the weekly Standard

ON THE FISCAL CLIFF
FRED BARNES • JAY COST

DECEMBER 17, 2012 $4.95

REQUIEM FOR A HEAVYWEIGHT

BARRETT TILLMAN on the decommissioning of the USS Enterprise

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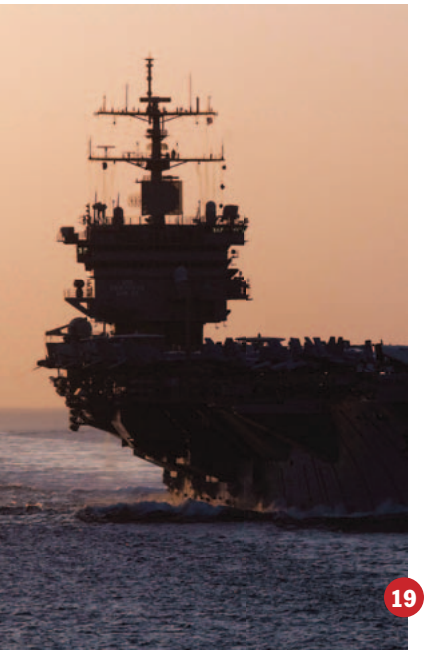
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When Brubeck Wasn't Cool

The Scrapbook notes with regret the death last week of Dave Brubeck, the California-born, classically trained pianist whose eponymous quartet—with its infectious melodies and unconventional time signatures—did so much to revitalize jazz in the 1950s and '60s. Brubeck, alto saxophonist Paul Desmond, and drummer Joe Morello are all now gone, leaving only the bass player, 89-year-old Eugene Wright.

As The Scrapbook has suggested in similar circumstances, the death of a famous, famously personable, and by all accounts supremely successful man on the eve of his 92nd birthday cannot be reckoned a tragedy. But with Dave Brubeck's death, a certain chapter in our cultural history is closed, and that is worth noting. It also awakens certain memories with which the great pianist is tangentially involved.

We are thinking specifically of the occasion, in 1970, when The Scrapbook was reading a hot-off-the-presses copy of Garry Wills's *Nixon Agonistes: The Crisis of the Self-Made Man*. The Scrapbook has decidedly mixed feelings about Wills, who has lurched in his time from writing for William F. Buckley Jr.'s *National Review* to devotion to the memory of the Stalinist playwright Lillian Hellman. *Nixon Agonistes*, as such books go, is a bit of a mess, more of a meditation on the times of Garry Wills than an account of Richard Nixon. But one passage, in particular, remains indelibly in The Scrapbook's mind, and it's not hard to understand why.

Wills is writing a kind of stream-of-consciousness riff on the general cluelessness of Nixon and his political apparatus, and as devices to display his wit settles on the presence in the campaign plane of Nixon's younger daughter and her fiancé:

> The token youth leaders on the plane were, of course, those joint heads of Youth for Nixon, David [Eisenhower] and Julie [Nixon]. They were a TV show from the Eisenhower era looked in on after ten years. Mr. and Mrs. Howdy Doody about to set up housekeeping. Even their clothes were out of the fifties—David's sloopy loafers and sport jacket, Julie's long skirts—and their favorite musician, in 1968, was still Dave Brubeck.

Dave Brubeck, 1920-2012

The "still" in that final phrase makes a loud thumping sound, and from any number of standpoints, this is an extraordinary paragraph. It is not enough that Wills is hostile to Nixon as a political candidate; he is prompted, as scholar-historian, to attack the personal appearance of family members—"Mr. and Mrs. Howdy Doody"—and express contempt for their apparent fondness for comfortable clothes ("sloopy loafers") and classic styles, as well as their taste in music. The year being 1968, Wills might presumably have been more favorably impressed if their "favorite musician" had been not Brubeck but, say, Donovan, or Gary Puckett & the Union Gap.

It is worth mentioning, as well, that the Brubeck who is a hapless punchline here for Garry Wills is the same Brubeck who, four decades later, was a recipient of the Kennedy Center Honors, and of whom Barack Obama said at the time, "You can't understand America without understanding jazz, and you can't understand jazz without understanding Dave Brubeck." Indeed, The Scrapbook has always wondered if Brubeck, a lifelong liberal, was aware of his status as an embarrassment in *Nixon Agonistes*.

For in this passage, The Scrapbook perceives any number of repellent things, not least a pioneering version of the kind of schoolyard invective and personal contempt that is now second nature on the left, and enshrined in such locales as MSNBC and the op-ed page of the *New York Times*. Of course, anyone who has ever seen a photo of Garry Wills would be reluctant to anoint him an arbiter of cool. But if we take Wills on his own terms, as a man of ideas and not a freelance character assassin, this passage tells us much more about him than about Julie Nixon and David Eisenhower, or Dave Brubeck. ♦

The Play's the Thing

According to British director Phyllida Lloyd, the Royal Shakespeare Company owes female actors some "reparation" for its shockingly sexist practice of casting male actors in male parts. Theater companies "should be just told that they have to have a 50/50 employment spread, then work out how to do the plays," Lloyd said last week, in an interview with BBC Radio 4. "If that means some gender-blind casting, some all-female, some all-male, it's not rocket science, and I think they could have some fun."

Gregory Doran, the RSC's artistic director, seemed open to the idea. "We have future plans to further explore the issues surrounding women

CBS / LANDOV

in theatre," he told the *Telegraph*. "A company with a 50/50 split of male and female actors is one that I've already challenged Phyllida to come and run in Stratford-upon-Avon."

For the sake of their audiences, we hope they are just engaging in some idle speculation. It's one thing for a director to make a choice to have a woman play Richard in *Richard II* in order to emphasize certain aspects of Richard's character—or to cast a woman as Falstaff because the right woman is there to fill the role. But to arbitrarily impose "gender blindness" on a company for nontheatrical reasons seems painfully myopic.

Lloyd is currently mounting an all-female production of *Julius Caesar* in London, and it's receiving decent reviews. She is obviously welcome to cast her productions however she wants. Indeed, Shakespeare himself was a "gender-blind" caster—at a time when all the parts were played by men. Shakespeare himself never expressed an opinion about this, but his Cleopatra chose to take her chances with the snake rather than live to see "some squeaking Cleopatra boy my greatness."

That directors should seek out actors with an eye towards making the play as good as possible, rather than to advance a social agenda, seems rather too obvious a point to press. However, The Scrapbook will hazard a radical thought: If you're directing a Shakespeare production, you ought to be primarily interested in the play, not in the codpieces of the actors. ♦

The War on Christmas, cont.

Every year around the holidays, the left sneers about the overabundance of "war on Christmas" stories in the media. The Scrapbook is tired of hearing about it as well, though that's because we're also weary of the left's zeal in stamping out innocuous public displays of faith.

And so it was with resignation that we read that UC-Berkeley's student government was trying to ban the appearance on campus of Salvation Army bell-ringers owing to the church's stance on homosexuality. It's true—the Salvation Army holds fast to traditional Christian beliefs that homosexual acts are sinful and marriage is between a man and a woman. We understand that many people disagree with this position, but the question is whether disagreement on this one issue is so important that it requires opposing the Salvation Army's historic and admirable commitment to helping those in need. Last time we looked, we didn't see thousands of members of the Human Rights Campaign standing out in the cold soliciting donations for the poor.

This narrow focus on the areas where Christianity runs afoul of modern liberalism elevates ideology over deeds and nearly always neglects to note where the church has been a force for good. In a historical sense, without Christianity it's a good bet that women's rights as we know them would be rare (which is why they still don't flourish in vast swaths of the non-Christian world). The abolitionist movement owed its underpinnings to Christianity, as did the civil rights movement and much of the 20th-century political drive to establish a social safety net for the poor. Do liberals not approve of the church having publicly exercised moral leadership on these issues?

Apparently none of this matters. So long as many Christians still oppose

Oppressor at work

policies that undermine the traditional family and refuse to sanction killing unborn children as a matter of "personal freedom," some liberals will be deeply invested in portraying churches as the most oppressive institutions ever.

Still, if you are one of these Scrooges offended by encountering the words "Merry Christmas!" on public property and cannot summon the largeness of heart to tolerate any organization that deviates from liberal orthodoxy on gay marriage, no matter how much good they may do elsewhere, The Scrapbook, in the spirit of the season, would nonetheless like to wish you and yours an enjoyable Winter Solstice and the good fortune never to find yourself in need of the sorts of social services provided by the Salvation Army. ♦

Sentences We Didn't Finish

'The Library of America series is the best continuous advertisement for the surpassing intelligence, creative leadership and elite values of the United States in the age of Tea Party stupidity. This year LoA published both *The Collected Writings of Joe Brainard* (a bewitching exploration of gay sensibility) and . . .' (Richard Davenport-Hines, the *Times Literary Supplement*, November 30). ♦

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Above and Beyond

I recently had occasion to attend a funeral at Arlington National Cemetery. It was the day after Veterans Day, and I woke up that November morning to find it cold and raining. Whenever you see military funerals in movies, it's raining—beads of water stream off the faces of soldiers implacably going through their drills, a heavy-handed metaphor for the stoicism and sacrifice of military service.

Alan Poindexter was my father's godson. He died this summer at age 50 in a freak accident while taking his developmentally disabled son for a ride on a jet ski. (His son survived the accident just fine.) Alan was several years older than I am and lived 3,000 miles away, so time and distance conspired to keep us from ever meeting when I was growing up. He was the son of one of my father's closest friends, his roommate at the United States Naval Academy, class of 1958. You may have heard of Alan's father, Admiral John Poindexter, whose commendable service to his country will long be noted.

Alan Poindexter's Arlington gravesite, foreground

Though his death was much too early, there was never any doubt Alan Poindexter would leave his own mark on the world. In fact, Alan had already departed from this world twice before—as the pilot of two space shuttle missions. The closest I came to meeting him was when I went down to Cape Canaveral in January 2008 to watch a space shuttle launch. But once I got there, I found out they quarantine astronauts prior to shuttle launches to keep them from getting sick. Not only did I not get to meet Alan, but technical problems postponed the shuttle launch a month, and I had to leave before I could witness Alan safely steering the *Atlantis* into the great blue yonder. For him, becoming an astronaut was the culmination of an already impressive career. By all accounts, he was a brilliant aerospace engineer and pilot: Even before orbiting earth 441 times, he flew 30 different aircraft and made 450 carrier landings flying F-14s in the Navy. Last, but certainly not least, he was a loving husband and father.

As my father's only son, I've been keenly aware of the fact that his godson was a seriously impressive individual. It's rarely a good idea to invite any comparisons to an actual, are-you-kidding-me rocket scientist and fighter pilot. These days, given my profession's reputation, you can imagine that retired Marine colonels aren't leaping at the chance to tell their friends their son forswore a military career to become a journalist. It's a credit to my dad that he's always been proud and supportive. Maybe I'm not an astronaut, but he's grateful I didn't go to law school.

In any event, Alan's funeral was the reason I found myself strolling through the grass at Arlington National Cemetery with my family, including my father, who had traveled all the way from Oregon to be there. We followed the horse-drawn caisson carrying the flag-draped coffin and eventually arrived at the gravesite. Fortunately, we were spared any mournful meteorological clichés. By then it had stopped raining, and the afternoon sun shone so low and bright over the gentle hills of Arlington that the warmth spread across the faces and pierced right through the dark overcoats of the assembled crowd. Thoughtful remarks and prayers were offered. The band played beautifully, and a group of sailors performed their exacting drills, culminating in the firing of three volleys off in the distance, each shot sending a jolt through the crowd. Finally, flags were presented to Poindexter's two sons and widow. As somber rituals go, Alan's funeral was uniquely affirming.

And when an astronaut dies, they go the extra mile. They suspended traffic out of nearby Reagan National Airport—no small gesture—so the Navy could honor Alan with a flyover. The jets came in low over the horizon, flying slowly in a classic delta formation. Then, right as they passed above us, one of the jets peeled off and shot straight up in the sky until it became a nearly imperceptible speck, then disappeared. They call this moving maneuver the Missing Man.

