mere 215,000 radios had "reached 10 million people." (The radios' bulky dimensions correlate to their capacity for delivering high volume.) Pearson continued: "We work with partner-organizations who identify the beneficiaries"—typically other organizations and community leaders who in turn feed villagers educational programming from the radios. It seems that if sub-Saharan women want to empower themselves with Lifeline radios, they have no choice but to do it as part of a group.

The solar-powered (and in case of bad weather, hand-crank-powered) Lifeline radios are also twofers—that is, they serve an additional environmental goal (to quote the Lifeline website) as "appropriate" technology. Pearson, during her presentation, criticized solar's chief competition in rural Africa, "cheap Chinese batteries," for generating toxic waste. During a break I

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8. More foreign food is projected to legally enter the U.S., increasing our chances of importing even more unchecked contaminated food.

9. "Buy American" food support will become illegal *(see chapter 2 & 6 of the agreement)*.

10. South Korea will still use import barriers that the U.S. does not use.

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article by Pat Choate, author and economist

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visited an exhibition connected to the conference titled "New Ideas, Old Challenges: Innovation and the Developing World." There, Harvard students, postdocs, faculty members, and conference participants (including Pearson's Lifeline) displayed their ideas for improving life in the Third World. They were a visually unappealing collection of carbon-phobic inventions that it was hard to imagine getting very far in the First World. There was a soccer ball called the "sOccket" that was supposed to generate enough electricity to power an LED light if children kicked it around enough during play. There were "microbial fuel cells" that promised to generate electricity out of the bacteria in dirt. There were insecticide-treated bed nets, the green way of dealing with mosquito-borne malaria now that DDT is under a cloud.

There was also the "Appropriate Rondavel Chimney," one of countless cookstove designs that Western tinkerers have spent almost four decades trying to persuade rural Third Worlders to use instead of the pollution-generating open fires and braziers on which they have traditionally prepared their meals. Cookstoves are iconic "appropriate" technology. The cookstove movement—the effort to build cheap, fuel-efficient stoves for the developing world—got going in the West during the 1970s when deforestation from cutting down trees for fuel was a worldwide environmental issue. But now, with climate change trumping tree conservation, the emphasis is on limiting the carbon produced by soot. The problem is that cooks in the developing world have never much taken to the improved stoves that well-meaning engineers and artisans have proffered them. In 1983 the Indian government distributed 35 million free stoves throughout the country, most of which were junked by their owners shortly after their acquisition. Still, the cookstove movement remains very much alive, partly because of its honored place in the global-warming constellation and partly because the lung diseases linked to smoke inhalation during cooking (chimney flues are unknown in much of the Third World) have given cleaner stoves a gender angle as well as a climate-change angle. The "cap and trade" climate-change bill that the House of Representatives passed in 2009 contained a directive, slipped into the bill's 1,400-odd pages, for the Environmental Protection Agency to identify ways to provide clean stoves to 20 million

households worldwide. The bill died in the Senate, but last September Secretary of State Clinton announced a pledge of $50 million to a U.N.-supported global cookstove coalition.

It all seemed depressing, this array of dreary goods designed for impoverished people that few impoverished people seemed willing to buy on their own or use when given to them. The distribution model contemplated by the products' designers was to pick a dirt-poor country, usually in Africa—Rwanda, Sudan, Lesotho, Sierra Leone—and then persuade a government agency or an NGO to hand out the bed nets, the environmentally correct stoves, and the electricity-generating soccer balls for nothing. Indeed, the bed net display included a discussion of the freeloader problem: recipients hiding the nets they already owned or pretending to have more children than they actually had so as to qualify for extra nets that they could sell or use for their domestic animals. Some of the products also seemed relatively expensive if one compared their prices with those of similar products available in the profit-oriented First World. For example, according to Kristine Pearson's website, a single Lifeline radio costs $100 to manufacture and distribute—even though commercially manufactured solar-powered radios can be bought retail for as little as $15 on Amazon (more sophisticated solar models sell for up to $150—but they are also infinitely sleeker and more versatile than the Lifeline). Nobody at the conference seemed to have asked, much less tried to answer, Freud's famous question, "What do women want?" Real flesh-and-blood Third World women, that is, not the politicians and NGOs who claimed to represent their interests.

There was one exception. Panelist Robert Jensen, an associate professor of public policy at UCLA's School of Public Affairs, said that his research in India had revealed that two off-the-grid developments that have had nothing to do with official or collectivist policies—access to cable television and "new employment" at call centers and computer-focused document-management operations—seem to do a better job of improving the health, educational prospects, and economic value of young women to their families than governmental and nonprofit interventions.

"Even the poor in India have cable TV," noted Jensen, showing a

slide of a sari-clad household fixated on a Bollywood soap opera. "When they see women making decisions on television shows, even when those women are presented negatively, as they often are, it correlates with women starting to make household decisions on their own," said Jensen. "Diodes are a girl's best friend," he quipped.

Jensen's observation about the private sector had corroboration from an unlikely quarter: the conference's cookstove expert, Kirk R. Smith, professor of global environmental health and director of the Global Health and Environment Program at UC-Berkeley. In a telephone interview a few days after the conference, Smith told me that the most successful low-polluting stoves in terms of actual day-to-day use seem to be those that are commercially manufactured, such as the Oorja stove in India, where only 65 percent of households, mostly in cities, are wired to a grid. The Oorja runs on crop residues processed into pellets and sells for about $25. "I use one for barbecuing at my house," said Smith. "It's got a little blower, and you're cooking in fifteen seconds."

About a half-million of the stoves, developed, manufactured, and extensively pre-tested on rural consumers by BP, have sold since the stove was introduced in 2007. Part of the Oorja's success is its visual appeal (it has a shiny stainless-steel façade). "You have to convince the women to use a stove, because they're the ones who cook," said Smith. "If you're used to not paying for something—some of these people make stoves out of mud for $2 or they use three rocks for a pot and an open fire—it's a change in thinking to have to pay for something. You can convince women by emphasizing that it's attractive—you appeal to their desire for time-saving and modernity. A lot of the stove people don't try to design their products to look good." He added, "Of course, every household ought to have electricity."

Emily Chamlee-Wright, an economics professor at Beloit College who was not at the Radcliffe Institute conference, has studied informal economic arrangements among women in West Africa. Voluntary credit associations formed by women, for example, have been around in Africa since the 1920s, far longer than microfinance and with built-in cultural norms that discourage abuse, Chamlee-Wright pointed out in a phone interview. Vegetable sellers at the open-air markets in Ghana tend to be "females feeding their families. They're very well organized. They allot areas for sellers of certain kinds of things, like tomatoes. They have structures for conflict resolution where the dispute goes up to the market queen. I don't want to disparage NGOs, but they tend to focus on intentional, directed beneficiaries. When trying to figure out how do we generate widespread prosperity, we look for ways to spread unintended as well as intentional benefits: new technologies and inventions, people working together. How do you trigger cascading effects? Something as simple as a cell phone can make a huge difference. Say you're a farmer, and you've got a truckload of tomatoes. You'd have to take a chance on where to sell them and maybe not get the best price. With a cell phone you can call your nephew in the city and have him check the prices for the best market for you. The problem is that most NGOs are still focused on top-down ways to benefit people."

What women in the developing world need, at least in West Africa, said Chamlee-Wright, are 'formal property rights. Lack of clear property rights in rural areas is a huge problem. Those market women think of themselves as owning their stall, but they don't.'

What women in the developing world need, at least in West Africa, said Chamlee-Wright, are "formal property rights. Lack of clear property rights in rural areas is a huge problem. Those market women think of themselves as owning their stall, but they don't. The stalls belong to the municipality, which typically sees trading as a problem to be managed. They might tolerate selling on the street, but sometimes they'll confiscate your goods. And if you don't own your spot, it makes no sense to invest in your business and grow larger so you can hire other people and give them jobs."

As Chamlee-Wright pointed out, cash in the hands of developing-world women can buy them autonomy and the improved health care that they crave. But at the Radcliffe Institute it was all, well, praise poetry, sisterhood, and government programs. During a break I chatted with two professors in the audience: Barbara Thomas-Slayter, a research professor specializing in African, gender, and peasant studies at Clark University, and her friend Joanna Hopkins, a retired Russian professor at Yale. "Women are more caring and involved with other people than men," said Thomas-Slayter. "They're more interested in peace and less interested in violence, less interested in the total waste of resources." I asked the pair what they thought would be the most effective way to improve the lot of women in the developing world. "More state support for parents," Hopkins shot back. Oh, dear. ♦

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Scott Rasmussen: MJ Cotton

Truman Capote, Katharine Graham at the Black and White Ball, 1966

HARRY BENSON / EXPRESS / GETTY IMAGES

Breakfast at Truman's

Betrayal, over easy.

BY WINSTON GROOM

Comes now William Todd Schultz, self-styled "psychobiographer," to explain the mystery of Truman Capote's lamentable *Answered Prayers*, which almost finished him off as a viable author. In a predictable nutshell, Capote wrote it because he had a lousy childhood that he never got over, but let us not get ahead of ourselves; there are other weenies to roast before this tale is done.

Psychobiographers apparently have a challenging job, which is to figure out how to sound more psychoanalytical than ordinary biographers without driving their readers nuts. As one might have guessed, psychobiographers trace most deviant behavior back to childhood, and Capote's case is no exception. All but abandoned by both of his divorced parents, Truman was raised in a small Alabama town an hour or so north of Mobile, where he became precocious and amused himself by writing and telling stories so well that no one could figure out whether or not they were true. I was personally, if slightly, involved in one of these stories, which serves to illustrate the challenges here for the psychobiographer.

After he became famous, Truman liked to tell interviewers that he got his start in writing by entering, and winning, a children's short story contest sponsored by the *Mobile Press-Register*. As luck would have it, in the wake of *Forrest Gump*, I told a talk-show host on national TV that I (who grew up in Mobile) also got my start in writing at the age of eight by winning the children's story contest

Tiny Terror
Why Truman Capote (Almost) Wrote Answered Prayers
by William Todd Schultz
Oxford, 208 pp., $17.95

Winston Groom is the author, most recently, of Vicksburg, 1863, *and of the upcoming* Kearny's March: The Epic Creation of the American West, 1846-1847.

in the *Mobile Press-Register*. When the then-editor of the newspaper heard of this, he fished out a copy of my original printed story, had it framed, and sent it to me, along with a note adding that, despite many rumors that Truman Capote had once won the paper's annual short story contest, no evidence existed to support the claim.

The point of all this is that Truman often didn't tell the truth, which is probably not such a bad thing for a novelist. The late Willie Morris was fond of saying that "sometimes you've got to lie a little to tell the truth," a statement he attributed to the late Shelby Foote, but which most certainly could be applied to Truman—especially with respect to *In Cold Blood* —but again, I digress. You can see, however, the quandary the psychobiographer faces when the object of his analysis is constantly lying.

Truman was apparently a born writer, since he never had much formal education, and yet published the critically acclaimed novel *Other Voices, Other Rooms* in 1948, at the age of 24, in which he autobiographically proclaimed his homosexuality. This led, a decade later, to an assignment from the *New Yorker* to cover the brutal murder of a family in Kansas, which, in turn, led to his groundbreaking *tour de force*, *In Cold Blood* (1966), which was once described as "faction"—the novel amalgamation of fact-based journalism and fiction. Despite outrage by conventional journalists as Truman's wholesale inventions in *In Cold Blood* leaked out, the book became an international bestseller, and its royalties, plus the subsequent movie, made Truman wealthy. With this behind him, he was ready for the big leagues, both literarily and socially speaking.

In the mid-to-late 1960s, the New York (and subsequently the entire) Social World underwent a profound change: In deference to Women's Lib, among other things, the ever-venerable *New York Times* replaced its long-established "society" or "women's" pages with a new Living section. This meant abandoning coverage of old-line New York WASP socialites in favor of movie stars and similar celebrities, political and otherwise, including Jews, changing forever the way "society" would be perceived. In time, a glamorous but elusive gaggle of wealthy wives, widows, and divorcees emerged—mostly thin, some beautiful, and all powerful within their own affluent circles, bolstered by their husbands' (or former husbands') prosperity and renown. Their names rolled giddily off the tongues of aspiring social climbers everywhere: C.Z. Guest, Nedda Logan, Gloria Vanderbilt, Lee Radziwill, Jacqueline Kennedy Onassis, Peggy Guggenheim, Slim Keith (aka "Big Mamma"). But the greatest and most elusive of them all was the redoubtable Barbara Cushing "Babe" Paley, wife of the chairman of CBS.

Into their posh salons Truman Capote swam effortlessly: rich, famous, effeminate, brilliant, and deliciously wicked of tongue. He called them his "Swans." (Others, not so charitably, called them "fruit flies.") He was seen with them at fashionable restaurants for lunch, notably La Côte Basque. Their husbands tolerated the five-foot-three author—also known as the "Tiny Terror," an appellation bestowed on him by Aileen Mehle, the "Suzy" of gossip columns—because he amused their wives. He was sometimes also referred to as their lapdog.

In 1966, Truman threw himself a huge party at the Plaza Hotel in the name of *Washington Post* publisher Katharine Graham. Called the Black and White Ball, the masked affair became the talk of the town for months over speculation on who would (and would not) be invited, and remains legendary after saturation press coverage that was almost obscene. But as sometimes happens when persons are abruptly covered with fortune and fame, weird behavior set in, occasioning our psychobiographer to shift into high gear. To coin a phrase from my Great Uncle Marshall, a sage Southerner if ever there was, Truman Capote, basking in all his celebrity, had suddenly become a "Big Ass Pete."

His drinking increased; he tried cocaine. He began to have ugly public spats with luminaries such as Gore Vidal and Tennessee Williams. He made up falsehoods about befriending celebrities such as Greta Garbo and having sexual affairs with Hollywood stars like Errol Flynn. He frequently made a spectacle of himself, drunk or stoned, on television. He was arrested for drunk driving. It was also about this time that the *Answered Prayers* scandal broke.

Depending on which version of Truman's story you believe, he had planned, at least as far back as 1958, to do a big "faction"-type book about high society, which he felt himself uniquely destined to write. In some versions of the tale it was the sole reason he had kissed up to the Swans, to get into their boudoirs and learn their innermost, dirtiest secrets. In other accounts, he merely realized at some point that there was good stuff in his private conversations with these upper-crust mavens, with whom he had become the closest of friends. Whichever it was really doesn't matter; the result was the same: *Answered Prayers* was arguably the most shocking betrayal since Judas sold out Jesus Christ. No one was spared. The vilest, most repulsive acts were described in the filthiest language imaginable. Ann Woodward, the socialite suspected of having murdered her husband in 1955 (later immortalized by Dominick Dunne in *The Two Mrs. Grenvilles*) actually committed suicide after seeing an advance copy of a chapter entitled "La Côte Basque, 1965."

The book, in fact, was never finished, but that didn't stop anything. Seven years after its due date, four chapters of the "by-then-much-anticipated" *Answered Prayers* began to appear in *Esquire*, at that time the smartest magazine around. Some of it is witty, some of it is bitchy, but practically none of it is printable in a respectable magazine such as this. By the time "La Côte Basque, 1965" appeared, the Swans were furious. The barely disguised characters of Keith, Paley, Guggenheim, Onassis, Vanderbilt, Woodward, and others

were publicly dragged through the sordid lies, infidelities, abortions, indiscretions, and other abominations which, until then, they had so naïvely revealed (or cavalierly gossiped about) across restaurant tables and in drawing rooms with "that dirty little toad," "hideous fag," "snake," "monster," etc., etc. Most vowed never to speak to Capote again, and most kept their word.

Nevertheless, *Answered Prayers* was not only the talk of the town, it scandalized a large segment of the nation. For his part, Truman seemed, at first, amused and then defensive at the reception of his work, which his publisher had foolishly compared to Proust.

"Well, who did they think they were talking to?" he hissed. "I'm a *writer*." He seemed to think that, sooner or later, his Swans would get over it and all would come right again. But to his dismay—and ultimately to his horror—that did not happen, and Truman began to realize that a considerable part of his life was suddenly closed to him forever. To absorb this, he began spending more time away from the city, at his country house in Bridgehampton, which is where I encountered him for the first time.

KATHERINE EASTLAND

For a young writer in the late 1970s and early '80s, "the Hamptons" at the tip end of Long Island was a golden place to live. I had left my Washington newspaper job to write a novel, and when it was well-received, I took a house in the Hamptons, where I had friends. Much of the literary world was out there then: Irwin Shaw, James Jones, Kurt Vonnegut, Shana Alexander, Joe Heller, John Knowles, Betty Friedan, Wilfrid Sheed, Willie Morris, George Plimpton, Peter Matthiessen, and Bruce Jay Friedman. Others, such as Bill Styron, Gay Talese, and Norman Mailer, would visit.

Truman morphed easily back into this old crowd, lunching again among his own kinds of people at Bobby Van's or dining at Mortimers. He was open and friendly when I met him, likely because I was a fellow Alabamian, and we struck up a casual, speaking friendship. He sometimes drank too much, and once I drove him home after he had lost his driving license. He asked merely to be dropped off at the end of his long driveway to the ocean, and I watched him lurch into the night toward home.

His biographers have produced evidence that, during this period, he was inconsolable over the loss of his Swans, nearly unraveled, went into depression, and developed "writer's block." It was said that he made overtures to regain the Swans' companionship. I was personally caught up in one of them.

A "beard" is an old-time New York expression used to describe a man who is actually something other than what he seems to be. On a Saturday afternoon in February 1978 I inadvertently became Truman Capote's beard. He had called me out of the blue one day in Manhattan, and asked if I could come for lunch at his apartment in the U.N. Towers the following week. Unable to think of anything else to say, I said "yes"—which soon had me wondering who else was coming, and what my role in this luncheon was to be. Part of the puzzle was solved a few days later when Truman called to see if I'd mind bringing "a girl," whom he had also asked to the lunch. Her name was Hilary Byers, and she turned out to be an attractive woman in her thirties. We arrived at Truman's apartment and were the only people there besides Truman and a tall Chinese butler dressed in a white cutaway. The apartment, which overlooked the East River, was decorated entirely in white: white rug, white furniture, including a white leather sofa, and mostly white art on the walls. The *pièce de résistance* was a large stuffed rattlesnake on the center coffee table, coiled in the act of striking, its great fangs and open mouth aimed toward anyone coming through the door. I was momentarily taken aback, but the Chinese butler intervened by taking drink orders.

Truman showed me to a chair and sat himself next to Hilary, engaging her in low, familiar conversation. (When I think about it, the way he curled up on the sofa, he did sort of remind one of a lapdog.) The drinks came and Truman pursued his con-

versation with Hilary, which continued unabated until lunch was served by the butler. I tried not to listen, and kept one eye on the snake, because it seemed to be a personal, private kind of talk; but occasionally I would catch the names of people such as "Slim" or "Gloria" or "Babe," sometimes accompanied by laughter. The table conversation was unmemorable, but at least I was involved in it, if I remember correctly. After lunch, however, Truman returned to his sofa and picked up wherever he had left off talking to Hilary. This went on for another hour until it became time to go.

When the elevator door opened, I told Hilary that I was going downtown to an art show opening but would be glad to drop her off in the taxi. She wouldn't hear of it, and as we waited for our cabs, I couldn't resist asking her what all the conversation with Truman was about. She looked at me and smiled as she got into her cab.

"Babe Paley," she said, "is my stepmother."

Truman's ruse to worm his way back into the Paley family's good graces did not work. Babe Paley had been ill with cancer and died later that year, having never spoken to Truman again. I shed my role as beard and resumed my writing, while Truman sank deeper into the depths of his degradation, abusing alcohol, drugs, and, occasionally, people. The last time I saw him was in Bridgehampton in the summer of 1980 at the "new" Bobby Van's, across the street from the "old" Bobby's. I sat with him for awhile as he drank three vodkas and grapefruit juice—*before* lunch. He died in 1984 of complications from his behavior.

He never finished *Answered Prayers*, although there were rumors that he had, and had hidden it away, or left it in a bus station locker, or burned it. The parts of it that were published in *Esquire* were bad enough, for him and for everyone concerned. His publisher bound them in a short book entitled *Answered Prayers: The Unfinished Novel*. They should have sold it in a plain brown wrapper.

Schultz the psychobiographer does not provide us with a clear explanation of why Truman wrote the book, but he posits several theories. One is that it was an act of self-destruction harking back to an unhappy childhood filled with rejection. As a weird sort of corollary, he suggests that Truman may have actually used the book as a defense *against* rejection in that, since he knew its publication would alienate the Swans, it was actually *him* doing the rejecting—a sort of you-can't-fire-me-I-quit scenario.

Then there is the notion that Truman really didn't understand the ramifications of publishing *Answered Prayers*, that he somehow believed the Swans would enjoy the publicity. I rather subscribe to this last theory, which sounds pretty stupid until you recall how much he was drinking and drugging during the period when he wrote it, and how the dangerous emotional highs and idiot celebrity he was riding after *In Cold Blood* can cause a man to lose his perspective.

In the end, however, I'm not sure we need to know all, or even any, of this, except as a cautionary tale. I remain a subscriber to the Intentional Fallacy school of literary thought, which holds that people ought not to be prying into how or why a writer wrote something, or what demons possessed him, or what he "meant"—that the work itself is the one and only statement of any importance.

By that standard, what little we have of *Answered Prayers* not only seems to have failed, but failed Frankenstein-like, bringing down its creator with it. ♦

B&A

Old Man and the See

The last years of a historic papacy.

BY JONATHAN V. LAST

The End and the Beginning
Pope John Paul II—The Victory of Freedom, the Last Years, the Legacy
by George Weigel
Doubleday, 590 pp., $32.50

With his beatification last month, John Paul II passed further into the pages of history. But unlike most historical figures, the Polish pope left a legacy that is still very much alive. Theologians are still grappling with his writings; the Roman Catholic church is only now being infused with the generation of priests who were called during his pontificate; the world has not yet finished the conversation he began concerning the dignity of the human person. The book on this remarkable man remains quite unclosed.