My two young daughters were transfixed by the spectacle. On the car ride over my wife had explained a little bit about Alan Poindexter and his life to our children. Our wide-eyed three-year-old immediately announced she wanted to be an astronaut. Even in death, Alan Poindexter's achievements and dedication to others remain an example we hope our children will live up to.

Mark Hemingway

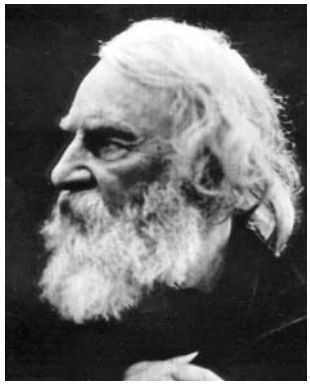
the weekly Standard

Footprints on the Sand of Time

As the world unravels on Barack Obama's watch, conservatives might want to take some solace in saying—We told you so! But they shouldn't. First of all, it's not as if the Romney campaign or the GOP congressional leadership or most conservative organizations really spent much time bothering to warn of the consequences of Obama's foreign policy. And in any case, there's not much solace to be had, as the world coming apart threatens the well-being of America, not just the success of Barack Obama's second term.

So what can conservatives do? They can explain that decline has been a choice, and that weakness has consequences. They can explain that Obama's inaction in Syria now is of a piece with his inaction in Iran in 2009, that the abandonment of Iraq in 2011 prefigured the prospective abandonment of Afghanistan over the next couple of years, and that defense cuts at home go hand in hand with an oh-so-light footprint abroad. The Obama administration has chosen a course of American retrenchment and retreat. Conservatives can urge the president to reverse course. They can try to minimize the damage he can cause over the next four years. And, as important, they can prepare to be ready to repair the damage from the Obama years.

Barack Obama



Henry Wadsworth Longfellow

We've recovered before. In the late 1940s, a war-weary nation looked the other way as the Soviet Union occupied Eastern Europe and China went Communist. It was only after the North Korean invasion of the South that the United States, first under Harry Truman and then Dwight Eisenhower, faced up to its responsibilities—but at considerable cost in lives and treasure over the next decades as we fought wars that perhaps could have been avoided and endured a Cold War that needn't have been as threatening as it was. In the late 1970s, a war-weary nation watched as Khomeini took over Iran and the Sandinistas Nicaragua. This time, the Iranian hostage crisis and the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan served as the wake-up call, answered first (to a degree) by Jimmy Carter, then resoundingly by Ronald Reagan.

PRESS ASSOCIATION / AP IMAGES

So perhaps every 30 years America has to go through a moment of retreat and renewal. But a happy outcome isn't assured. Barack Obama is no Harry Truman. The Republican party has no obvious Reagan—or Ike, for that matter, waiting in the wings.

And the conservative movement—a bulwark of American strength for the last several decades—is in deep disarray. Reading about some conservative organizations and Republican campaigns these days, one is reminded of Eric Hoffer's remark, "Every great cause begins as a movement, becomes a business, and eventually degenerates into a racket." It may be that major parts of American conservatism have become such a racket that a kind of refounding of the movement as a cause is necessary. A reinvigoration of the Republican party also seems desirable, based on a new generation of leaders, perhaps coming—as did Ike and Reagan—from outside the normal channels.

The good news is that these new leaders do not have to create something *de novo*. They have an American tradition to appeal to. That tradition would suggest a "light footprint" isn't the best America can do. It would suggest that it's not really America's destiny to tiptoe through the world, hoping not to do too much to disturb dictators and jihadists.

All this talk of footprints would have rung a bell with earlier generations of Americans. The poet Henry Wadsworth Longfellow isn't in much favor today, as his didactic seriousness isn't in accord with modern taste. But earlier generations of Americans—perhaps even a young Dwight D. Eisenhower and a young Ronald Reagan—would have been familiar with his "Psalm of Life," with its famous second stanza:

> *Life is real! Life is earnest!*
> *And the grave is not its goal;*
> *Dust thou are, to dust thou returnest,*
> *Was not spoken of the soul.*

And the almost equally famous later stanzas:

Lives of great men all remind us
We can make our lives sublime,
And, departing, leave behind us
Footprints on the sand of time;

Footprints, that perhaps another,
Sailing o'er life's solemn main,
A forlorn and shipwrecked brother,
Seeing, shall take heart again.

Contemporary liberalism is committed to leading from behind, with a light footprint. Isn't it the historic task of American conservatism to shape an America that will lead again from the front, with a stride worthy of a great nation? Isn't it the task of conservatism to restore American leadership so that friends of freedom around the world, *Seeing, shall take heart again*, in an America that seeks to *leave behind us / Footprints on the sand of time*?

—William Kristol

Obama v. Assad

NEWSCOM

Aleppo on December 5, 2012

The flurry of excitement over Syria's "moving" of chemical weapons highlights yet again the paralysis gripping U.S. Middle East strategy. "We're kind of boxed in," an administration official confessed to the *New York Times*. "There's an issue of presidential credibility here, but our options are quite limited."

Indeed, there is a credibility issue. President Obama said at an August 20 news conference that it was a "red line for us [if] we start seeing a whole bunch of chemical weapons moving around or being utilized." That would "change my calculus," he declared. But what has changed is the definition of "move." Apparently, it doesn't mean the Syrian Army moving chemical rounds in order to use them on rebel forces or mixing the "precursor" elements that give a chemical warhead its lethality, but, in the clarifying words of National Security Council spokesman Tommy Vietor, "'moving around' means proliferation," as in transferring them to Hezbollah.

It's also true that options, that is military options, really are limited. Take the question of Syria's chemical weapons. The Obama Way of War—cyberattacks plus drones plus proxies plus, in extremis, SEAL Team Six—would be hard-pressed to handle the mission. It's doubtful, to begin with, that we have anything like a comprehensive understanding of Syria's chemical capabilities. We do know that there are five main chemical facilities in Syria, scattered around the country, and maybe two dozen lesser sites. The Syrians have a limited number of Scud missiles—maybe 150 or so—capable of fitting a chemical warhead. And most of those are thought to be in southern Syria, in range of Israel, stored in caves. The Israelis watch them closely, and probably we do, too. Scuds also take some time to fuel and prepare for launch.

Preempting Syrian chemical weapons use or trying to prevent repeated use would require a substantial and extended air campaign and is more likely, as the anonymous administration official confessed to the *Times*, to "create the exact situation we're trying to avoid"—that is, the probable dispersal of whatever's left to Hezbollah and others. Realistically, the situation would demand the use of ground forces. In effect, Syria's chemical weapons become a different sort of red line—to foreclose American intervention of any sort.

The administration seems to be contenting itself with the conclusion that the Syrian Army is on the brink of collapse and that the Alawite coalition will crumble once deprived of the leadership of the Assad family. That's far from clear. Even in the north around Aleppo, Syrian outposts are being evacuated in good order or overrun—garrisons are not surrendering en masse. The regime is fighting hard in Damascus and in control of the vital link between Damascus and the Alawite homeland in the north, the area around Homs.

So President Obama might well get another bite at the apple. A post-Aleppo, rump "Alawistan" would be a tough nut to crack for the Syrian opposition; the rebels still lack the firepower or anything like the national command-and-control mechanisms to finish the job quickly, particularly if Iran and Russia continue support for the Assad regime—and if the regime has a weapons-of-mass-destruction deterrent.

The outcome in Syria will be determined first on the battlefield. If the United States remains militarily self-deterred, we'll have little say in what happens in Syria. Or across the rest of the Middle East.

—Thomas Donnelly

Spender in Chief

The president doesn't want a deal; he wants higher taxes, on his terms. BY FRED BARNES

Waiting for details on those spending cuts . . . and waiting . . . and waiting . . .

Among President Obama's rhetorical skills is an impressive mastery of lip service. He displayed it last week when he spoke to the Business Roundtable, the lobby for big business. And he did so without betraying even a hint that his words were bunk.

In this case, he was paying lip service to the notion that—contrary to what he called "my reputation"—he's for spending cuts to reduce the deficit and to secure a bipartisan deal to avert the fiscal cliff on January 1. "We're prepared to make some tough decisions when it comes to cutting spending," he insisted.

The business moguls didn't break into laughter, but they should have. Senate minority leader Mitch McConnell did when he heard the president's plan for a fiscal cliff agreement. Serious spending cuts, meaningful reforms, even modest restraint—those are missing from the Obama plan. And not surprisingly.

When Democrats controlled Congress with large majorities in his first two years as president, Obama spent lavishly. The deficit soared past $1 trillion a year and has stayed there. Federal spending reached 25 percent of GDP, the highest level since World War II. Obama had an excuse. He was battling a deep recession. But when the downturn ended five months after he took office, he continued to spend.

His second two years were different. Republicans captured the House in 2010 and claimed a mandate to shrink spending. Obama resisted at every juncture. He opposed cuts—any cuts at all—in three continuing resolutions that kept the government operating in 2011. And he asked for a "clean" increase in the debt limit—that is, with no spending cuts attached. He acceded to cuts only under extreme duress.

Obama's plan for a fiscal cliff compromise reflects his hostility to spending cuts. Instead, he wants to raise taxes by $1.6 trillion. That's a nonstarter. He wants another stimulus of $50 billion. It's already DOA on Capitol Hill. Worse, he's back with the most fraudulent spending cut of all, $800 billion in reduced funding for wars in Iraq and Afghanistan a few years from now when they're no longer being fought. This counts as a cut of money that's never going to be spent.

But at least Obama is willing to tackle skyrocketing entitlement spending, right? Wrong. He's offering $400 billion in reductions sometime down the road, chiefly in what's paid to providers. Yes, this would produce a reduction—in the number of providers, particularly doctors, who will quit seeing Medicare patients.

What Republicans want with entitlements is not cuts but reforms. They've recommended raising the eligibility age for Medicare and slightly means testing the formula for benefits. This isn't radical stuff. The Medicare prescription drug program is already means tested to favor the less affluent.

Why not agree to these changes? The liberal base of the Democratic party—Obama's base—opposes them, that's why. House minority leader Nancy Pelosi says they would harm the middle class (not true). She's against shaving any funding from Medicare, with one exception. In 2010, she supported a cut of $716 billion, with the money shifted to Obamacare to make it appear fiscally sound and thus able to win congressional approval.

If Obama doesn't know better than to follow Pelosi's lead, the co-head of his deficit reduction commission, Erskine Bowles, does. He's an ardent entitlement reformer and was the instigator of the 1997 agreement between Newt Gingrich and President Bill Clinton on reforming Social Security. Their secret pact died when the Monica Lewinsky scandal broke.

Bowles, by the way, was the Democratic leader of the commission. He talks to Obama and surely must have described the value of reforming entitlements. But Obama may be so puffed up by winning reelection that he won't consider a major concession to Republicans or he may be just too much of a reactionary to allow tinkering with a sainted liberal program.

NEWSCOM

Fred Barnes is executive editor of The Weekly Standard.

By dismissing GOP offers, he's pursuing a risky strategy. The press trumpets the White House line that the only impediment to a fiscal cliff deal is Republicans' refusal to accept income tax rate hikes for the wealthy (and not so wealthy). But there's another barrier that's equal to the tax hike, perhaps greater.

House speaker John Boehner can't agree to a deal without real spending cuts or reforms. If he did, House Republicans would abandon him. The *Washington Post* says "a growing chorus of Republicans" are ready to accept a deal that boosts tax rates. Maybe so, but the chorus would be no larger than a quartet or a trio if spending cuts aren't included.

Treasury Secretary Tim Geithner claims the president is willing to go over the fiscal cliff absent higher tax rates for the top 2 percent of earners. That would mean everyone's taxes would go up and deep cuts in defense and domestic spending would be imposed.

One could argue this would give Obama exactly what he relishes: more tax revenue and less defense spending. But the price would be high. The chance of a recession would increase significantly. He'd try to blame it on Republicans, but recessions are always named for presidents.