George Weigel's latest volume helps us to continue leafing through the pages. His first book about John Paul II, *Witness to Hope* (1999), may well be the most important biography of the 20th century. Not content with that little trick, Weigel picked up where he left off: *The End and the Beginning* is actually three books about John Paul in one, all of which allow us to reflect more deeply on the pope's legacy.

In one section, Weigel gives a biographical account of the final six years of John Paul's life. (In a perfect world, this would also be added to future editions of *Witness to Hope*.) The pope's declining years were suffused with suffering. Even as Parkinson's disease racked his body, he was transformed, as Vatican reporter John Allen put it, from "'supreme pastor of the Catholic Church' . . . into a living

Jonathan V. Last is a senior writer at The Weekly Standard.

symbol of human suffering, in effect, an icon of Christ on the cross." He was, in his own words, "a sick man among the sick," living in service to God's will with astonishing grace and demonstrating that human beings are not disposable, that each of us has inherent dignity, no matter our frailties or outward "worth."

Weigel's description of these last years is both comprehensive and engaging; his account of the pope's death, unadorned and beautiful. But the most moving passage is a brief scene, a previously unreported episode from 2000. Before he became pope, Karol Wojtyla was a great outdoorsman, who often went hiking and kayaking with a group of lay friends in Krakow. The little circle of intensely close countrymen became known as his *Srodowisko*. In August 2000 the surviving members of the *Srodowisko* came to visit the pope at Castel Gandolfo, with their children and grandchildren. They brought with them a kayak, which they playfully set up in the courtyard—one last outdoor adventure with their beloved priest. The ailing, 80-year-old John Paul stayed up with them late into the evening, greeting everyone individually. At the end of the night, they sang the song they once did at the close of each day on their kayaking trips, and the pope bid each of them good-night, one by one.

> When the Pope finally shuffled off into the villa, the third generation of *Srodowisko*, the small grandchildren of the original hikers and kayakers, followed him in a straggly line, "like the Good Shepherd and the sheep."

Pope John Paul II and his would-be assassin, Mehmet Ali Agca, 1983

Much, however, is taken up with darker tales. Weigel has trawled through recently uncovered documents from Communist state police—the Russian KGB, the East German Stasi, and the Polish Sluzba Bezpieczenstwa (SB)—to construct an account of the secret war the Communists waged against John Paul for 30 years. Karol Wojtyla was first brought in for questioning by the SB in 1956. He was a professor at the seminary in Krakow, and the police wanted to test his political leanings. He wisely kept the interview to theological matters. At the time, the authorities were infinitely more concerned with Cardinal Wyszynski, the Polish primate who was waging a one-man campaign against authoritarianism. Their obsession with Wyszynski sometimes bordered on the comical: During Vatican II, they compiled a document entitled "Memorandum on Certain Aspects of the Cult of the Virgin Mary in Poland" and distributed it among the bishops in an attempt to discredit him for his Marian devotion. The memo was written by STOLARSKI, one of the priests who became willing agents of the state. There were to be many others (some 270 of them) with names such as MARECKI and TORANO, Catholic clergy and laymen who agreed to spy on the church for the secret police.

After Wojtyla was made bishop in 1958, the SB took an ever-increasing interest in him. Given the codename PEDAGOG, he was put under constant surveillance, his residences bugged and monitored. In dossiers, the police determined that Wojtyla had an "unusual combination of intellectual qualities with those of an active, practical, and organized man." This combination alarmed them, but they also suspected that his intellectual gifts made him soft. In 1962, the archbishop of Krakow died. The government reserved the right to veto his successor, and veto they did, rejecting every name Wyszynski and Rome put forward for a year. Finally, in the fall of 1963, the head of the Polish Communist party told one of Wyszynski's aides: "I'm waiting for Wojtyla, and I'll continue to veto names until I get him." Surer proof of Providence would be hard to find.

The Communists believed that Wojtyla—a poet, philosopher, and intellectual—was a man of ideas, not power. They soon realized their mistake. When he was created cardinal in 1967, the surveillance of Wojtyla increased to *Lives of Others* levels. A four-page questionnaire was dispatched to every SB informant, agent, and collaborator who had ever run across him. Did Wojtyla smoke? What brand of cigarette? When did he shave? Who polished his shoes? How often did he go to the dentist? With each passing year the authorities grew more concerned about Wojtyla's abilities as a *defensor civitatis*. Between 1973 and 1974 the SB seriously considered arresting him and charging him with sedition on three separate occasions.

GAMMA-KEYSTONE / GETTY IMAGES

The secret war continued into John Paul's pontificate, with spies in the Holy See and agents constantly trying to disrupt his activities. During his homecoming to Poland in 1979, the SB created a special section to drive Poles away from the services and minimize the news of the crowds who came to see him. The operation, dubbed LATA '79, was a failure: Some 11 million Poles—one-third of the country—saw him in person during the nine days of his pilgrimage.

In George Weigel's hands, none of this history is a chore. His vivid accounting is, here and there, leavened with acid wit. In one passage, he recounts the death of Metropolitan Nikodim, president of the World Council of Churches and a KGB spy known as ADAMANT. Fittingly enough, ADAMANT died during a private audience with John Paul I, suffering a heart attack in the course of their interview. As he expired in the pontiff's arms, his last words were, "I am not a KGB agent." Weigel tartly observes, "But he was." Explaining the Soviets' plan to retrench after losing this asset, Weigel notes that the KGB issued secret order #00122, which bore the "gloriously Stalinist" title: "Measures to Strengthen Agent Operational Work in the Struggle with the Subversive Activity of Foreign Clerical Centers and Hostile Elements among Church People and Sectarians." No wonder they lost the Cold War.

The funniest moment in this otherwise serious and excellent book, however, takes place at the outdoor Mass at St. Peter's Square on October 22, 1978, where the newly named Pope John Paul II was inaugurating his service. The square was filled with visiting officials and dignitaries. The Soviet ambassador to Italy—a sly Party man who had some inkling of the storm gathering before him—leaned over to the president of Poland and remarked icily, "The greatest achievement of the Polish People's Republic was to give the world a Polish pope."

He was, perhaps, righter than he knew. And *The End and the Beginning* is an achievement, too. You cannot fully understand the man who will pass into history as John Paul the Great without it. ♦

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B&A

Seeker of Truth

A mind as wide as the legendary waistline.

BY EDWARD SHORT

G.K. Chesterton, 1915

Many will know Ian Ker as the author of the definitive life of Cardinal Newman. Now he has focused his biographical and critical skills on G.K. Chesterton (1874-1936), the great journalist, critic, poet, novelist, and biographer, and the result is a discriminating portrait that does welcome justice to the full richness of his subject's hitherto undervalued work.

G.K. Chesterton
A Biography
by Ian Ker
Oxford, 688 pp., $66

In his life of Newman, Ker encapsulated his subject's quest for reality by translating Newman's motto, *Ex umbris et imaginibus in veritatem*: "Out of unreality into Reality." In *G.K. Chesterton* he persuasively argues that his subject was Newman's successor precisely because he shared the 19th-century convert's passion for reality, a quality which Hilaire Belloc also discerned in his friend: "Truth had for him," Belloc recalled, "the immediate attraction of an appetite. He was hungry for reality. But what is much more, he could not conceive of himself except as satisfying that hunger … it was not possible for him to hold anything worth holding that was not connected with the truth as a whole."

Chesterton was a servant of the truth, as well as a champion of reality, and it is these qualities together that make him so salutary a figure for our own age, which is not only reluctant to acknowledge objective truth but embraces unreality with frenetic abandon. The entertainer in Chesterton might have been intent on making his readers laugh, but he also extolled

Edward Short is the author of Newman and his Contemporaries.

what many in his time (and our own) wish to see diminished, including the Christian tradition, the sanctity of life, the dignity of the family, and personal liberty—and it is refreshing to see these vital aspects of the man given their prophetic due.

With the same critical distillation that distinguished his life of Newman, Ker has sifted through Chesterton's massive output to identify several major themes which, taken together, demonstrate the unity and depth of his thought. In his introduction, Ker writes:

> Chesterton's philosophy of wonder . . . is well known, but I have also highlighted the complementary principle of limitation that informs all his thinking about art, literature, politics, and religion. Linked, too, to his philosophy of wonder is his concept of the role of the imagination in enabling us to see the familiar afresh, as it were for the first time.

Unlike other commentators, who insist on seeing Chesterton the thinker as separate from Chesterton the funny man, Ker appreciates how the two were fused. For Chesterton, our misconceptions, our lies, and manifold allegiances to unreality cry out for exposure; and it was his abiding sense of *caritas*, no less than his keen sense of humor, that impelled him to use paradox to show his readers the comic discrepancies between truth and falsehood. Every reader will have his favorite Chestertonian sallies; one of mine is from his introduction to *David Copperfield*:

> The wise old fairy tales never were so silly as to say that the prince and the princess lived peacefully ever afterwards. The fairy tales said that the prince and princess lived happily ever afterwards; and so they did. They lived happily, although it is very likely that from time to time they threw the furniture at each other. Most marriages, I think, are happy marriages; but there is no such thing as a contented marriage. The whole pleasure of marriage is that it is a perpetual crisis.

Marriage meant a good deal to Chesterton, and it is another merit of Ker's life that he shows how, at once, it saved and renewed his wayward hero. To appreciate this fully, however, the reader needs to know something of Chesterton's life.

Born on Campden Hill in 1874, he was educated at St. Paul's School and the Slade School of Art. His father worked for a firm of estate agents and his mother was of Franco-Scottish ancestry. Her Aberdeen forebears, the Keiths, gave Gilbert his middle name. A dilatory learner, Chesterton never shone in his studies, though he excelled at comic drawing. It was after becoming a publisher's reader that he took up journalism, and for the rest of his life he would see himself as a journalist, who only wrote novels and plays, poetry, and biographies as a sideline.

This insistence of his that he was only a journalist has led some to conclude that Chesterton was shallow. Yet in a piece on Marshal Ferdinand Foch, which would have amused his mother, he gave the lie to such dismissive appraisals.

> There was a great deal about Foch that was intensely and peculiarly French. Nobody but a Frenchman would have launched that direct and yet dazzling epigram in the midst of the Battle of the Marne: "My right gives way; my left retreats; situation excellent; I attack." Where that phrase was so typically French is that it has three separate meanings, and they are all true. A superficial person will take it as a fine piece of fanfaronade, a romantic defiance and refusal to accept defeat. A more sagacious person will see that it is a piece of irony almost worthy of Voltaire. . . . The most sagacious person of all will observe that it was also a piece of cold, hard, scientific fact. It really was true that the Germans pursuing

George Bernard Shaw, Hilaire Belloc, G. K. Chesterton, 1927

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> the Allied retreat on one side, and checking the attempted envelopment on the other, created the strain and the weak point at which Foch suddenly struck. That is the French genius; to say things that only look witty and are also wise. That is the achievement of all French literature and philosophy; it is the supreme and splendid triumph of looking shallow, and being deep.