His second term would be an ordeal. For four years, he and Republicans would fight over spending, taxes, and the bad economy. Should the media finally turn on Obama, he would face a gauntlet of merciless critics.

And there's something bigger at stake to which Obama often seems oblivious. Presidents are expected to lead. They're supposed to rise above partisan disputes and produce favorable results. Would Ronald Reagan or Lyndon Johnson or Bill Clinton allow the country to fall into a fiscal abyss?

As he closed his speech to the Business Roundtable, Obama indulged in more lip service. He's for bipartisanship. "We're not insisting on [higher] rates just out of spite or out of any kind of partisan bickering," he said. As with all lip service, the opposite is true. ♦

Permanent Gridlock

The showdowns on spending won't end until the voters make up their minds. BY JAY COST

As the nation heads ever closer to the so-called fiscal cliff—the January 1 deadline at which, absent congressional and presidential action, taxes will go up and (on January 2) spending will go down—both sides are bandying about accusations, counter-accusations, and counter-counter-accusations.

Democrats are convinced that the GOP is not negotiating in good faith, as it is in hock to supposedly extreme antitax activists. Republicans are similarly convinced that President Barack Obama and Treasury Secretary Timothy Geithner are bad-faith actors, content to drive the nation over the cliff because it will advance the left's long-term agenda of higher taxes and lower defense spending. Similarly, both sides spy incompetence in their opposition: The left believes that Speaker John Boehner cannot control his House caucus, and the right suspects that President Obama lacks the temperament to broker a deal.

All of this—and more—might well be true, but the political class is too prone to explain gridlock as a function of individual personalities. While they no doubt matter, the two sides are deadlocked for much larger, structural reasons, which stretch back generations in some cases and ultimately have their roots in the chronic indecision of the American people.

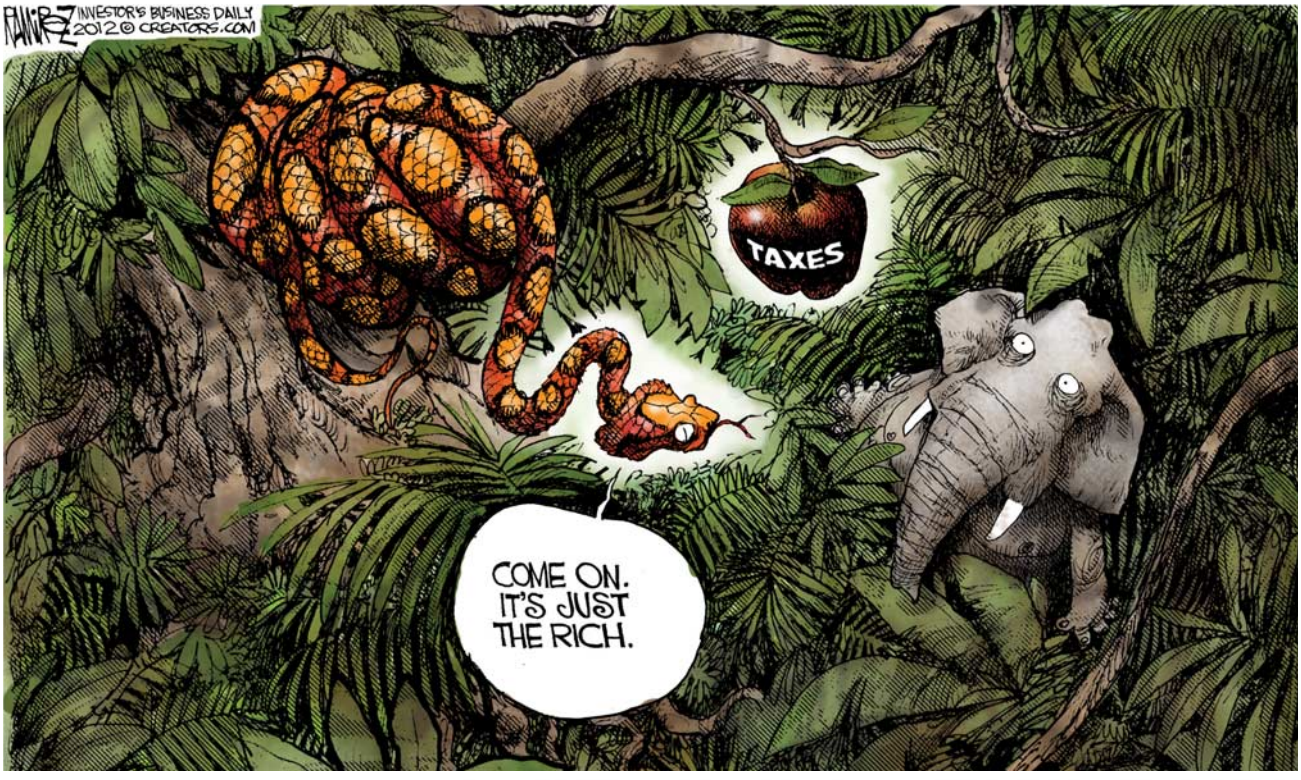
The first, and most obvious, source of gridlock has to do with the issue at hand: top marginal income tax rates. For decades, the two sides have not seen eye-to-eye on this issue. A quick perusal of legislative history indicates that clearly enough. Ronald Reagan's 1981 tax cuts passed the House of Representatives with 151 Democrats voting nay and just 88 voting yea—and most of those yea votes were Southern Democrats who have since been replaced by Republicans. Northern liberals hated the Reagan tax rates in 1981, and they hate them today.

Similarly, congressional Republicans have balked at tax hikes time and again. After Reagan's job approval numbers deteriorated in 1982, his political capital dissipated and he was forced to pass a deficit reduction bill that included nearly $100 billion in tax increases. The bill passed, but 89 House Republicans split with the man who has since been remembered as the embodiment of the modern conservative movement.

This pattern continued over the next 20 years. George H.W. Bush ultimately agreed to a deficit reduction package in late 1990 that included $137 billion in new taxes, as well as an increase in the top marginal rate. Some 105 conservative Republicans in the House voted against the president. In 1993, Bill Clinton's budget, which again raised taxes, won the support of exactly zero House Republicans. Democrats have demonstrated similar recalcitrance in supporting tax reductions: Just 10 House Democrats backed George W. Bush's 2001 tax cut package, and only 7 supported the 2003 tax cuts.

Given that it is these very same tax rates that are now on the table, is it any surprise that the two parties cannot find common ground? Of course not. The reality is that there has been virtually no common ground on taxes for a generation. Indeed, it was the very lack of common ground that generated the fiscal cliff in the first place.

Jay Cost is a staff writer at THE WEEKLY STANDARD.



THE LAST TEMPTATION

Why should any be discovered now?

If anything, common ground—always in short supply—has been eroding over the last few decades, which points to the second structural reason for gridlock. Ronald Reagan was able to win crossover support from congressional Democrats for his 1981 tax cut passage in large part because he had won handily in their districts. Ideology aside, pure political calculation signaled to these Southern Democrats that Reagan was not a leader to defy lightly.

However, President Obama has only a fraction of this sway over congressional Republicans. While the votes are still being tabulated, it is a safe bet that an overwhelming majority of House Republicans will have come from districts that voted for Mitt Romney. The implication is stark: The two sides are basically representing different constituencies, with competing values and beliefs. What sway does President Obama hold over a Republican whose district went for Mitt Romney? The answer: very, very little.

Third and most important, insofar as the two political coalitions do overlap, it is thanks to an electorate that seems, at best, confused and uncertain about what it wants. Democrats these days like to tout polls showing that the GOP's position on taxes is unpopular, but they often fail to mention just how sensitive those polls are to the wording of questions. Tweak the way the question is phrased—for instance, from asking about tax hikes on "the rich" (the Democrats' favorite) to hikes on "small businesses" (the GOP's preferred phrase)—and you will get starkly different answers.

Nowhere is this confusion more evident than in the 2012 exit polls. President Obama claims a mandate to raise taxes on the wealthy to reduce the deficit. Does the evidence back up that claim? Perhaps—it just depends on what evidence you are looking at. Some 60 percent of voters said that tax rates should either be "increased for all" or "increased for $250K+." That seems to support the president's position, but those same respondents gave a contradictory answer to a related question. The exit pollsters also asked if taxes should be raised "to help cut the deficit." Just 33 percent said yes and 63 percent said no.

One potential explanation for this contradiction is that voters want taxes raised not for deficit reduction but for more spending. Yet just 43 percent of respondents stated that the "government should do more," while some 51 percent said the government is doing too much. Public opinion on this issue is, in a word, incoherent. As a whole, the voters did not give a clear indication of what they want done with taxes, spending, and the deficit.

Why does the public seem so ill-prepared to answer basic questions about the size and scope of government? The answer might simply be: They never really had to before now. For generations, conservatives have warned about a government that was too intrusive and a danger to private initiative; liberals have been bemoaning a government that has not done enough to secure social justice. Yet the public has never had to make a hard choice because of economic growth. In the latter half of the 20th century, growth in real gross domestic product averaged 3.6 percent per year. This enabled us to have our cake and eat it, too: The government could grow every year, and

do more to ensure equity between citizens, without intruding on the private sector via higher tax rates. Everybody could win, in some sense.

Since 2000, growth has been roughly half that, clocking in at 1.8 percent per year, which is about where most experts believe 2012 will end up. This stagnation has put unprecedented pressure on Washington. The "have your cake and eat it, too" combination of big spending and low taxes has generated an annual budget deficit that now tops 10 percent of gross domestic product, unprecedented in peacetime and unsustainable over the long haul.

This is a reality that appears not to have sunk in on the public. Polling data indicate that the people simply do not understand the parlous state of public finances—hence the refusal to brook tax hikes to deal with the deficit, or spending cuts in entitlements, the biggest drivers of the nation's overdrawn account. Little wonder that, after two years of gridlock between two sides that cannot find common ground, the public obstinately refused to break the tie in 2012.

So long as the public continues to send mixed signals, and indeed appears not to fathom the depth of the problem, the two sides will not come to some kind of long-term agreement. Why should they? Better to kick the can down the road until the next election, in the hope that your side can gain an edge.

That points to a grim near-term future for American politics and policy. The fiscal cliff will not be the last showdown between conservatives and liberals on taxes and spending. Given that both factions occupy critical strongholds in the government—the GOP controls the House and a Democrat holds the veto pen—we should expect more of the same: gridlock, recriminations, and periodic crises that necessitate last-minute "grand bargains" that, on closer inspection, are not so grand. This state of affairs will continue until the American people finally decide which side's approach they favor in dealing with the deficit. ♦

Mittal Europa

France's Socialists are more bark than bite.

BY CHRISTOPHER CALDWELL

Ever since France's Socialist president François Hollande arrived on the world stage, he has faced questions from his party rank-and-file. Is he radical enough to stand up for the left, as his rhetoric would indicate? Or willing to cut compromises with capitalists, as his career would indicate? He and his cabinet often claim to be acting in the spirit of Barack Obama. Much as the president has tried to make oil companies surrender leases they aren't exploiting, Hollande campaigned on forcing companies that want to close down a production site to seek a buyer for it. Hollande's recovery minister, Arnaud Montebourg, gave an interview to CNBC recently in which he defended the idea of nationalizing industries. "Barack Obama's nationalized," he said. "The Germans are nationalizing. All countries are nationalizing." Over the past two weeks, Hollande has had an opportunity to put his money where his mouth is. The result has been a debacle for his government.

In September, Arcelor Mittal, the multinational steel giant, announced it would close two blast furnaces at its Florange facility in Lorraine, putting 629 jobs at risk. France had been through this routine before. In 2008, when Arcelor sought to close a plant in nearby Gandranges, Nicolas Sarkozy extracted a promise from the company to invest $400 million in new facilities, provided conditions in the steel market were favorable. Turns out they weren't. Sarkozy wound up looking like a sap and giving the Socialists a campaign issue. So this time, when Arcelor announced the Florange closure, Montebourg laid into its leaders, accusing them of "lying" and "blackmail," and threatening to nationalize the facility. Lakshmi Mittal, the company's CEO, flew to France and the stage seemed set for a showdown. On November 30, Hollande's prime minister, Jean-Marc Ayrault, announced that Mittal had "accepted the conditions I have laid out." There would be no layoffs, and plenty of new investment.