Given his marked differences with the Modernists, it is ironic that Chesterton should have grown up in the same Bedford Park neighborhood as Yeats. Chesterton and Yeats make for an instructive contrast: Although inspired rhetoricians, they could not have taken more different roads philosophically. In 1922 Chesterton converted to Rome, what he called the "rock of reality," while Yeats left the Protestant agnosticism bequeathed him by his father to convert to the table-tapping and hocus-pocus of Madame Blavatsky. Chesterton and Yeats also differed in their view of the common man: Yeats, the last hurrah of the Anglo-Irish Ascendancy that had produced Swift and Burke, always took a seigniorial line with his Roman Catholic countrymen, speaking of them by turns as having been *born in the peasant's cot / Where man forgives if the belly gain* and *fumbling in a greasy till ... add the halfpence to the pence / and prayer to shivering prayer*, and as *base-born products of base beds*. Chesterton, by contrast, exulted in the common man. Indeed, as Yeats's friend Ezra Pound once observed, "Chesterton *is* the mob."

On this theme, which runs throughout Chesterton's work, Ker is revelatory. As he points out, "Aversion to the masses, Chesterton dares to suggest, is really aversion to their 'energy. The misanthropes pretend that they despise humanity for its weakness. As a matter of fact, they hate it for its strength.'" For Chesterton, only the humble can appreciate the "colossal vision" of "things as they really are." The intellectuals who looked down on the common man—especially such progressives as Carlyle, Shaw, and Nietzsche—were heretics in his eyes precisely because they discounted the common man's dignity.

The amount of lasting work that Chesterton produced—despite his delight in the bonhomie of Fleet Street—is impressive. One can point to his novels, *The Napoleon of Notting Hill* (1904) and *The Man Who Was Thursday* (1908); to his great Father Brown stories; to his critical studies of Robert Browning and Charles Dickens; and to his wonderfully witty essays, his "tremendous trifles," in which he managed to pack such a wealth of insight. His marriage to Frances Alice Blogg in 1901 transformed his life. In 1909 she removed her convivial husband to Beaconsfield, far from the beckoning public houses of London. She also moved him towards Catholicism. A devout Anglo-Catholic, Frances introduced her husband to many aspects of Christian orthodoxy of which he was ignorant. Without her influence, it is fair to say, Chesterton might never have managed his greatest work, including *Orthodoxy* (1908), *The Everlasting Man* (1925), *St. Francis of Assisi* (1924), and *St. Thomas Aquinas* (1933), the last of which Etienne Gilson considered the best book ever written on the subject.

Ker is excellent on Chesterton the critic, too, showing how trenchant he was not only on his beloved Dickens but on the Victorians as a whole. In *The Victorian Age in Literature* (1913), Chesterton described how the English might have resisted the French Revolution but underwent a revolution of their own when the rich used their game laws and enclosures to turn England into a land not of common landowners but landlords, who then set about making the rationalism of Bentham, Mill, Darwin, and Huxley the new national faith. And in response to these depredations, Chesterton saw a series of spirited counterattacks, launched not only by the Romantic poets but by Cobbett, Carlyle, Newman, Dickens, Ruskin, Arnold, and the Pre-Raphaelites. The Victorian middle classes accepted the revolution of their oligarchs to avoid a more drastic democratic revolution but (as Chesterton recognized) this only emboldened the "enemies of the Victorian compromise" to intensify their own counterrevolutions.

Ker highlights the magnanimity of Chesterton. Again, like Newman, he looked for what was good in those he criticized—even those, like Matthew Arnold, who never shared his religious convictions. In his biography of the painter G.F. Watts, for example, Chesterton had occasion to praise Watts's great portrait of Arnold, about which he said:

> The portrait-painter of Matthew Arnold obviously ought not to understand him, since he did not understand himself. And the bewilderment which the artist felt for those few hours, reproduced in a perfect, almost an immortal picture, the bewilderment which the sitter felt from the cradle to the grave.

Most critics would have left matters at that, but how typical of Chesterton to add that "the bewilderment of Matthew Arnold was more noble and faithful than most men's certainty."

In drawing his own portrait of Chesterton, Ker exercises an artful self-effacement, which allows the wit and wisdom of his subject to take center stage. In this, he embraces something of his subject's own respect for limitation: Rather than interjecting his own views into those of Chesterton—or worse, paraphrasing him—Ker allows his subject to speak for himself. As a result *Chesterton* is not only funny but full of surprise and charm and profound good sense.

There are some genuinely good books on Chesterton. Maisie Ward, who knew him, wrote a lively biography in 1943. William Oddie recently wrote a groundbreaking study of Chesterton's early life. D.J. Conlon edited two volumes of criticism on Chesterton by the likes of T.S. Eliot, W.H. Auden, V.S. Pritchett, John Gross, Kingsley Amis, P.J. Kavanagh, and Wilfrid Sheed. But the need for a proper critical biography has long been acknowledged, and Ker has supplied it. Now, and for the foreseeable future, for any true understanding of the scope of G.K. Chesterton's achievement, which captures not only the sage but the good, gentle, generous man, Ker's biography will be indispensable. ♦

B&A

Tangled Web

A children's classic, and the moral dimensions of animal farming. BY MATTHEW SCULLY

Charlotte's Web is a beautiful story about a farm animal who pleads for his life and is mercifully spared. Since its publication in 1952, the book has inspired generations of children to wonder about the meat set on their plates, and generations of parents to search for comforting explanations, usually followed by a little dose of "realism" about farm animals and their fate: It's just a story, a sentimental fantasy; nobody *wants* to harm the animals, but we have to eat, and anyway real pigs don't cry out, like Wilbur in *Charlotte*, "Save me, somebody! Save me!" The concern is that impressionable children might read too much into it, by jumping to the conclusion that a tale of compassion for animals was actually meant to encourage compassion for animals.

The Story of *Charlotte's Web*
E.B. White's Eccentric Life in Nature and the Birth of an American Classic
by Michael Sims
Walker, 320 pp., $25

Mr. and Mrs. Zuckerman, and Wilbur, by Garth Williams

The best children's books have a realism of their own, showing cruel things as they are without recourse to the excuses and euphemisms one learns only later in life. Spend some time reading hunting literature, with its tortured rationales and raptures on the thrill of blood sport, and *Bambi* will seem like the voice of pure reason. A pig's desire to live in *Charlotte's Web* trumps the adult appetite for crispy bacon or pork chops; these trivial benefits of slaughter come off seeming low and selfish, and in the moral purity of the story there is no way to make them appear otherwise. There's a reason that hunters, livestock farmers, and butchers so often serve as the villains in children's literature. It's because the ruthless things they do rely on justifications too labored for a kid to have mastered yet—only more so in our day, when the details of animal farming are so bad as to require concealment even from adults. For cheap sentimentality, there is no outdoing the folks who today run farms that resemble concentration camps and then give the meat brand names like "Sunnyland" and "Happy Valley." They least of all are in a position to fault others for trading in fantasies.

Charlotte's Web appeared before real-life barnyards gave way to "mass-confinement facilities" and pigs became "production units" hidden away in factory farms beyond the reach of human charity, much less the solicitude of a spider. But it's a safe bet the author would not have approved, and indeed it turns out that E.B. White had doubts about the necessity of slaughter even in more lenient settings, as Michael Sims explains in his excellent study of the classic tale and how it came to be written. White was himself a part-time farmer, and produced the best-selling paperback children's book ever (some 45 million copies) after tending each morning to the inhabitants of a barn in coastal Maine that is today on the National Register of Historic Places. By the late 1940s, writes Sims, White—known to friends as Andy—began to feel "guilty."

> One issue that haunted Andy was the morality of raising farm animals. As he walked along through the early-morning mist, around the corner of the barn and down to the barn cellar, carrying a sloshing pail of slops for a pig, he faced again and again what he thought of as his own duplicity. His pig relied on him to deliver food and guard the door, and Andy performed these tasks conscientiously. But in a few months he was scheduled to betray the creature's confidence and slaughter it. . . . He would sit up late in April, tenderly nursing a lamb back to health, only to slaughter it come August. So much gentleness to end in so much blood, in a hammer blow to the head, a knife slash to the throat—only hours after Andy had dutifully served what the lamb did not know was its last meal.

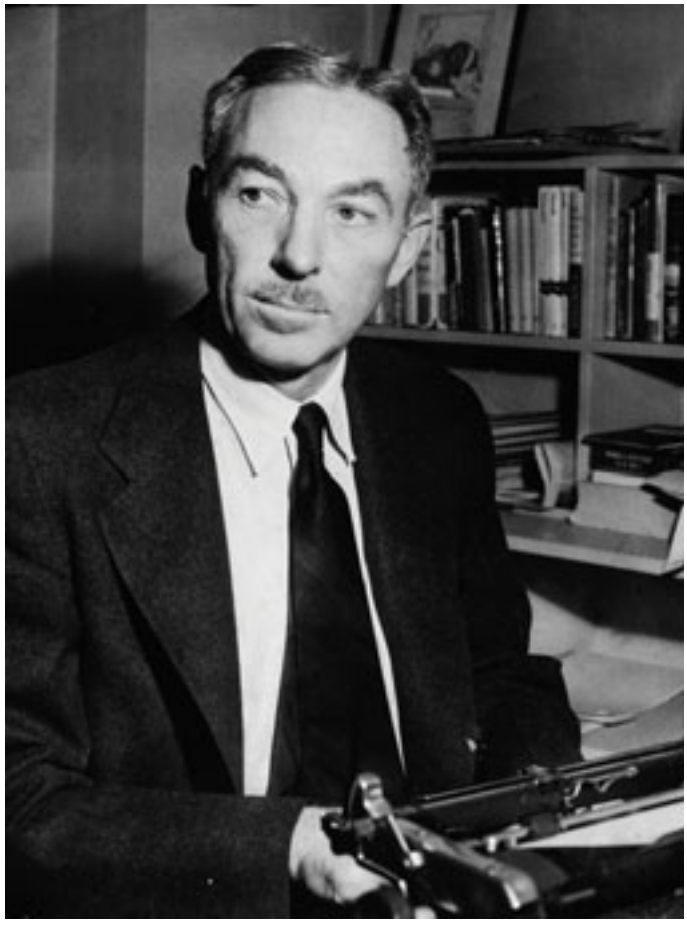
If E.B. White had become a vegetarian, we would surely know it. Yet for a time, at least, his thoughts wandered in that direction, understandably for a man who all his life had admired and empathized with animals. As a boy in Mount Vernon, New York, White

Matthew Scully is the author of Dominion: The Power of Man, the Suffering of Animals, and the Call to Mercy.

enjoyed the company of chickens, turkeys, ducks, and geese raised by the family in a stable out back, along with the dogs, cats, canaries, frogs, and other creatures always nearby. He was drawn to books of the era like *Lives of the Hunted* that viewed animals individually and with "sympathetic curiosity," as Sims puts it, instead of just as prey, resources, or indistinguishable specimens of a group. Animals, White realized early on, were "not merely background characters in his own little drama." They were "just as real as human beings, as alive as himself," and in the way of many children he felt a special bond with animals that never wore off.