Great, said representatives of the CFDT trade union. *Let's see the agreement.* That is when things began unraveling.

Apparently, when the state acts like a businessman, as it does in France, it expects the same kind of confidentiality private businessmen do. Ayrault would not release the details, which were said to be in a two-page "secret accord." Even Montebourg was reportedly not allowed to see them. Then investigative reporters at *Le Canard Enchaîné* obtained a copy and published it. The left was shocked. Hollande got even less than Sarkozy did. Arcelor promised about $225 million in spending, but all but $70 million of this was money that would have been spent anyway. Basically, layoffs would be replaced by buyouts. There were agreements on yet more closures, which were supposed to be temporary. And, crushingly, there was the mutual acknowledgment that Ulcos was not ready.

Ulcos stands for Ultra-Low-CO_2 Steelmaking. An EU green-energy, anti-global warming project launched in 2004, it is the *deus ex machina* through which the Socialist party had promised Tomorrow's Green Energy Jobs. Every country has something like it. It will save hundreds of millions in carbon credits—as soon as European governments can find a way to make companies pay more than 7 euros a ton for them. France alone has poured about $200 million into Ulcos, and the cost of the project will rise to $800

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THE COMPROMISE

million. Other governments pay for much of the rest. But the hope is that 48 steel-making companies will pitch in, so Arcelor has already picked up a good deal of the cost. In asking for help on jobs, France was passing the church collection basket a second time.

The credulity that France's working class brought to the promises of Ulcos was touching. As recently as last week, a CFDT spokesman told the French press: "We demand that the blast furnaces be kept on until the Ulcos project materializes." The European Commission in Brussels was due to decide on December 20 whether to give grants of up to $300 million to an Ulcos program at Arcelor's Florange plant. But not only has the project not materialized; the technology hasn't either. On Thursday, Brussels announced that Arcelor had withdrawn its bid.

The left of the Socialist party and the trade union movement has flown into a rage. CFDT head Édouard Martin told reporters, "We have two enemies now, Mittal and the government." (It has been years since American unionists have been so forthright in describing the companies that sign their paychecks as enemies.) Jean-Luc Mélenchon, who defected from the Socialists in 2008 to form his own Party of the Left, describes it as a "fresh betrayal." Many in the French public see his point. One poll by OpinionWay found 59 percent would either favor or tolerate a nationalization of Florange.

All governments are uneasy coalitions between hacks and true believers. Generally you woo true believers with rhetoric and hacks with legislation. Hollande's attempt to do that has failed. The true believers have won the public's ear, and the hacks are scrambling to explain. Bruno Le Roux, leader of the Socialist deputies in the National Assembly, complained that Montebourg's tactics had been too extreme. "What looked to us like a means of pressure was carried out as the only solution," he told the press.

But it is Montebourg who has logic on his side here—if you throw around the claims Hollande has been throwing around, nationalization *is* the unique solution. France went into the era of deregulation with unreasonable expectations. A nationalized industry can serve as a jobs program, in a way that private industry cannot. That is why nationalizations were popular in the 20th century in the first place. "Public-private partnerships" can sometimes allow the state to act as a free-rider on private enterprise. But a free-rider does not get to steer.

When Arcelor Mittal reminded France of that last week, Hollande did not share the truth with his public. How could he? France resorted to the nuclear option—threatening nationalization—and got nothing out of it, not even, ultimately, the 600 jobs it set out to try to save. And in the process it has acquired a reputation as a place where no corporation can be assured its private-property interests will be respected in the slightest.

It would seem that corporations need not be so fearful. Hollande has proposed a 75 percent tax on high earners. He has said in speeches that he does not like the rich. Well, maybe he doesn't like them, but he fears them. And as far as the rich are concerned, that will do just as well. ♦

The War on (Married) Women

It's embedded in the tax code.

BY ASHLEY E. MCGUIRE

One minute, dear—Mommy's busy being overtaxed.

As our lawmakers—newly reminded of the power of female voters—huddle to strategize about the "fiscal cliff," they have an opportunity to address a real threat to female prosperity: a tax code that is disproportionately burdensome to married women, especially working moms.

Although some states have adjusted their tax rates to correct for this, and Congress has adjusted the penalty for certain tax levels, it is still true that when couples come together "for richer, for poorer," the IRS has no problem making working women poorer.

Here's how the marriage penalty works: Mr. and Mrs. report a combined income to the IRS. This pushes them into a higher tax bracket than they, or at least one of them, were in when they were single, so their taxes rise. They are taxed on their joint income even when electing to report as "married filing separately."

Women are the ones who typically take the larger financial hit, since most married women are second earners—by choice, it should be noted. The Pew Research Center reports that nearly two-thirds of married women with children 17 and younger would prefer to work part-time, a luxury enjoyed by only 26 percent of working mothers. Still, whether wives are second earners by choice or not, why should the tax code penalize their contributions and disincentivize the use of their talents?

As columnist Kimberley Strassel summed up the problem, "A married woman who does the same job as a single man keeps fewer of her dollars." A wife working part-time can actually cause her household a net loss if her paycheck bumps the couple into the next tax bracket and the family incurs childcare expenses. That puts working mothers in an absurd position. For all the glass ceilings women have broken, working wives are standing on a trap-door tax floor.

What's more, should a wife seek out the working mom's dream of flexibility, say by shifting from a staff job to a freelance role, the prize comes with a hefty price tag. A woman who structures her working life to maximize flexibility will pay tax rates as high as 60 percent in some states.

The government penalizes most harshly the professional situation that is most desirable for many women: self-employment. A self-employed woman will always pay taxes at a higher rate than that of her salaried husband earning the same amount. The "self-employment tax" hits the independently motivated worker (regardless of sex) with both the employer and employee contributions to Social Security and Medicare. There is no reason to exempt self-employed women from paying into Social Security and Medicare like everyone else. But the fact remains that a woman making a living as an independent contractor sees less of her income than a woman with a boss.

And then there is childcare. If a couple decides to hire someone to care for their children at home, their options are: take another financial hit and hire an accountant, or buckle in and get cracking on the I-9 Employment Eligibility Verification form, the W-4 Withholding Allowance Certificate, the SS-4 Application for Employer Identification Number, IRS Publication 926 Household Employer's Tax Guide, Form 1040ES, Estimated Tax Payment Coupons, Schedule H Household Employment Taxes, Form W-2 and W-3 reporting forms, and a similar series of state forms. The forms come with different due dates and different penalties for missing the due dates—it can be dizzying just trying to file the proper paperwork by the right date. Employing a nanny is akin to taking on an extra part-time job, the burden of which tends to fall on the mother.

NEWSCOM

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In today's competitive childcare market, most nannies require that their income cover their portion of Social Security, Medicare, the federal unemployment tax, and state unemployment and disability insurance. In many urban areas, the starting rate for decent childcare is $20 an hour if you don't choose day care (or you did not think to put your child on the waiting list for the local center on your way home from your first sonogram). And while the federal government still allows a childcare deduction of up to $1,050 for one child, a woman working even part-time can burn right through that in a matter of weeks. Many working mothers choose to take the financial hit, accepting that to keep their hand in professionally means spending more on good childcare than they will take home. Again, this puts the working mother in the position of working even though it makes zero financial sense.

Republicans just lost an election partly because they failed to counter the Democrats' preposterous claim of a Republican "war on women." Democrats hung social issues like "reproductive rights" around Republicans' necks. These tactics helped win them single women.

Republicans should seize on the debate about tax reform to pivot and reframe. They should point out that the Democrats' love of taxes and bureaucracy is a war on married women with children. Our tax code burdens these mothers' efforts to participate in the job market on the terms many find most desirable: with flexibility, while keeping their children at home. It rewards parents' efforts to hire childcare legally by drawing them into a paperwork nightmare.

Let's not forget that Romney won married women by a 7-point margin—or that most single women don't stay that way. Most will eventually take their turn staring at a stack of nanny tax forms or watching their paycheck suddenly shrink for the sole reason that a husband entered their lives. This is a real affront to women—and a political opportunity for Republicans should they have the good sense to address it. ♦

Leading from the Rehab Center

Mark Kirk didn't let a stroke slow his campaign for Iran sanctions. BY ALANA GOODMAN

Mark Kirk enjoying his primary victory in 2010

Since suffering a near-fatal stroke last January, two tasks have obsessed Senator Mark Kirk from his encampment at a Chicago rehabilitation center: relearning how to walk, and expanding the economic war the Illinois Republican has been leading against the Islamic Republic of Iran for the past decade.

Kirk is best known as the co-architect with Sen. Robert Menendez (D-NJ) of the toughest banking sanctions in history. But his work on Iran sanctions goes back years. In the '90s, Kirk served as counsel to House International Relations Committee chairman Ben Gilman, who spearheaded the congressional crackdown on Iranian and Libyan finances. Kirk went on to win a congressional seat in 2000, where he targeted Iran's oil market and cofounded the House Iran Working Group.

Upon joining the Senate two years ago, Kirk helped craft the "Kirk-Menendez sanctions," an amendment to the 2012 defense authorization bill that barred U.S. and international financial institutions from working with Iran's central bank.

"The notion is that if you can cause economic collapse, or at least bring the regime to the brink of economic collapse, then you can potentially break the nuclear will of the supreme leader, Ali Khamenei," says Mark Dubowitz, executive director of the Foundation for Defense of Democracies and an expert on sanctions.

The amendment passed Congress in late December 2011. Weeks later, Kirk woke up with a relentless headache. While driving to a Polish

NEWSCOM

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community event in Chicago, Kirk lost feeling in his hands, and his eyesight blurred. He asked his staff driver to drop him off at the hospital. The walk from the car to the emergency room was the last time anyone from Kirk's office saw him walk unaided.

Kirk was having an ischemic stroke on the right side of his brain; the attacks came in waves, and his condition deteriorated in the hours that followed. The internal swelling was severe enough to warrant three surgeries: one to remove a portion of his skull, another to excise dead brain tissue, and a third to replace the bone after the swelling subsided.

Since then, Kirk has been secluded at a rehab center in Chicago and his home in Illinois, working to regain mobility on the left side of his body. Unbeknownst to many outside Capitol Hill, Kirk has also been working behind the scenes to tighten the screws on Iran—pushing for expanded sanctions, conferring with top-level Israeli officials, and sparring with Senate Democrats, in between a grueling routine of rehabilitation exercises.

An aide who was with Kirk when he woke up from surgery says the senator began talking about beefing up sanctions almost immediately. His staff resumed his regular briefings, and his calls to colleagues often drifted to Iran.

"Mark and I, and our staffs, have had multiple and ongoing conversations during his recovery and his input was critical in this effort," says Senate minority leader Mitch McConnell of Kentucky.

Dubowitz, who worked closely with Kirk's office before and after the stroke, says the senator has "probably done more from his hospital bed than most senators have done from their offices on this issue."

"We've certainly seen a lot of very thoughtful, detailed proposals that have come out of his office since the stroke," Dubowitz adds. "A number of which were adopted in the last round of legislation."

Kirk has also been in touch with the Israeli embassy and Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu. In March, Kirk watched Netanyahu's annual address to the American Israeli Public Affairs Committee from the inpatient room at his rehab center. "I want to say a special message to a great friend of Israel who's not here tonight, Senator Mark Kirk," said Netanyahu. "Senator Kirk, I know you're watching this tonight. Please get well soon. America needs you. Israel needs you." The audience erupted in applause.

Not long after, Kirk called his Washington staff and asked them to offer an amendment on his behalf expanding banking sanctions and targeting Iran's energy and insurance sectors. The proposals were met with strong private resistance from the White House and Senate Democratic leadership, which first tried to block them and then added language watering them down.