About half of *The Story of Charlotte's Web* takes us through White's early life, an association with the *New Yorker* that lasted until his death in 1985, his marriage to colleague Katherine Angell, and their move from Manhattan to Maine as soon as literary acclaim provided the means. He wrote, of course, on all kinds of subjects, and even with the success of his collected essays and two children's stories—the *Stuart Little* adventures, about a mouse in New York City, came out in 1945—is perhaps best known for expanding the English-usage rules of his Cornell professor William Strunk's *The Elements of Style* (1918) to give us, in 1959, "Strunk & White." It's all briskly told, with a view to the life that led to *Charlotte's Web*. In Sims's own pleasant style, free of the strained academic theorizing one fears in books about books, he tells us how a good man produced an unlikely work of greatness about a clever spider weaving her web to proclaim the innocence of a pig named Wilbur. And when he comes to the work itself, examining White's notebooks and evolving drafts of *Charlotte's Web* in the early 1950s, what's clear are the perfect instincts of the writer in his prime.

"My fears about writing for children are great," White had told his editor. "One can so easily slip into a cheap sort of whimsy or cuteness." To avoid this, he filled the story with as much natural detail as it would bear, about how spiders really act, pigs really live, and small farms really operate: "What he did not want to do," writes Sims, "was retell animal life in human terms."



E. B. White, 1953

NEW YORK TIMES CO. / GETTY IMAGES

He had sketched out, for instance, an exchange with Charlotte in which Wilbur expounds on a general philosophy of life, as a creature needing only slop, straw, and company to be content. White dropped the scene, realizing (explains Sims) that "it would have been too self-aware for his innocent protagonist." Another discarded passage had the pig save Charlotte from harm; White "decided instead to keep Wilbur passive and not heroic." Likewise, though the animal characters speak, it is only the daughter of farmer John Arable who can hear them, because "Fern has empathy for other creatures . . . her innocent willingness to sit still and listen affords her a glimpse of other lives."

Though White would surely have agreed that some animals can feel a measure of empathy themselves—along with varying capacities for loyalty, affection, altruism, and sorrow—he was careful, says Sims, not to "twist their personalities into moral versus immoral decisions." So it is left to Fern to declare the planned execution of Wilbur an "injustice," while Charlotte, soon to die herself, takes pity on the frightened piglet in more creaturely terms, wishing him more days to enjoy the gentle breezes, the warmth of the sun, the beauty of the world, "the glory of everything." Wilbur is content in terms a pig might choose if he could, "comfortable and happy, for he loved life and loved to be a part of the world on a summer evening."

It's the words given to animal characters, of course, that invite lectures on "personification" from pedants, and here again we need only compare the fairy tale farmyard of *Charlotte's Web* with the language of real-life hog farming today to test their essential truthfulness. Wilbur, upon learning what farmer Arable has planned for him, says "Stop! I don't want to die! Save me, somebody!" A noted apologist for factory farming insists it's not cruel to confine pigs in small cages for their entire existence because "these animals have *never* been in natural settings and so cannot know what they are missing." Which of these accounts of how pigs feel is more disconnected from

reality? Wilbur, at least, inhabits a recognizable universe in which living creatures seek comfort, dread death, and cry out in fear. The *words* "I don't want to die" are anthropomorphic, but surely capture something of the sounds that fill slaughterhouses everywhere. By contrast, to conceive of millions of pigs living in misery but unaware of "what they are missing," creatures who suffer but don't even know it, is pure make-believe.

Only human pride could convince itself of such a thing, sacrificing honor in the care of animals and calling it rationality, subordinating compassion to a frivolous culinary preference and calling that maturity. Perhaps it was with this trait in mind that White came up with his most inspired touch in the story, when Charlotte, searching for just the right word to weave in Wilbur's defense against the ax, settles on "HUMBLE." The theme, writes Sims, is "the joy of being alive," the happiness intended for all creatures, the august and lowly alike, and a fear of violent death no more complicated for a terrified human being than for any condemned animal. It is good to be spared, and good to be the one who does the sparing.

Along the way we learn how White came up with the names for Wilbur (after a pig he'd raised), "Charlotte A. Cavatica" (a play on the spider's genus and species names), and other characters, although Sims may have missed one in the case of the family name "Arable." It not only conveys suitability for farming, but is awfully close to "Arabella," the earthy wife in Thomas Hardy's *Jude the Obscure* who aids in the slaying of a pig: "The dying animal's cry assumed its third and final tone, the shriek of agony; his glazing eyes rivetting themselves on Arabella with the eloquently keen reproach of a creature recognizing at last the treachery of those who had seemed his only friends."

This conjecture would square with the sense of regret that Sims tells us helped inspire *Charlotte*. White himself described the feeling in a 1948 *Atlantic Monthly* essay entitled "Death of a Pig," recounting his failed efforts to save a sick pig on the farm in Maine. Finding the creature dead in the barn, "the loss we felt was not the loss of ham but the loss of pig. He had evidently become precious to me, not that he represented a distant nourishment in a hungry time, but that he had suffered in a suffering world."

After quoting this passage, Sims calls it a case of "empathizing at an almost frightening level with the pig," and I'm not sure what he means. Sims seems upset about the book's level of moral reflection, yet without that we'd have only a charming but idle yarn, with nothing to teach but graceful writing. *Charlotte's Web* is subversive in the gentle way of *Bambi: A Life in the Woods*, *The Story of Ferdinand*, and other children's classics, conveying a little message of protest against things that young readers naturally recognize as mean and unfair, until some jaded adult comes along to explain that this is the way the world has always worked and no one has much choice in the matter. It offers a timeless lesson about a choice available to everyone, to show clemency to one's fellow creatures—and who says that mercy must be confined to fairy tales? As Charlotte herself explains to the pardoned pig, "By helping you, perhaps I was trying to lift up my life a trifle. Heaven knows anyone's life can stand a little of that." ♦

B&A

Incongruous Light

Two poets illuminate their separate worlds.

BY WYATT PRUNTY

Charles Simic knows what World War II and the Cold War felt like in Eastern Europe. *We kept the gas oven lit to warm ourselves*, Simic says, *While mother cried and cried chopping onions / And my one goldfish swam in a pickle jar*. These lines are from "Scenes of the Old Life." The life described here is skewed and meager, and while its inhabitants may deflect from their discomfort, they never escape it. The mother in the poem cries over "onions," but over more general matters as well. "The Elusive Something" ends, *And found myself alone on a street / I didn't recognize, feeling like someone / Out for the first time after a long illness*. Simic is one *Who sees the world with his heart*, as he says in the same poem, but *Then hurries to forget how it felt*.

Master of Disguises
by Charles Simic
Houghton Mifflin Harcourt,
96 pp., $22

Wait
by C.K. Williams
Farrar, Straus & Giroux,
144 pp., $25

Charles Simic may "forget" an emotion, but he remembers the cause. The poem, "Same-As-Ever," ends, *Nothing ever happens here / Except for these foreign wars / That maim the young boys*. And then there are the "girls," left behind *to hustle drinks in local dives*. Or there is "The Absent One," which begins, *Someone's late coming home*. In fact, that person never comes home. Instead *The lamp left for him in the window / Burns as the day breaks*, and this continues *for months after*.

Wyatt Prunty, Carlton professor of English at University of the South (Sewanee), is the author, most recently, of The Lover's Guide to Trapping.

Of those with power during Simic's early years, "Sightseeing In the Capital" recalls *old buildings / With their spacious conference rooms* where people "*weigh[ed] life and death / Without a moment of fear / Of ever being held accountable*. If anyone today is close to forgetting about the cost of bad government, Charles Simic is here with a reminder.

Much of what the reader encounters in *Master of Disguises* is the world moving at odd speeds and oblique angles. Sometimes even Simic himself appears to swerve. This is the case in "Old Soldier," which begins, *By the time I was five, / I had fought in hundreds of battles.* "Old Soldier" continues:

After the bombing raid, the sky was full
Of flying cinders and birds.
My mother took me by the hand
And led me into the garden
Where the cherry trees were in flower.

The contrast here—a sky of cinders, a sky of flowering cherry trees—is the reminder Simic has for us that the terror of war persists, spring or no spring. In "Solitude," two people renting in the same building meet, one wishing to borrow a candle from the other. They stand *face to face / Between two dark apartments / Unable to think of anything else to say / Before turning [their] backs on each other*.

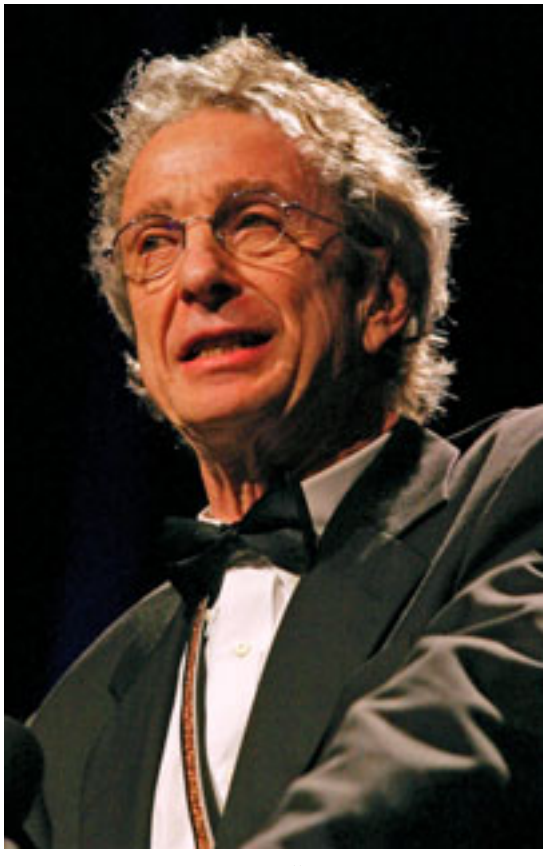
Simic's "Sad as a Ship in a Bottle" begins, *Sad as a matchbox in a house / Where they've stopped smoking*, and the poem ends, *Sad as a hotdog-eating champion / Having dinner in a fish restaurant*. Such incongruities—a home without heat, a light continually on in a window, a bombing raid while trees are in bloom, neighbors with nothing to say—are familiar fare in *Master of Disguises*. And they can be funny—a pickle jar for a goldfish, a box of matches for someone who has stopped smoking, a drastic change in menu for "a hotdog-eating champion." Simic's wry sense of humor speaks to a world always a bit skewed. "Streets Paved With Gold" ends with the description of someone *in a tree swing . . . Too old to be swinging / And to be wearing no clothes*. That person is

Blowing random notes on a toy trumpet
At the converging darkness,
And the one little white cloud
Dilly-dallying in the evening sky.

There is an internal resistance to this poem that one finds elsewhere in Simic. Facts are recorded; facts refuse to be resolved. That is the double view readers encounter in Charles Simic. Things are near and far at once, an onion here and the world there, both causing the same tears.