Of course, neither the White House nor Democratic leadership wanted to publicly stand in the way of sanctions, and Republicans managed to add binding provisions in conference. It wasn't everything Kirk had hoped for, but it was close. In August, President Obama signed the bill into law.

Meanwhile, Kirk was dealing with other obstacles in Chicago. He was slowly relearning to walk, practicing on a treadmill and stairs. A video released by his office four months after the stroke showed Kirk struggling down a hallway with a quad cane and oxygen mask, flanked by several medical aides. Two months later, the cane and mask were gone. By the end of the summer, Kirk was able to return home and start outpatient treatment.

The language-dominant side of the brain (the left side for most people) controls communication. Kirk's stroke was on the right side, which handles executive functioning, including memory and focus. Still, his staff maintains that he's as sharp as before, when he developed a reputation for being able to rattle off precise details, like the names of Turkish banks enabling illicit trade for Iran. In Illinois, he keeps up with Washington developments through multiple daily conversations with staff, TV news, and occasionally on his iPad.

There are lingering challenges. The videos released by Kirk's office show some paralysis on the left side of his face, which causes subtle speaking irregularities. He doesn't use his left arm in the footage, giving credence to reports that it may never regain full function. But those who have met with him in Chicago say his recovery has been impressive.

"Senator Kirk is a great friend, and I am really encouraged by his progress," says Scott Brown, the outgoing Massachusetts senator, who visited Kirk in rehab. "While he's working very hard to recover, he's still focused on policies to help his constituents and our country. He continues to be a leader on preventing Iran from getting a nuclear weapon."

Last week, Kirk's office announced that he will be back in Washington in January in time for the next session. That would mark a full year since his stroke, and nearly a year into maximum-force sanctions that have devastated the Iranian currency but haven't halted the regime's nuclear program.

In the months Kirk was away, Iran increased its supply of 20 percent-enriched uranium by one-third; it doubled the number of nuclear centrifuges at its underground Qom facility between May and August, according to a report by the International Atomic Energy Agency. Kirk, for his part, is working on new legislation expanding banking and energy sanctions, which he plans to introduce toward the end of the year.

"On the sanctions dial of zero-to-10 we're probably at a 7," Dubowitz said. "We need to get to a *Spinal Tap* 11."

And so Kirk keeps building the pressure on Tehran, focused and methodical, the same way he paces the treadmill and mounts the stairs—on November 3, he made his first public appearance at a Chicago fundraising event, climbing three dozen flights of stairs inside Willis Tower.

His recovery is far from over. But the world doesn't stop spinning, and neither do Iran's centrifuges. ♦

USS Enterprise

Hail and Farewell

The USS Enterprise, right, sets out on its 22nd and final deployment, 2012.

By Barrett Tillman

For the Big E, it was the beginning of the end. On March 11, 2012, USS *Enterprise* (CVN-65)—the world's first nuclear aircraft carrier and the oldest active combat ship in the U.S. Navy—left Norfolk on her final deployment. She was embarking upon the end of a 51-year career, a seagoing record unmatched by any warship in American history and seldom approached elsewhere.

The Big E's skipper is Captain William C. "Boomer" Hamilton Jr., a tall, well-spoken Alabaman who acquired his call sign after a "sonic event" when he flew F/A-18 Hornets. Hamilton assumed command in August 2011, shortly after the ship returned from an Arabian Sea deployment. That cruise was to have been the Big E's swan song prior to decommissioning.

But it wasn't. National defense requirements intervened, and Boomer Hamilton and company found themselves performing an encore in "the no-kidding last cruise."

Hamilton is the carrier's twenty-third captain. He speaks in a rich baritone that could get him a second career in broadcasting. A Top Gun graduate, landing signal officer, and test pilot, he deployed in four other carriers during his 30-year career.

Enterprise's executive officer is Captain Gregory C. Huffman, also a fighter pilot and test pilot. His nonflying duties included a stretch as a White House military aide from 2002 to 2005. As "exec" he spends much of his time dealing with personnel matters: the ship's company of 3,100 plus 1,300 in the air wing and another 200 for the embarked task group staff.

Commanding the seven squadrons of Carrier Air Wing One is Captain Robert "Clete" Boyer, an F/A-18 pilot as

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"CAG." (The World War II acronym for air group commander is still used, though the terminology has changed.) Air Wing One is composed of four strike-fighter squadrons plus early warning, electronic warfare, and helicopter units—in all, some 60 aircraft.

Official news releases stated that *Enterprise*'s last deployment was her twenty-second. A knowledgeable count, however, showed 24 cruises through 2011, excluding her two-month 1962 shakedown and at least three training periods of similar duration. It's not unusual for amateur historians to have more accurate information than the naval bureaucracy.

On this twenty-fifth deployment, Big E aviators flew over the Mediterranean, the Persian Gulf, and the North Arabian Sea. On one notable occasion in early May, Strike Fighter Squadron 211 held an airborne change of command overhead the carrier when Commander John Bixby relieved Commander James McCall. Said Bixby, "I'm an aviator, so anything we can do in a jet is better than something we can do on the ground."

Enterprise, like most carriers, gained weight over the years. Originally pegged at 89,000 tons maximum, she now displaces nearly 95,000. In that time, she has flown a remarkable variety of aircraft, from piston-driven Skyraiders and Tracers of 1950s vintage to the current generation of tactical jets: 20 types including helicopters. In contrast, her nearest competitor, USS *Nimitz* (CVN-68), has operated 14 types.

The Big E is a longtime warrior, having logged five Vietnam deployments between 1966 and 1973. Like her predecessor—the conventionally powered carrier USS *Enterprise* (CV-6), which recovered from multiple bomb strikes and kamikaze damage in World War II—"the 65 boat" has heart. On January 14, 1969, off Vietnam, a hot engine exhaust ignited a rocket pod on a parked fighter on *Enterprise*'s flight deck. Twenty-seven men were killed and 314 injured, with the loss of 15 aircraft. But *Enterprise* returned to sea in late April—a remarkable 51-day turnaround.

Vietnam produced the best-known veteran of the current *Enterprise*: former attack pilot Stephen Coonts, who became a hugely successful novelist. Today he notes, "I flew from her deck on her last two Vietnam cruises, 1971 to 1973. I made over 200 cat shots from her deck and over 200 arrested landings. Like many young men and women, I did a lot of growing up aboard *Enterprise*." (For readers unfamiliar with carriers, "cat" is short for catapult. A carrier deck is shorter than a normal runway, so planes taking off must be hurled into the air by hydraulic catapults, and planes landing must be "arrested" when their "tailhook" catches one of four cables stretched across the flight deck.)

Whereas the original Big E fought only Imperial Japan, Boomer Hamilton's ship has fought multiple enemies. In addition to Vietnam, she has launched combat missions in Middle East waters since 1988. During Operation Praying Mantis, *Enterprise* aircraft contributed to sinking two Iranian vessels in retaliation for attacks on international shipping in the Persian Gulf. In the '90s she participated in Operation Southern Watch, enforcing the no-fly zone over Iraq. Subsequently her air wing responded to 9/11 with strikes into Afghanistan and launched aircraft in the second Iraq war beginning in 2003.

For officers, *Enterprise* has long been a stepping stone to flag rank. At least 17 of the first 20 captains were promoted to admiral, with the first 4 making three- and four-star rank. The third skipper, James L. Holloway III, became chief of naval operations under Richard Nixon.

In 1983 Captain Robert J. "Barney" Kelly ran the ship aground in San Francisco harbor but surprised some naval pundits by growing four stripes into four stars. Insiders said that an Annapolis ring and nuclear power school made the difference, as captains of fuel-oil powered ships who made similar errors were fired.

A scandal emerged in 2011 when Captain Owen Honors was censured for a video produced on his watch as executive officer four years before. The content was condemned as gay bashing, and Honors—then intended to be the ship's last skipper—was relieved of command. Though reprimanded with others involved with the film, Captain Honors remained on active duty.

Enterprise is not only the oldest carrier afloat—she's also one of a kind. Originally she was to have had five sisters, but the cost was prohibitive, and the next nuclear carrier, lead ship of the Nimitz class, did not arrive until 1975. Consequently, after her half-century in service, spare parts are not available from the naval yellow pages. Hamilton explains, "We have a tremendous machine shop, and our guys can manufacture almost anything we need. If something breaks, they can make it. It's expensive, but it keeps us going."

Enterprise has outlived her next two successors: *America* (CV-66, from 1965 to 1996) and the original *John F. Kennedy* (CV-67, from 1968 to 2007). Both were oil-fired ships, the last non-nuclear-powered carriers in the fleet.

The cost of building and operating a nuclear carrier is enormous. *Enterprise*'s original price tag was $451.3 million. *Eisenhower* (CV-69, commissioned in 1977) was reckoned at $4.5 billion in 2007 dollars; *George H.W. Bush* (CVN-77), the last Nimitz-class ship, is pegged at $6.2 billion, but the new *Gerald Ford* (CVN-78) is listed at $13.5 billion—a figure that may grow before commissioning in 2015, with the follow-on "JFK II" somewhat less.

Taxpayers are entitled to ask what they get for their

money. A nuclear carrier can run two-and-a-half times the acquisition and operating cost of an oil-fired carrier over a similar career. Today's new flattops probably cost around $12 billion to build and operate over their expected service life. Carrier captains and aviators note several operating advantages, including plenty of fresh water, ample steam for catapults and other systems, and less corrosion from the putrid effects of stack gas. In addition, since they don't carry fuel oil, there's extra space inside the hull—any ship's inevitable concern—for ordnance, berthing, and other uses.

The downside to a nuke also is multifaceted. Refueling a nuclear carrier is a lengthy process, requiring careful handling of hazardous materials, and is usually done once in the vessel's life. Engineers actually cut through the flight deck, hangar deck, and other spaces to gain access to the reactors. Because of the time involved, major maintenance and upgrades are undertaken at the same time, extending the process and making each ship unavailable for years. *Enterprise*'s last refueling, in conjunction with a major overhaul, took four years, 1990 to 1994. *Nimitz*'s refueling took three years, from 1998 to 2001.

Before embarking on her last cruise, *Enterprise* was inspected by Admiral John C. Harvey of U.S. Fleet Forces Command. He lauded the Big E and her escorts, saying, "I haven't sent a strike group underway that is as ready as you are. No one has done as much to get ready, worked as hard, and accomplished as much in every warfare area. You should be very proud of what you're going to be doing once you get to where you're going . . . where the business of the nation needs you."

Harvey brought to his statement the perspective of a history buff. He well knows the critical role that carriers have played in the nation's business for more than 70 years.

Naval commentators have long insisted that in time of crisis, presidents ask, "Where are the carriers?" Aircraft carriers have been America's geostrategic trump card for seven decades. But in the original crisis, Washington mavens wanted to know, "Where are *their* carriers?"

On December 7, 1941, the Imperial Japanese Navy not only launched the attack that precipitated American entry into World War II, it also propelled the flattop to world-historical importance. Six Japanese aircraft carriers and their escorts secretly crossed the Pacific and, operating as an integrated unit, struck Hawaii. At the time, neither the American nor the British Navy, each with global commitments, could have concentrated so many flattops on a single mission. Naval historian John B. Lundstrom has aptly described Japan's Pearl Harbor striking force as "a 1941 atomic bomb."

With its battleships destroyed or benched, and with marginal submarine torpedoes, Admiral Chester Nimitz's Pacific Fleet had one option for taking the war to Japan. Nimitz began with three carriers, reinforced over the next several months with others from the Atlantic. His champion flattop was the USS *Enterprise* (CV-6), commissioned in 1938, the seventh American naval vessel to bear the name and immediate predecessor of the one now retiring. She became the single most essential platform of the Pacific War.