The poems in C. K. Williams's *Wait* are written in the long conversational lines we now expect from this poet. Like Simic, Williams reports upon childhood during World War II and the Cold War. But for Williams, meaning is more affective than ironic. He, too, has an eye for oblique and isolating situations, but he stands closer to his subjects. *Wait* opens with a poem, "The Gaffe," that is about a child's innocent mistake. Out in the yard of a house where a boy's brother has just died, the speaker, a young Williams, asks without thinking first, *How do you know when you can laugh when somebody dies, your brother, dies?* The rest of the children *go quiet, the backyard goes quiet*. And the speaker wonders *why that someone in me who's me yet not me let me say it*. And, he adds, *Shouldn't he have told me the contrition cycle would from then be ever upon me, / it didn't matter that I'd really only wanted to know how grief ends, and when?* There is a gentle insistence to Williams, a kind of wised-up hope—a cast of

Charles Simic



C. K. Williams

BRENDAN SMIALOWSKI / GETTY IMAGES; NANCY KASZERMAN / ZUMA PRESS / NEWSCOM

mind that Henry James might summarize as "American," especially were James contrasting this with Charles Simic's understanding.

In "Thrush," Williams reports such things as the mothering by a thrush who takes care of one healthy baby but also cares for the one that will not make it. Or he describes the anxiety of a young mother hurrying by with her *Down's syndrome infant in a stroller*. For Williams, these situations are alike in terms of the care they demonstrate. In a poem entitled "Cows," Williams sees a related situation in the coincidence that occurs between *a girl / on the road from the village* who *stands brokenheartedly crying* and some *heifers, / each with a numbered tag*. The cattle are destined for market, one assumes, but for now they stand bawling over "the fence," expressing what Williams imagines to be "*Feed me!*" but also "*Save me!*" / Save me! Save me! Save me!

The girl cries and the cows bawl from alien universes, but Williams lends a sympathetic ear that places everything in one location, where the reader is to "wait," in the sense that a poem requires we stop to consider, start to care. As the title poem puts it, we are to "wait" for the "*Chop, hack, slash; chop, hack, slash*" of time but also, mysteriously and generously, for the happiness of being alive. Or as Williams says, *I should tell you too how happy I am, / how I love it so much, all of it, chopping and slashing and all*.

"The Gaffe," "Thrush," and "Crows" open *Wait*. Each describes a situation requiring that we pause. Williams is keenly aware of the evil *humans can do to each other*, but he also acknowledges the good. Williams is the product of modernism's refashioning, but he is of romantic stock, too, in that the power of experience derives from something at once external and internal, objective and subjective.

The half-line quoted above comes from "Jew on Bridge," the last piece in *Wait*. This is a poem that ranges from Dostoyevsky to Chekhov to Celan to understanding today, especially as we review the troubled 20th century. How does one respond to our recent history, cross the bridge or jump from it? Where is the good to be found here? The answer, in part, is that one waits.

"Teachers," "Steen," "Rash," and "Clay" are poems that report their worlds as follows. "Teachers" catalogs "Sleeping halls" populated by those *like shades of lives never to be lived*. "Steen" describes *predation / inherent in . . . vehement need*. "Rash" cites *generalizations* that *clog* one's heart, *foliating / from I dare not entertain*

There is an internal resistance to this poem that one finds elsewhere in Simic. Facts are recorded; facts refuse to be resolved. That is the double view readers encounter in Charles Simic. Things are near and far at once, an onion here and the world there, both causing the same tears.

what stony, nettled soil. But then there is another aspect to all this, as the poem "Clay" argues. What continues, we are told, is the need *to stay / in the fire, and wait, not knowing if the waiting will end, if you might / waste what you have*. The positive outcome, when it occurs, results thanks to the fire of a kiln in which *two / figures in terra-cotta* have been hardened, and thanks also to the maker's ability to *wait* for the fire to do its work. The good end here results from patience.

In "Among the Exiles" Charles Simic says that *On the use of murder to improve the world, / They had many vivid memories*. And in "The Invisible" he tells us of *vast terrors concealed / By this costume party*, such a party being made of things vulnerable and beautiful, *Of flowers and birds / And children playing in the garden*. Or in "The Toad" Simic concludes:

> *God never made a day as beautiful as today,*
> *A neighbor was saying.*
> *I sat in the shade after she left*
> *Mulling that one over.*

Soon Simic is "hopped over" by a toad that has found him harmless, as for a moment at least the beautiful and the unexpected join *in the shade* of Simic *mulling*.

In "Assumptions," Williams begins, *there is an entity, vast, omnipotent but immaterial, inaccessible to / all human sense save hearing*. And, he concludes, *all this will continue, go on and on, the same formulations, same / unfaltering faulty logic*. The way we will *go on* is by a

> *claim of truth extracted from the tricks of good or bad, yes and no,*
> *existence, nonexistence,*
> *these binomial mental knots we suffer and destroy for, and which go on*
> *and on, on and on and on.*

Williams, too, will mull things over, though he acknowledges the limits to "mulling." What Williams presses, however, is the value of such contemplation. That is the way we attend to others, and such attendance forms a counterbalance to time. This is the means by which Williams is able to say how "happy" he is, and how much he loves his life, the *chopping and slashing and all*. The poems in *Wait* demonstrate many admirable properties. Patience and generosity of spirit head the list.

Charles Simic's characteristic stance maintains some distance from his subjects, while C. K. Williams stands nearby. Reading these two together is like attending a debate in which differences highlight a shared concern. While the methods for reportage differ, Simic and Williams possess a similar understanding as to the way things go, and the same strong wish that they go well. ♦

B&A

Enter Laughing

A funny, but not so revealing, showbiz memoir.

BY ZACHARY MUNSON

LISA O'CONNOR / ZUMA PRESS / NEWSCOM

Tina Fey, Lindsay Lohan, 2004

Tina Fey is funny. Really funny. If you don't think so—well, I hate to say it, but . . . you're stupid. Don't be mad. I know whereof I speak: I used to be stupid, too.

I spent years convinced that Fey wasn't funny, that she presided, as head writer, over another one of the many not-so-great periods in *Saturday Night Live*'s history, and that her turn on Weekend Update was pretty unmemorable. I was reluctant to see *Mean Girls* because of her involvement with it. I avoided *30 Rock* for years, thinking—no—*knowing* that it wasn't funny. It couldn't be funny. Tina Fey created it *and* starred in it.

Bossypants
by Tina Fey
Reagan Arthur, 288 pp., $26.99

As I say, I was stupid. When I finally broke down and watched *Mean Girls* and *30 Rock*, I had to admit: They were funny. As the writer of *Mean Girls* she somehow managed to make Lindsay Lohan seem like a sympathetic human being. And *30 Rock*, since its debut, has been the most consistently funny and clever and weird show on television, so densely packed with jokes—great jokes—that repeated viewings are not only enjoyable but practically necessary to catch everything worth catching (which is nearly everything): Fey's awkward, romantically inept character Liz Lemon, and her on-again/off-again boyfriend Dennis, the Beeper King of New York; NBC executive Jack Donaghy's dumping of Condoleezza Rice by text message ("You + Me = L"); his mother's church in Waltham, Massachusetts: Our Lady of Reluctant Integration; everything that Tracy Jordan says; the insane Dr. Leo Spaceman (pronounced spa-che-men) . . .

I could go on. It is a great show, with only a handful of clunky episodes among the more than 100 that have aired. So it should be no surprise that *Bossypants*, Fey's memoir of sorts, is (yes) funny. It is well written and blessedly free of the cringe-inducing introspection and oversharing that populate so many show business autobiographies.

Like Fey's show, *Bossypants* packs a ton of jokes into a relatively small amount of space. Not even the cover goes to waste. It is emblazoned with phony "advance praise" ("'Absolutely delicious!'—A guy who eats books") and proclaims proudly, "Once in a generation a woman comes along who changes everything. Tina Fey is not that woman, but she met that woman once and acted weird around her." And it's not just around great women that she acts weird: Fey begins with heartfelt congratulations to the reader "on your purchase of this American-made genuine book. Each component of this book was selected to provide you with maximum book performance, whatever your reading needs may be."

Not surprisingly, as a relatively new mother, she writes a lot about kids and parenting. In her main chapter on babies ("There's a Drunk Midget in My House") she asserts, "Like most people who have had one baby, I am an expert on everything and will tell you, unsolicited, how to raise your kid!" And she writes a hilariously vapid and pretentious poem, "The Mother's Prayer for Its

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Daughter," that offers (among its many supplications) the hope that *when she one day turns on me and calls me a / Bitch in front of Hollister, / Give me the strength, Lord, to yank her directly into a / cab in front of her friends, / For I will not have that Sh*t. I will not have it.*

Fey also writes admiringly about her father, who really does sound like a pretty awesome guy. With simultaneous poignancy and hilarity, Fey wonders:

> How can I give [my daughter] what Don Fey gave me? The gift of anxiety. The fear of getting in trouble. The knowledge that while you are loved, you are not above the law. The Worldwide Parental Anxiety System is failing if this many of us have made sex tapes.

Her frank discussion of her own insecurities is, for the most part, hilarious, as when she sums up her romantic exploits in college by asking, "[W]hat nineteen-year-old Virginia boy doesn't want a wide-hipped, sarcastic Greek girl with short hair that's permed on top?" And though it often seems that she is channeling Liz Lemon just to get laughs, just when you think she's drifted into shtick it becomes apparent that she really *is* that insecure, particularly about her career and public perception.

She harps a bit too much on the importance of women in comedy. She feels the need to defend herself against the public assertions made by the unlikely duo of Jerry Lewis and Christopher Hitchens that women aren't funny. She spends too many pages writing snarky replies to people who have anonymously bashed her on various blogs and websites. I suppose these rebuttals are just more attempts to be funny, but they're one of the few places in *Bossypants* that aren't, and they come off as bitter and petty, if just minor blemishes on a highly enjoyable book.

Does *Bossypants* offer great insight into the creative process behind writing great comedy? No. Does it present a riveting portrait of the ins and outs of network television? Not really. Is it deep? Happily, it is not. It's just funny, which is actually a pretty big accomplishment. ♦

B&A

Lincoln in the Foxhole

Our most eloquent president meets our greatest war.

BY JONATHAN D. HORN

President Lincoln and General George McClellan, Antietam, 1862

"Both read the same Bible, and pray to the same God; and each invokes His aid against the other." So observed Lincoln about North and South in his Second Inaugural. In private, however, the president mused, "God can not be for, and against the same thing at the same time." Neither, of course, could Abraham Lincoln be. Yet over the past decade, those supporting American military intervention and those opposing it have each found ways of invoking Lincoln's name against the other. If only both sides could, at least, read the same Lincoln canon.

Lincoln on War
edited by Harold Holzer
Algonquin, 336 pp., $24.95

Enter Harold Holzer. As the author or editor of more than a score of books about Lincoln, Holzer knows his way around the archives as well as anyone. His expertise shows in the selections he chooses for this engaging one-volume compilation on the topic that dominated Lincoln's presidency. Given how much has already been written—the 16th president has inspired an estimated 16,000 books—it is fair to ask what else can be said. The answer for Holzer lies in what Lincoln said himself. While abridging in places, the book presents notable letters, addresses,

Jonathan D. Horn was a speechwriter for President George W. Bush.