This Big E escorted her sister, *Hornet* (CV-8), in launching the Doolittle Raid against Japan in April 1942, then played an essential role in the strategic victory at Midway in June. That battle cost her older sister *Yorktown* (CV-5), but Japan never recovered from the loss of four of its own carriers. Consequently, two months later America launched its first offensive of World War II at Guadalcanal in the Solomon Islands. There *Enterprise* fought two more carrier duels, keeping Japanese forces in the area to a manageable level. At the height of the campaign in mid-November, the Big E was America's only remaining fleet carrier in the Pacific. *Saratoga* (CV-3) was sidelined with battle damage, while the other four Pacific Fleet carriers had been sunk between May and October.

In the Atlantic, where Winston Churchill confided that the German submarine threat to Britain's lifelines was his greatest concern of World War II, carriers performed an essential function in suppressing the U-boats. The Royal Navy, which had invented the aircraft carrier in the Great War, now converted merchant ships into small flattops to provide air cover for convoys at sea beyond range of land-based planes. The United States followed, and by the spring of 1943 Allied escort carriers (CVEs) had closed the dreadful Mid-Atlantic Gap, where wolf packs had voraciously fed on fat merchantmen. Thirteen months before D-Day, the U-boat master, Admiral Karl Dönitz, admitted the obvious: Carrier aircraft working with destroyers had made life short or tenuous for German submarines.

At war's end the U.S. Navy possessed 99 carriers of all types, mostly CVEs. *Enterprise* had just completed extensive repairs of kamikaze damage sustained three months before, but soon was retired as the Navy acquired bigger, newer ships. She had earned a record 20 battle stars, becoming the most decorated man-o-war in American history. But she was sold for scrap by an uncaring naval bureaucracy, and by 1960 she was gone. Much of her steel went to Japan.

Little appreciated today is the critical contribution of tailhook aviation to saving Korea in the summer of 1950. When the Communist steamroller left Pyongyang Station for Seoul and points south in late June, USS *Valley Forge* (CV-45) and a British carrier responded.

In contrast, nearly every allied airfield on the peninsula was overrun or rendered untenable, forcing Air Force squadrons back to Japan in August. They had to overfly the Yellow Sea en route to operating areas around the shrinking Pusan Pocket.

Three U.S. flattops provided on-call tactical airpower that was essential in offsetting the North Koreans' large manpower advantage. Then in September, carrier aviators supported the Inchon landings, which reversed the course of the war. In all, 11 fleet carriers and 6 light or escort carriers logged 38 deployments during the "police action." Carriers were so heavily engaged in Korea that flattop aircrew and sailors accounted for one-third of U.S. Navy deaths.

All the while, progress was leaping ahead by orders of magnitude. In 1961 the current "Enterprise VIII" hoisted her commissioning pennant to become the world's first nuclear-powered carrier. Her captain was Vincent de Poix, who had flown from CV-6 in 1942. He had five of his old ship's portholes installed in his new command.

Barely 10 years after the Korean armistice in 1953, carrier aviation launched into a decade long effort in Southeast Asia. Eventually 17 attack carriers made more than 70 deployments from 1964 through 1972, and 4 antisubmarine carriers participated as well. At the end of those nine years, ships and men were worn out. *Oriskany* (CV-34) averaged nearly one combat cruise a year, and *Hancock* (CV-19), *Ranger* (CV-61), and *Kitty Hawk* (CV-63) were close behind. From the initial reconnaissance missions over Laos to the first strikes against North Vietnam to the mining of Haiphong Harbor, carriers were instrumental in executing American strategy, however erratic and flawed it may have been. More than 450 carrier fliers and crew perished among 2,562 Navy deaths: nearly one in five.

Foremost among the advantages of carriers is "territorial independence." As admirals are fond of noting, a carrier's flight deck represents four and a half acres of sovereign American soil. Perhaps the best example was Operation El Dorado Canyon, the retaliatory strike against Libya for a terrorist bombing in Berlin in 1986. Air Force briefers displayed a map showing the route flown by F-111 fighter-bombers from Britain, around the periphery of Western Europe, to avoid overflying wavering allies. Meanwhile, the air wings of *Coral Sea* (CV-43), *Saratoga* (CV-60), and *America* (CV-66), operating in the Mediterranean, contributed more than half the total sorties, with salubrious results on Muammar Qaddafi's behavior.

Despite the expense and time required for refueling nuclear carriers, the Navy is usually able to meet deployment commitments. "Surge" operations have brought the concentration of unusually large numbers of flattops. The best example was Desert Shield/Desert Storm in 1990-91, when six carriers were concentrated against Saddam Hussein's Iraq, providing timely airpower. Air Force partisans griped that early CNN reports from USS *Independence* (CV-62) in Operation Desert Shield represented "Carrier News Network." The flattops directly engaged were *Midway* (CV-41), *Ranger* (CV-61), *America* (CV-67), *Eisenhower* (CVN-69), and *Theodore Roosevelt* (CV-71) in the Persian Gulf and Red Sea. The carriers represented a force multiplier when there was no more ramp space to be had on the Arabian Peninsula.

In recent decades the Navy has maintained 11 big-deck carriers, excluding ships operating Harrier jump jets and helicopters. Since one nuclear carrier is always refueling, 10 are available for deployments. *Enterprise*'s replacement, USS *Gerald R. Ford* (CVN-78), is expected to commission in 2015, leaving a shortfall during the interim.

Partisans on both sides of the aisle argue either that America no longer needs 10 deployable flight decks—or that it needs more. The latter is an extremely hard sell, and not only because of cost. There has not been a war at sea in seven decades, and none appears to be on the horizon. Carriers have supported the war against terrorism since 2001, and they also contribute to disaster relief—what sailors call "pizza delivery." However, the Navy is being redirected more toward Asia and the Western Pacific, where at present the U.S. Navy outweighs the Russian and Chinese fleets combined. When it comes to carriers in particular, the Russians have just one, the conventionally fueled *Admiral Kuznetsov*; commissioned in 1991, she has spent her career in port or serving in the Northern (Atlantic) Fleet and Black Sea Fleet. China's lone carrier, *Liaoning*, is a Russian-built Kuznetsov-class ship currently used for training.

Whatever happens in the Western Pacific or elsewhere, *Enterprise* will not be there. She returned from her extended final cruise on November 4, 90 days later than expected. Growing tensions with Iran required her presence until another carrier arrived. Said Boomer Hamilton, "We are pleased to be returning to our families after a very successful deployment, but to know that it is the last time *Enterprise* will be underway through her own power makes our return very sentimental."

The ship's inactivation took place December 1 at Norfolk. Because her eight reactors need to be removed for disposal, the actual decommissioning and dismantling process will require years and will happen without an audience.

Nevertheless, the Big E's reputation is assured. Heir to the fightingest reputation in the U.S. Navy, owner of records that will forever belong to her alone, she exits her service as a unique player on the global stage of the world's great oceans and the air above them. ♦

Democracy, Gangnam-Style

South Koreans pick a president

By Ethan Epstein

Buyeo, South Korea

On a blustery afternoon in late November, all of the tensions enfolded in Park Geun-hye's bid for the South Korean presidency were on display in this mid-size city three hours south of Seoul. Madame Park, as the *Saenuri* (New Frontier) party standard-bearer is known, had come here to walk through an outdoor market, shaking hands, hugging babies, and smiling for photographs, just like an American candidate at the Iowa State Fair—though with kimchi instead of corn dogs on offer.

Moon Jae-in, left, and Park Geun-hye on the campaign trail

Just as the conservative Madame Park was to begin her walk, a local *Saenuri* party representative got up on a platform with a megaphone and began leading the crowd in a chant. He would shout, "Park Geun-hye!" and the crowd would respond, "For President!" But after a few iterations of this routine, the party flack switched things up and began chanting "Park Chung-hee!"—the name of South Korea's military dictator from 1961 to 1979, who just happens to be Park Geun-hye's father. The mostly older crowd loved it. When Madame Park completed her walk-through and stood up on the platform to make a few remarks, she didn't allude to the fact that the crowd had just been lustily cheering the name of a former autocrat.

But that's the strange position in which Park Geun-hye finds herself in this election: She's running for president in a free and open election in East Asia's most dynamic democracy, yet is benefiting from residual attachment to a dictatorship. That's hardly the only tension animating Park's candidacy. She's also a female candidate in a patriarchal, Confucian society. She's running, in large part, to dismantle—or at least temper—the economic system that her father's regime built. And she's steadfastly and courageously opposed to the *North* Korean dictatorship.

As befits a society as family-oriented as Korea, if Park Geun-hye is elected South Korea's first female president on December 19, it will have a lot to do with her lineage. Her father, who seized power in a 1961 coup and held it until his assassination by his own spy chief in 1979, is widely seen as the father of modern Korea.

And indeed, it's difficult to overstate Park Chung-hee's influence here. Hard as it may be for contemporary visitors to Korea to contemplate—this is a country with blazing-fast Internet, sparkling cities, a designer clothing habit rivaling Milan's, and heated seats in the Seoul subway—at the dawn of Park's reign, South Korea was an extremely poor country. In 1961, the nation's per capita GDP was $92, according to the World Bank. (The same year, the United States' was $2,935.) South Korea was poorer than Guatemala, Zambia, Iraq, the Dominican Republic, Liberia, and . . . North Korea. The country was in terrible shape after 35 years of brutal Japanese occupation from 1910 to 1945 and the ravages of the Korean War.

Park rapidly modernized the country. Through both state-run companies and close cooperation with the so-called *chaebol* (the massive Korean conglomerates, like Hyundai and Samsung, that command an amazing

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percentage of Korea's GDP), Park's government transformed a mostly agrarian country into the export powerhouse that it remains today. His government built up the country's infrastructure, creating the first highway from Seoul to South Korea's second city, Busan, along with scores of other bridges, dams, and powerplants. The first lines of Seoul's sprawling subway system were also constructed under his reign. Park's policies paid dividends. By the time of his assassination, South Korean per capita GDP was nearly $2,000, and the country was growing 9 to 10 percent each year. So it's little wonder that, to many Koreans, Park's regime represents something of a golden age.

But Park Chung-hee's golden age had a decidedly tarnished hue. Park suspended the country's democratic constitution and muzzled the media, and his security agency ordered the torture—and sometimes the murder—of dissidents. Even so, polls today regularly find that Koreans rank Park as not only the country's greatest president (which wouldn't be *that* impressive, given that the Republic of Korea is still less than 70 years old) but also its most admired leader of all time, outranking even King Sejong, who oversaw the creation of the Korean alphabet.

A young Park with her father, Park Chung-hee

'A Well-Prepared Woman For President," read the banners at Madame Park's campaign events. There's no doubt about the veracity of the "well-prepared" part. The 60-year-old Park's whole life has been defined by her proximity to power. The oldest of three children, she was 9 when her father took control of the presidency, and following her mother's assassination in 1974, she served as South Korea's official "first lady," accompanying Park Chung-hee to all national functions. Her own career began in earnest in 1974, when she was appointed the honorary president of Girl Scouts Korea. From there, she pursued a number of philanthropic endeavors, leading hospitals, senior citizens' associations, and cultural foundations.

South Korea transitioned to democracy in the late 1980s, but Madame Park didn't enter the political arena until about a decade later. According to her campaign biography, the 1997 financial crisis "proved to be a turning point in Park's career. Fueled by a desire to support the country towards stabilization, Park decided to enter politics for the first time . . . she ran for office . . . and was elected to the National Assembly." She served in the assembly from 1998 until this year, leading the country's conservative party, then the GNP, now named the *Saenuri*, for a time.

But the "woman" part of Park's slogan has caused some trouble. South Korea is still a relatively patriarchal society; to give one example, only about half of Korean women are in the workforce (compared with about 65 percent in the United States and nearly three-quarters in Denmark). Park has never married and is childless—another fact that has tongues wagging from Seoul to Busan. A professor at one of Korea's leading universities even said in a televised interview, "Women, in social terms, indicate those who get married, give birth, and raise children, in short, living their lives as women. Park may have the genitals of a woman but has never performed her role as a woman." Park's line in response to this vicious attack is that she's "married to the country."