MATHEW BRADY / MPI / GETTY IMAGES

and proclamations as Lincoln wrote them. (All who would proclaim their intellectual superiority by exulting in the trivial mistakes of others should take heed in the prairie lawyer's spelling struggles.)

While *Lincoln on War* coincides with the 150th anniversary of the Civil War, Holzer argues that the book is as much a guide to present politics as a work of history:

"Modern commanders in chief . . . have routinely and repeatedly (if sometimes inappropriately) cited Lincoln's resolve, and quoted Lincoln's words (often unpersuasively), to justify wars of their own," he writes. In the selections that follow, it is easy to see why. There seems to be a Lincoln for every political taste. There is the young man who worried about whether his generation could preserve the freedoms that the then-greatest generation (the Founding Fathers) had won. There is the congressman who opposed the Mexican War but voted for funding the troops (not the other way around, Senator). There is the commander in chief who suspended habeas corpus and asked Congress, "Are all the laws but one to go unexecuted, and the government itself go to pieces, lest that one be violated?" Holzer omits that last line in a rare editorial misfire.

Like most compilations, *Lincoln on War* risks becoming a book that students of history merely consult in parts instead of reading as a whole. One can imagine White House and congressional aides stockpiling copies so they can arm their bosses with quotations for the next military debate. It would be a shame, however, if *Lincoln on War* ended up as a martial version of *Bartlett's*. When stitched together by an editor of Holzer's skill, Lincoln's writings still provide one of the best narratives of the Civil War. That these documents remain so coherent a century and a half later speaks to how Lincoln never lost sight of the war's larger historical context even as he struggled through its day-to-day trials. If, as Holzer notes, the president's "words on war ultimately approached the sublime," the path that led Lincoln there began long before the Gettysburg Address or Second Inaugural.

Lincoln understood that the means by which we wage war have a way of changing the ends for which we fight. If winning the war required abolishing slavery, the president could not simply promise to restore the union on its original basis, as he had at the war's outset. Instead, his letters and speeches needed to build toward the "new birth of freedom" that he gave voice to at Gettysburg. The progression that Holzer captures is a reminder that wars do not follow scripts, and presidents must adjust their words accordingly. It is not inconceivable that a president who has confined military operations to protecting innocent lives in Libya might one day find himself explaining why it became necessary to remove a murderous dictator. We should be so lucky if his words followed the arc of Lincoln's writings toward an ever-expanding vision of liberty. And while *Lincoln on War* won't settle any of today's debates over war and peace, perhaps it can restore some humility.

The question, after all, is not whether Lincoln is on our side but whether we are on Lincoln's side. ♦

B&A

Webster's First

The pioneer who discovered the American language.

BY **WILLIAM H. PRITCHARD**

The subtitle of this welcome biography of Noah Webster links what the author calls Webster's "obsession" with the "creation of an American Culture." Although Webster has been the subject of several biographies—the most substantial and comprehensive being Harlow Unger's *Noah Webster: The Life and Times of an American Patriot* (1998)—Joshua Kendall aims to introduce Webster to a "broad reading public" that knows him as little more than a famous name. He is convinced also that Unger, in the lines of previous writers about Webster, presents too idealized a portrait of the man. Instead, Kendall sees him, like his great predecessor Samuel Johnson, as prey to "intractable" mental distress which, in the language of modern psychiatry, Kendall calls an "obsessive-compulsive personality disorder." According to the biographer, Webster's "crippling interpersonal anxiety" from childhood on was essential to his composing not only the dictionary and the phenomenally popular *Spelling Book*, but numerous other publications on a surprising variety of subjects—enough to make him a more than plausible addition to the founders of American culture.

The Forgotten Founding Father
Noah Webster's Obsession and the Creation of an American Culture
by Joshua Kendall
Putnam's, 368 pp., $26.95

If one shrinks a bit from the all-too-available vocabulary of personality disorders and interpersonal anxieties, Kendall doesn't ride these horses too hard but provides an objectively toned and sympathetically rendered account of Webster's

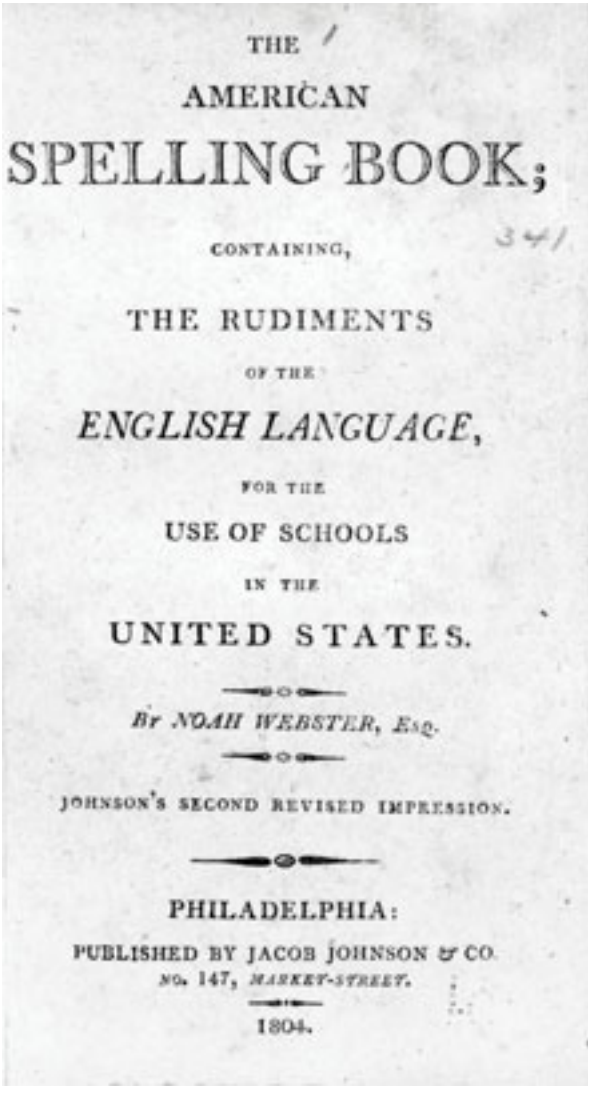
William H. Pritchard is Henry Clay Folger professor of English at Amherst College.

astonishing career. He begins with a portrait of the 27-year-old graduate of Yale who has just published *Sketches of American Policy*, recommendations on how the newly emerging republic should conduct itself, and who is visiting the retired General Washington at Mount Vernon. Kendall has the clever idea of heading each chapter with a definition from the dictionary Webster would eventually write: For his prologue, "George Washington's Cultural Attaché: The Definer of American Identity," he singles out Webster's definition of "American."

> A native of America; originally applied to the aboriginals, or copper-colored races, found here by the Europeans; but now applied to the descendants of Europeans born in America. The name *American* must always exalt the pride of patriotism. *Washington*.

When, 15 years later, after Washington's two-term presidency and his death, Webster failed to be named official biographer of his hero, he began instead the longer but more rewarding task of what an unfriendly critic would refer to as "Noah's Ark," the 70,000-word *American Dictionary of the English Language*.

What many have failed to realize, including your reviewer, was the range and extent of Webster's activities prior to the dictionary's appearance in 1828. He grew up in what was known as the West Division of Hartford, Connecticut, was close to neither of his parents, studied at Yale under its future president Timothy Dwight, was friends with Joel Barlow (a member of what came to be known as the Connecticut Wits), and under Barlow's influence hung around, in Kendall's words, with "a fast crowd that chased women, drank and swore." Hard to believe, but later on he abandoned a plan to make an anthology of English poets because too many of them employed undesirable language. One of these was John Dryden, about whom Webster found it "mortifying" that the poet should "regale the libidinous with his translations of Theocritus and Lucretius which I read when at college and which are *vade mecums* for a brothel." Such words, uttered with typical Websterian severity, suggests why urbanity is the word that least fits him.


THE
AMERICAN
SPELLING BOOK;
CONTAINING,
THE RUDIMENTS
OF THE
ENGLISH LANGUAGE,
FOR THE
USE OF SCHOOLS
IN THE
UNITED STATES.
BY NOAH WEBSTER, ESQ.
JOHNSON'S SECOND REVISED IMPRESSION.
PHILADELPHIA:
PUBLISHED BY JACOB JOHNSON & CO.
NO. 147, MARKET-STREET.
1804.

When war broke out with England, he, his father, and two brothers joined the Revolutionary militia; he graduated from Yale in 1778, after which his father declared he could give him no further economic support. Unmoored, Noah spent a good many hours reading Johnson's *Rambler* essays while deciding to become a lawyer. For awhile he taught students at an elite Hartford school while assisting a lawyer and reading law after hours. The strain proved too much, and Webster suspended his studies in the face of what his earlier biographer, Unger, thinks was an "undefined illness . . . probably influenza." Kendall opts for a more dramatic psychic breakdown, calling it "acute depression and anxiety," while comparing Webster's plight to that of Dr. Johnson, who at age 20, according to Boswell, experienced something similar. Like Johnson, Webster pulled out of the depths by committing himself to a life of writing that would lead to a great work of lexicography.

What provided Webster with the funds necessary to undertake and carry out the dictionary enterprise was the fabulous success of his rewriting of a widely used 18th-century speller by the Englishman Thomas Dilworth. Webster's redoing of Dilworth was pitched toward American children, limiting itself to commonly used terms and differing from Dilworth by grouping together monosyllabic words that sounded alike (bug, dug, hug, lug, mug, tug) and proceeding to words of more than one syllable. English and Irish place names were replaced by a list of the American states, important towns, and counties. There is a parallel, notes Kendall, with the recent political revolution: Just as the American military had taken on the tyrannical British government, the American literati, Webster felt, now had to strike out against the unwieldy British language, bringing order to

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chaos. Originally named rather formidably *A Grammatical Institute of the English Language*, the most significant section was renamed *The American Spelling Book*, a volume that over the next century would sell more copies than any book except the Bible.

Webster's lifetime friend, Timothy Pickering, who would become Washington's secretary of state, stayed up all night reading the *Spelling Book* and reported to his wife that "the time will come when no authority as an English grammarian will be superior to [Webster's] own." A few years later, after hearing Webster lecture, and in a passage Kendall doesn't quote, Pickering wrote to his nephew:

> With respect to Mr. Webster, you must have noticed that with a competent share of good sense, he possessed a *quantum sufficit* of vanity . . . [and] so much of egotism, especially in a young man . . . as to prevent his hearers receiving the satisfaction that might otherwise have been derived from many ingenious observations.

Webster was "not known for his playfulness," Kendall observes in an understatement: "I do not remember to have seen him smile," testified a young man who delivered page proofs of the dictionary to him. Webster disposed of Shakespeare by admitting his genius but noting in him "the grossest improprieties" and that "his language is full of errors, and ought not to be offered as a model for imitation." This habit of vilification, of which Kendall takes full note, had its milder version when, after asking a boy loitering whether his mother didn't want him at home, Webster hired the boy to pick up the stones from the road in front of his house (payment 12-and-a-half cents an hour).