Park's main opponent in the presidential contest is a man named Moon Jae-in. (Several fringe candidates are also on the ballot.) If Park is South Korea's conservative standard-bearer par excellence, Moon is a doctrinaire liberal, with deep roots in the South Korean left. As a student, he was expelled from university for protesting Park Chung-hee's regime; he went on to work as a human rights lawyer, one steadfastly opposed to the dictatorship. Later in life, he became a founding editor of South Korea's leading left-wing newspaper, a sort of Seoul-based *Le Monde* or *Guardian*.

In the current campaign, Moon has gone out of his way to remind Koreans of his association with Roh Moo-hyun, the country's left-wing president from 2003 to 2008. (Moon, a friend and law partner of Roh's long before his presidency, served as his chief of staff.) That's a pretty brash move, given that Roh's presidency—which included a bribery investigation and Roh's impeachment—is now widely viewed as a disaster. (One middle-aged man I spoke to in Seoul, no doctrinaire conservative he, labeled Roh "Korea's worst president ever.") In a way, the identity of each candidate is clarifying. Through their biographies alone, they each represent the very apotheosis of their side; it's as if William F. Buckley were running against William Ayers.

Park's campaign says that the two top issues on the public's mind in the election are—surprise, surprise—the economy and foreign policy. In some ways, South Korea's

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economic problems are familiar to any resident of Europe, the United States, or Japan: The country suffers from high household and government debt, an aging population (see Jonathan V. Last's "Where Have All The Children Gone?" from The Weekly Standard's November 12 issue), yawning federal deficits, wage stagnation, painfully slow economic growth, and near-record levels of income inequality.

But the South Korean economy has some unique characteristics. Most important is the *chaebol*, a network of family-controlled conglomerates (again, think Samsung), which utterly dominate the economy here. According to Bloomberg, "The country's 10 biggest conglomerates make up more than half the total value of the 1,779 companies on the Korea Stock Exchange. And they continue to grow. In the past four years, the number of companies linked to the top 35 business groups has almost doubled, to nearly 600. . . . Exports by the 30 largest *chaebol* accounted for 84 percent of South Korea's overseas shipments in 2010." More ominously, "those 30 employed just 6 percent of the nation's workforce."

This economic system is mostly a vestige of Park Chung-hee's rule. But now Park Geun-hye wants to limit the power of the *chaebol* by, among other policies, increasing punishments for embezzlement and other financial shenanigans. She also wants to provide more aid to small and medium-sized enterprises, a historically underdeveloped sector of the Korean economy. Park calls this "economic democratization." She also wants to attack the deficit, which stands at about 2 percent of GDP. She's a bit vaguer on this subject, though. Park compares herself to a Korean mother; in Korean households, it's often the women who are in charge of balancing the household checkbook.

Moon's approach is decidedly more government-centric. He promises a draconian crackdown on the *chaebol*, proposing to eliminate the so-called cross-shareholding system, which allows a conglomerate to maintain control over its circle of subsidiaries with a relatively small number of shares. (This complex system is a boon to the *chaebol*.) He speaks about retaining only "the good parts" of the market economy. And Moon wants to go on a hiring binge, adding some 400,000 bureaucrats to the public-sector payroll.

As of 2010, the last year for which data were available, South Korea was ranked 28th out of 29 OECD countries in welfare expenditures. The government spends less than 11 percent of GDP on welfare programs, compared with 32 percent in France and Sweden. (The OECD average is closer to 20 percent.) Both candidates want to increase

welfare spending, but with a huge difference in degree. Park, for example, wants to expand government spending on health care, targeting coverage of specific illnesses, like cancer. Moon, meanwhile, wants to increase health care spending by triple the amount that Park proposes. Park makes the point that while Moon offers only redistribution, her platform is designed for both increased redistribution *and* increased growth.

It's unsurprising, given the presence of a nuclear-armed, Stalinist state just 40 miles north of the nation's capital, that foreign policy is also playing an important role in the election. Park stresses the importance of maintaining the close military alliance with the United States that sees 28,500 American troops stationed here. Given Korea's location, relations with Beijing will be pivotal. Intriguingly, a party spokeswoman suggests that Park could have better relations with the Chinese government than would Moon, because the Chinese authorities have, in many important ways, self-consciously emulated her father's policies of the 1960s and '70s.

It's always a good sign when a candidate is criticized in North Korean propaganda. And, indeed, the North Korean media have claimed that Seoul will suffer "unbearable misfortune" should Park be elected. She's earned the opprobrium. Madame Park rightly points out that simply sending unconditional aid to Pyongyang represents nothing but a "fake peace." She also doesn't shy away from pressing the moral case for democracy in North Korea. Given her lineage, that requires something of a straddle. But she's attempting to square this circle. In a September press conference, Park apologized for human rights abuses that occurred under her father's regime. "Behind our history of miraculous growth, there were the sacrifices of workers who suffered under harsh working environments, and behind our guarding of national security against North Korea there were violations of human rights by public authorities. I once again offer my sincere apologies to the people who suffered wounds and hardship as a result, and to their family members," she declared. It was a shrewd move; even in her apologetic statement, Park alluded to her father's record of "miraculous growth."

One of the central ironies of South Korean politics is that many of the politicians who most support "engagement" (read: unconditional aid) with the North Korean government are the same people who steadfastly opposed South Korea's dictatorship. The case of the late Kim Dae-jung is instructive here. Kim spent much of his career bravely making the moral case for democracy in South Korea, even while exiled in Japan, where the South Korean dictatorship attempted to assassinate him. But when he was elected president of South Korea in the late 1990s, Kim initiated the "Sunshine Policy," which saw the South Korean government shower the North Korean regime with aid, and all but ignore its woeful human rights record.

Moon Jae-in represents a continuation of this noxious trend. Not only does the former anti-dictatorship activist support opening talks with the North Korean regime without any preconditions, but he also backs restarting various exchanges and aid programs, which were suspended in the wake of North Korea's sinking of the South Korean ship *Cheonan* and the shelling of a South Korean island, both of which occurred in 2010. Even North Korea's planned missile launch has not deterred Moon's zeal for "engagement" with the evil regime in Pyongyang.

For most of the campaign, it looked like Park was going to coast to victory. Ahn Cheol-soo, an independent, liberal-leaning professor and former businessman was also in the race, drawing a large bloc of support from the young. Ahn, who is prone to spouting airy platitudes, was basically the TED Talk candidate, as befits a man most commonly referred to by the ominous moniker of "software guru." It looked like Ahn and Moon would split the liberal/left vote, allowing Park to waltz into office. But, for reasons that are still unclear, Ahn dropped out in late November, leaving a one-on-one race between Park and Moon. With a majority of Ahn supporters switching their support to Moon, Madame Park has a real dogfight on her hands. Recent polls show her support at 47 or 48 percent, while Moon draws 44 or 45 percent.

Walter Paik, a spokesman for Park's campaign, appears confident, averring that South Korea is a fundamentally conservative country. He points out that when leftist candidates are elected president, it's always by a tiny margin (Roh Moo-hyun was elected by only 49 percent to his opponent's 47 percent in 2002), whereas conservative presidents are often able to run up huge wins (the current president, Lee, won by more than 20 points). This will benefit Park's candidacy. She'll also be helped along by the country's overwhelmingly conservative media. Wired though Korea may be, some 60 percent of the public here still reads at least one print newspaper regularly, and with one prominent exception, those papers are conservative. Park should dominate among older men. To win, Moon, the leftist, will need to capture Obamaesque numbers among women and the young. Against a female opponent, he may have a hard time doing so.

And while Madame Park is not exactly a charismatic presence on the stump, she projects an air of being "cool, calm, and collected." In an aging country facing some serious problems, that should be enough. It might not be a walk in the park, but the dictator's daughter has a good chance of being South Korea's next democratically elected president. ♦

‘It Is Well That War Is So Terrible’

The battle of Fredericksburg, December 1862

By Geoffrey Norman

Fredericksburg, Va.

One hundred and fifty years later, when you tour the battlefield, you can take a short footpath to the top of a little knob where the Confederate commander watched as the battle played out in a kind of natural amphitheater, with the enemy’s regiments advancing on his lines, their flags flying, and the shells of his own artillery blowing holes in their ranks.

“It is well that war is so terrible,” Robert E. Lee said as he watched. “We should grow too fond of it.”

The governor of Pennsylvania, Andrew Curtin, also witnessed the battle and he reported to Abraham Lincoln what he had seen. The president, according to Curtin, was in anguish over the bloody defeat of his army. Curtin later recalled Lincoln piteously saying, “What has God put me in this place for?”

Union troops returning fire from unfinished pontoon bridges

It may have been the lowest point yet for Lincoln and for his country’s fortunes in a war that had become more terrible than anyone could have foreseen. Almost three months earlier, the Union Army had turned back Robert E. Lee’s invasion of the North at the battle of Antietam. Lee’s army held its ground in the bloodiest single day of the war, then slipped across the Potomac River, unopposed, back into Virginia, to Lincoln’s great disappointment. He urged his general, George McClellan, to pursue Lee and annihilate his army. McClellan, however, was sublimely content with what he considered a great victory. “Those in whose judgment I rely,” he wrote to his wife, “tell me that I fought the battle splendidly and that it was a masterpiece of art.”

So he spent days, and then weeks, resting and resupplying his army. And he did consider it *his* army. “The Army of the Potomac,” he said to a member of his staff, “is my army as much as any army ever belonged to the man that created it.” The army was, indeed, loyal to him, and Lincoln knew it. McClellan was a political force, more threatening in some ways to Lincoln than he was to Lee. The battle of Antietam was fought in late September 1862. Election Day was coming in early November, and if Lincoln were to relieve McClellan of command before then, it would hurt his party’s already weak prospects at the polls. McClellan was a favorite of the Democrats, who wanted an early—and possibly negotiated—end to the war. McClellan might be (and eventually was) the Democrats’ candidate in 1864.

Since Lincoln could not afford to martyr the general, he prodded him and urged him to move. “If we cannot beat the enemy where he now is, we never can,” he wrote to McClellan. “It is . . . easy if our troops march as well as the enemy, and it is unmanly to say they cannot do it.”

He also resorted to sarcasm, responding to a McClellan request for fresh horses to replace his tired mounts with, “Will you pardon me for asking what the horses of your army have done since the battle of Antietam that fatigues anything?”

McClellan did move, finally and in desultory fashion. And the elections went against the Republicans. Lincoln decided, at last, to move himself, and a courier was sent to McClellan’s headquarters on a snowy night with an order relieving him of command. His replacement was Ambrose Burnside.

Where McClellan suffered from an excess of confidence, Burnside lacked sufficient belief in himself. And, as events

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proved, with good reason. But Lincoln liked him and had offered him command on two previous occasions. Both times, Burnside had declined saying he was not up to the job. He gave in on the third occasion only because he knew that if he did not accept, Joe Hooker would. He considered himself the lesser of two evils.

The Army took McClellan's dismissal hard. Some of the men that he had made into soldiers and molded into an army wept and vowed that if he would lead them, they would march on Washington. McClellan calmed them and took the whole thing with a measure of public grace. One could almost infer that he'd decided he would rather run against Lincoln than fight against Lee.

So that left Burnside in command, on November 11, with the weather becoming an important consideration if he was to move on Lee and give battle. Since there was no ambiguity about Lincoln's expectations, the new commander of the Army of the Potomac came up with a plan for moving his army quickly, from its position near the old Manassas battlefields to a place almost equidistant between Washington and Richmond, on the Rappahannock River, which he proposed to cross on pontoon bridges. The aim was to force Lee to react; for the Union Army to seize the initiative. Unlike McClellan, who routinely estimated his enemy's strength as being two or three times the actual numbers, Burnside recognized that he enjoyed numerical superiority. Roughly 120,000 men in ranks against some 80,000 in Lee's Army of Northern Virginia. If Burnside could outmaneuver Lee, get between him and Richmond and force him into battle on ground of his choosing . . .