The sweep of his activities and publications is mind-boggling. A brief enumeration includes editorship of a literary magazine and newspaper, lectures on copyright law, and his stimulation of a national census by personally counting the houses in various American cities. In response to an epidemic of yellow fever he produced *A Brief History of Epidemic and Pestilential Diseases*, consisting of 700 pages, later termed by William Osler as the most important medical work written in America by a layman. In his spare time, as it were, he fell "madly in love" (Kendall's hard-to-believe words for it) with Rebecca Greenleaf, married her, and sired seven children whom he treated with some austerity. While at work on the dictionary he became a devout Calvinist, and after moving from New Haven to Amherst, became a founder of Amherst College.

Meanwhile, the great work was proceeding, first by publication of a *Compendious Dictionary* ("compendious" meaning short) as a trial run for the longer work. Here Kendall, because of the scope of his book, simply doesn't have the space to do full justice to its composition, and interested readers should seek out David

Noah Webster, ca. 1800

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Micklethwait's *Noah Webster and the American Dictionary* for a fascinating account of the operation. Micklethwait points out that it was a great advance in lexicography, "not because Webster defined so well, but because he defined so widely," the result being thousands of artistic and scientific terms hitherto available only in specialist dictionaries. Kendall notes that while Webster set out to replace, even to "slay," Dr. Johnson (his own dictionary would contain 12,000 more words than his predecessor's), a third of his definitions demonstrate Johnson's influence.

Webster's Third Dictionary now sells better in its Web-based venue than in copies of the printed book, but the *Collegiate Dictionary*, which has sold 56 million copies since 1898, will see a new edition in 2013. Kendall assures us that the company is keeping up to date with the language and has recently included such additions as "chick flick," for which we can all be grateful. ♦

B&A

Balkan Dreams

A debut novel hovers among shadows and action.

BY JOHN SIMON

This is the latest runaway bestseller among first novels. Much has been made of the fact that Téa Obreht was 24 years old when she finished writing it, that she hailed from the former Yugoslavia, that she was 12 when she came to the United States with her family, that she wrote the novel mostly as a student at Cornell, that the style could best be described as magic realism (though she does not call herself a magic realist), and that she was a woman. And not only a woman but a blonde, and an attractive one.

The Tiger's Wife
A Novel
by Téa Obreht
Random House, 352 pp., $25

The novel has mythic qualities—and is by no means the sort of thing attractive young blondes usually write about. The vocabulary is large, the syntax mostly correct and idiomatic, and the prose both exotic and poetic. Obreht declared various influences, the most evident being Gabriel García Márquez, whose *Love in the Time of Cholera* she pronounces the perfect novel. Respected writers—T.C. Boyle, Colum McCann, and Ann Patchett—showered her book jacket with superlatives.

She has appeared in respected publications: The *New York Times Book Review* accorded her the rare privilege for a first novel, a front-page review; the *New Yorker* chose her as the youngest member of a select group, "The Twenty Under Forty," and published a chapter of *The Tiger's Wife* in its pages, something tantamount to literary canonization.

So who is this young woman of mystery? Yes, mystery, for her very name seems fictitious. The acute accent on Téa does not jibe with either Serbian, her native language, or with English, her adopted one. Obreht would appear to be a Slovene name, but why Slovene in Belgrade, Serbia's capital, where she spent her first seven years? It turns out that she has Muslim, Slovene (i.e., Roman Catholic), and Greek Orthodox ancestors. Some time ago Wikipedia accorded her a brief entry, revealing her real surname as something very Slavic and ponderously polysyllabic. Also curious are the two pages of acknowledgments at the end of the *The Tiger's Wife*, as provocatively unusual as the book itself.

There is much that is indisputably arresting about Obreht the writer. She is in equal measure talented and annoying. On the positive side are her intense powers of observation of nature, objects, people and their behavior, which she perceives and evokes in minute detail with the eye of a miniaturist painter. Also the frequent, albeit inconsistent, ability to convey things through striking similes and metaphors. On the negative side are pretentiously elucubrated tropes, and problems with the larger picture—fully realizing some characters and finding a proper arc for the story. Thus her structure is often deliberately choppy, with excessive crosscutting or disjunctive fresh starts. Her chapters tend to be like short stories—seem, indeed, to have originated as such. Major characters are introduced a bit too serially even as earlier ones fade too often out of the picture. The never-named country is sometimes Serbia, sometimes not, remaining generic Balkan.

In the novel's present, the quasi-autobiographical Natalia and her best friend Zóra (again with a preposterous accent mark), two young doctors, travel from what is called the City across borders (corresponding to those between Serbia and Croatia) to inoculate endangered children in some seaside town, but neither then nor later become fully realized characters even though they reappear periodically.

More developed are events in the past, such as Natalia's close relationship with her distinguished physician grandfather, with whom she, as a child, makes weekly visits to the zoo to check up on their beloved tigers. Grandfather carries in his pocket a well-thumbed copy of Kipling's *Jungle Book*, which makes multiple appearances, usually featuring its tiger. This zoo bears marked similarity to the Belgrade Zoo, located in the Kalimegdan, the fortress-park at the confluence of two rivers (in reality, the Danube and Sava).

Of Natalia we learn that she adores her grandfather, who is basically

John Simon, author and critic, lives in New York.

the novel's protagonist, but possibly because he figures now as an old man, now as a nine-year-old boy, and now in-between, remains in too-uncertain focus. Of more or less equal importance are the tiger and the tiger's wife. Upon her grandfather's death Natalia travels to retrieve his possessions since he puzzlingly went off to die in the distant burg of Galina. She, too, will meet the deathless man, a strange character who neither ages nor dies but announces and facilitates the death of others, being, he says, the nephew of Death. His name is Gavran (Serbian for raven) Gailé (of no known language) and he has periodic meetings and weird intercourse with Grandfather.

As a boy, Grandfather became involved in Galina with the tiger, escaped from the city zoo through German bombing (it is almost always war), and is now wandering in a snowy landscape (it is almost always winter). He stops on the hillside above Galina, terrorizing its people, all but one. That is the deaf-mute girl, as she is known at first, the widow of the brutal butcher Luka, who beat her. A petite but somehow strong creature, she becomes known, when widowed, as the tiger's wife; certainly the tiger makes regular nightly visits to her house. Grandfather becomes her only friend and helper in the village.

Different characters take over single or some consecutive chapters, only to vanish more or less completely. There are even strange characters in Natalia's friends' vineyard, digging for something even stranger. There is Luka, the brutish butcher; there is Dragisa the Bear, who hunts (especially) bears and stuffs them to sell to aristocratic buyers; there is the Apothecary, who goes by more than one name and provides a sort of village gossip central. All of them come to diverse but equally sticky ends. So does the tiger's wife, whom the village all along wanted dead. The tiger, however, survives, albeit in parts unknown.

The most quoted passage runs as follows:

> Everything necessary to understand my grandfather [who keeps telling little Natalia stories] lies between two stories: the story of the tiger's wife, and the story of the deathless man. These stories run like secret rivers through all the other stories of his life—of my grandfather's days in the army; his great love for my grandmother; the years he spent as a surgeon and a tyrant at the University. One, which I learned after his death, is the story of how my grandfather became a man; the other, which he told me, is of how he became a child again.

That sounds very clear, but is not really borne out by the novel. We do, indeed, get the stories of him and the tiger and tiger's wife; but there is, for instance, nothing much about his great love for his wife. As a mature man, he does run into the deathless man at odd times, first after Gavran (nicknamed Gavro) has been shot in the head and buried, only to revive at night and begin by asking Grandfather for water. He always asks for water; why he doesn't get it himself is one of the book's lesser mysteries.

Téa Obreht

BEOWULF SHEEHAN

Their conversations are pretty weird, but then weirdness is Obreht's stock in trade. Herewith a very few out of numerous examples. What are "green-river veins" or "a productive cough"? What is "the wet glazed noise of throat ache"? Why is something "noticed by the city's tank commander, who would go on to shoot himself three days later"? Isn't that too much or too little about a character who gets no further mention anywhere? How big is a tiger if he can hide "in the hollows of fallen trees"? Why are cooked fish on a platter "clear-eyed and firm [looking] like something out of a circus"? How is "the ridge of [someone's] nose folded up against her eyes"? Particularly forced is the showy use of recherché verbs. A dog bays, an owl fares in from somewhere, a tiger mouths thistles, a shovel is lanced, a head is staved in, someone's chest jolts, the sun blanches water bottle-green, a shirt sinks into someone's skin, a bull smears someone across the dirt. Snow dews in someone's eyes, a tiger's skin is clewed up as dead as a sail, a tiger is washed with fire. And much, much more.

So Olbreht gets away with verbicide; there are also mistakes of grammar I will spare you. From a prized writer I would ask for better. Not so the folks who fall all over themselves to praise her. Or do they propel themselves all over? ♦

"But Gingrich's third wife [Callista] also is being cited by people close to him as a key factor in the staff revolt that has left his presidential campaign on life support."* —Associated Press, *June 10, 2011

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For Gingrich, it's (just like) starting over

CALLISTA IN CHARGE

'All we are saying is give Newt a chance'

BY ALBERT GOLDMAN

GOFFSTOWN, N.H. — Presidential candidate Newt Gingrich was sprinting toward the podium at last night's debate—he and his wife Callista initially took the wrong bus headed to Mohegan Sun casino in Connecticut. "I'd fire my scheduler but I'm married to her," the former speaker of the House said with a smile. He also seemed to be wearing unmatching socks. "The lighting at our motel wasn't all that great and it was hard to distinguish between the blues and blacks," said Callista, who also serves as Gingrich's personal valet, chauffeur, cook, chief of staff, pollster, senior adviser, and volunteer.

Last week, Gingrich suffered a major setback in his presidential bid when practically his entire team resigned over differences in strategy. "I really don't see what all the fuss was about," Gingrich said after the debate. "When we returned from our Greek cruise, we were very mindful to bring back souvenir T-shirts, spoons, and cute little Acropolises for the staff." Others, however, complained about the candidate's spouse taking charge.

Mr. Gingrich countered, "Callista made me realize that we all shine on, like the moon and the stars and the sun. Now if you'll excuse me, I need to iron my shirts." According to longtime adviser Sam Dawson, Callista Gingrich had been increasingly inserting herself between the candidate and the staff, becoming more involved in strategic decision-making. "I don't know what he sees in her," said Dawson. "Many of us have known Newt much longer than she has. Then she walks in like Yoko Ono and tears the team apart. Plus she's a lousy singer."

Over the past week, however, Mr. Gingrich has taken a more Zen-like approach to the presidential race. When rival candidate Tim Pawlenty described Gingrich's economic and health reform plans as a "double fantasy," Gingrich replied, "You may say I'm a dreamer, but

IMAGINE CONTINUED ON A17

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The Gingriches plan a bed-in if the debt ceiling is raised.

Weiner to continue rehabilitation

ment center located in Sandals Jamaica

the weekly Standard

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