The plan was presented to Lincoln. On November 14, Burnside was informed, by wire: "The President has just assented to your plan. He thinks it will succeed, if you move rapidly; otherwise not."

So Burnside did what was asked of him. He moved rapidly. So rapidly, in fact, that for a few days Lee was not sure what his opponent intended. Burnside's armies were in place on the Rappahannock before Lee had concentrated his forces. There were only 1,000 troops on the other side of the river to resist the crossing the Union troops would make on the six pontoon bridges, which Burnside had requisitioned through channels.

The bridges, however, did not arrive that day. Nor the next.

Burnside waited a week for the pontoons and bridging materials to arrive. One small but typical piece of bad staff work, in a long chain of them, resulted in the delivery of unbroken horses to a wagon train that had been assembled to transport the bridging material. While the horses were trained to harness, Lee acted.

Burnside had been frustrated back in September by a stone bridge across Antietam Creek. The bridge that he had been unable to take in time to win the battle—and, perhaps, end the war—has been known ever since as Burnside's Bridge.

Now, in command of the entire army, he found himself again unable to force a crossing. And while he waited for the pontoon bridges to arrive, observers riding over his lines in baskets hung below tethered balloons, watched as the Confederates prepared their defenses along a naturally strong position on the opposite bank of the river.

By the time the pontoons arrived, the situation had changed completely, and Burnside informed his superiors he could not "make the promise of probable success with the faith I did when I supposed that all the parts of the plan would be carried out."

Even so, he decided to attack. It was that or return to Washington and winter quarters. And he had been put in command to attack.

His plan was to use the town of Fredericksburg, on the opposite bank of the river, as cover for his crossing and to get the bridges across during darkness. There would be another crossing, further downstream. Two wings of his army would attack Lee's lines, left and right. The downstream attack would carry the enemy's line and then turn and advance to support the other wing. Lee would be taken flank and front.

Burnside's commanders were dubious. He, uncharacteristically, insisted. But his orders were vague and allowed the commander of the downstream wing to interpret them according to his own cautious inclinations.

Upstream, the laying of the pontoons was not finished before daylight and Confederate troops, firing from concealed positions behind the walls of the town, killed enough engineers to make further work impossible. Burnside ordered the town shelled and his artillery took it under fire, causing extensive damage but failing to dislodge the Confederate infantrymen. Finally, Union troops from Michigan crossed the river, under fire, in boats and established a beachhead where they were reinforced by some Massachusetts and New York men. In a rare War episode of urban combat, they drove the Confederates from the town and Union soldiers proceeded to sack it.

The crossing was accomplished on December 11. Burnside did not hurry in getting his divisions across the river and assembled for the assault on the high ground where Lee's troops watched and waited from positions that they were convinced could not be taken. It was another full day before all was ready and the attack was finally launched.

General William Franklin commanded the downstream attack, and he conducted it without much conviction, committing less than one-third of his men to the assault against Confederate forces under the command of Stonewall Jackson. Still, there was a momentary

success. General George Meade's troops found a weakness in Jackson's lines and drove through it and were advancing. But they were too few—less than 4,000 men—and unsupported by the rest of Franklin's command. Jackson's reserves met them head on and the units on either side struck the Union flanks and broke up the attack. Meade lost 1,850 men killed, wounded, or captured.

This was as much success as Burnside's army would experience in the Battle of Fredericksburg. Beyond that there would be frustration, defeat, and slaughter.

The battle beyond the town of Fredericksburg came down to a Union attempt to cross some 400 yards of open ground, across a relatively narrow front, moving uphill, against a line of infantry that occupied a sunken road behind a protective stone wall, with artillery in support and able to depress its barrels and fire over the heads of the defenders into the attacking ranks. Burnside's plan called for a brute, frontal assault on a narrow front with secure flanks. It was an unimaginative blueprint for disaster.

Confederate troops firing from behind the stone wall

The attack did not begin until a few hours after daylight. The low ground along the river was covered in dense fog, so the Union formations were concealed, with the Confederates able to hear the sounds of their preparations, "like the distant hum of myriads of bees."

By midmorning the fog was burning off and the Confederates could look down from their formidable defensive positions and watch as the enemy regiments formed up and dressed on the center for the attack. This was the majesty of battle as many had imagined it would be before the firing started. This was war that Lee believed men could grow too fond of.

The Union formations came on, disappearing into a shallow swale, and then rising out of it, in range of the Confederate muskets that had been waiting behind the stone wall and the cannons that were in place slightly above and behind them.

Six assaults were chopped down by rifle fire and blown apart by artillery without a single Union soldier coming within 50 yards of that wall and the sunken road behind it. December 13 was one of the shortest days of the year, but to the Union soldiers who lay bleeding and dying on the ground in front of the stone wall, it must have seemed endless.

Men under Hooker's command carried out the last, futile assault. They did their duty, and then it was over. In his official report, their general put it bitterly: "Finding that I had lost as many men as my order required me to lose, I suspended the attack."

Burnside wanted to continue to battle the next day and proposed to lead the assault himself, at the head of his old corps. It would have been suicidal, and that may have been the point. He could have been spared but not the additional men who would have been lost. Burnside's generals persuaded him to quit the battle, lest it prove, one said to him, "disastrous to the army."

That night, with the dead and wounded scattered across the battlefield, the skies came alive with a cold, unworldly light. It was a rare occurrence, this far south, of the aurora borealis, the northern lights, seen by many men, no doubt, as an omen.

But of what?

The battle was over. The Union had taken some 12,653 casualties, more than twice the losses in Lee's ranks. Burnside was done, though he later made one more doomed attempt to outmaneuver Lee, and it resulted in what was known as the "mud march," and, mercifully, no actual battle.

Among the many Union wounded was one George Whitman, brother of the poet, who, when he saw the name on the casualty lists, traveled to Fredericksburg to do what he could, even if that would be merely to provide a decent burial.

Walt Whitman's brother was only slightly wounded. Others, many others, were not so fortunate, and his exposure to them and their suffering gave Whitman voice. He described what he had seen in his journal:

> (December 21, 1862) among the camp hospitals in the Army of the Potomac, under General Burnside. Spent a good part of the day in a large brick mansion . . . used as a hospital since the battle, and seems to have received only the worst cases. Outdoors, at the foot of a tree, within ten yards of the front of the house, I noticed a heap of amputated feet, legs, arms, hands, etc.—about a load for a one-horse cart. Several dead bodies lie near, each covered with its brown woolen blanket. In the dooryard, toward the river, are fresh graves, mostly of officers, their names on pieces of barrel staves or broken board, stuck in the dirt.

The battle of Fredericksburg did not end the war, of course. But, as both Lee and Whitman sensed, it was the end of something. ♦

General George C. Marshall (seated, left) and staff at the War Department (1941)

What Would Marshall Do?

Fire some generals, for starters. BY TIM KANE

What is strategy, after all? The public talks about war as if it were a game of chess or Risk or Sid Meier's Civilization. But the real meaning of strategy, as opposed to tactics, is the capacity to determine what to do in a world without guidelines, not how to optimize resources toward well-defined objectives. Thus, the problem with armchair strategy, even when those armchairs are in the Oval Office, is the assumption that satellite imagery and GPS tracking have eliminated fog and friction. We have endless conversations about strategy (backward-looking all), fewer conversations about strategists, and none about the most important topic of all.

The Generals
American Military Command from World War II to Today
by Thomas E. Ricks
Penguin, 576 pp., $32.95

What is the system for producing our generals? The United States Army does not produce its generals on the fields of friendly strife at West Point, nor in the classrooms of the Command and General Staff College, nor at the Army War College—not even on bloody fields of combat. It produces them quietly in the paperwork labyrinth known as Human Resources Command, rarely weeding out the very worst while incessantly promoting the most cautious and mediocre. It was not always thus.

The demise of the military's personnel system is the subject of *The Generals*, a collection of biographies from George Marshall to David Petraeus that has a narrative arc as powerful as its policy message. Thomas Ricks describes the genesis of General Marshall's successful system, which emphasized the frequent relief of weak performers, and its evolution during the 1970s into a micromanaging bureaucracy. Along

Tim Kane is the author of Bleeding Talent: How the U.S. Military Mismanages Great Leaders and Why It's Time for a Revolution.

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the way, he aims his fire at the usual subjects—namely, skeptics of counterinsurgency and the failed leaders who almost lost Iraq before the surge in 2006-07—as those familiar with his recent books might expect.

The Generals offers a different, much more penetrating look at how, organizationally, the Army lost its nerve to let leaders lead and bear the consequences. Did you know that General George Kenney, upon promotion to head air operations in the Pacific in mid-1942, immediately relieved five generals from command and fired an additional 40 colonels? Did you know that one-third of submarine commanders were relieved in 1942? Ricks laments the loss of relief, or any real accountability at the top, in today's military.

"Not a single general has been removed for ineffectiveness during the course of this war," scolded one outside adviser to President George W. Bush in late 2006—a stunning statistic compared with General Marshall's relief of 600 officers before the United States even sent troops overseas during World War II. And it wasn't just Marshall; it was a philosophy he cultivated in all branches. The Supreme Allied Commander (and future president) General Dwight Eisenhower advised his old friend and fellow general, George Patton, "to be cold-blooded about removal of inefficient officers."

Relief is just one of the lost management tools from that era. Today, military performance evaluations are so inflated that everyone walks on water (at least on paper) while promotions are all but timed to the day for the first dozen years of an officer's career, regardless of talent or experience. Job-matching is done not by letting commanding officers select among qualified applicants, but by a faceless bureaucracy with whom most young officers interact only over the phone or, more often, by email. It's one of the great ironies that the armed forces, defending free-market capitalism 20 years after winning the Cold War, are organized along principles inspired more by Lenin than by Milton Friedman.

Generals Ricardo Sanchez, John Abizaid, and George Casey in Baghdad (2004)

ASSOCIATED PRESS

To his credit, Ricks does not get bogged down in the logic or bureaucracy, but tells a fascinating story of how Army leaders came out of Vietnam with a singular focus on tactics at the expense of strategic thinking. Frequent rotations—of 12, and then 6, months—during the wars in Korea and Vietnam had the perverse effect of making combat units inexperienced, risk-averse, and oblivious to the results of their actions. One study found that roughly three American soldiers were killed during the first half of their tours in Vietnam for every one in the second half.

Tactical weakness was the symptom, not the malady, but it was addressed during the two decades after Vietnam by a relentless focus on Army-wide tactical training and education. And here is where Ricks shines, blending an impressive level of research with expert storytelling. He brings life to the rebuilding of the Army under General William DePuy, who developed AirLand Battle Doctrine, instructing authors of the new field manuals that "wars are won by draftees and reserve officers. Write so they can understand." Yet rather than counter the ticket-punching and careerism fostered by frequent job rotations, the new training programs made things worse. Psychological studies in the 1980s and '90s reported that Army generals were more introverted and rigid; battalion commanders surveyed in 1983 said that one-quarter of new brigadier generals were unqualified, a finding echoed in studies ever since. At the same time, younger officers remain as sharp and creative as any generation before.

The only flaw is that Ricks gets distracted by the very thing he identifies as a distraction. Training, doctrine, and programs to educate officers were never the solution to strategic weakness in the personnel system. Nor will modifying them matter one bit. An epilogue outlines a number of smart proposals regarding rotation, but I found myself wishing for some insight into how the evaluation and job-matching functions were neutered in the 1980s Pentagon, and why.

"How do you teach judgment?" ask Ricks and his protagonists. It's a good question; it's also an irrelevant question. The military has made all the right moves in designing excellent leadership training programs that foster independent thinking in its ranks. But the effort is wasted by the refusal to distinguish or promote talent. The Pentagon has perfected teaching judgment to its officers, but has abdicated passing judgment on them.

Tactical success, strategic failure. ♦

B&A

Symons Said

On the trail of a strange, elusive life in literature.

BY MICHAEL DIRDA

My quest for Symons—A.J.A. Symons, that is—began when, many years ago, I first read that strange novel *Hadrian the Seventh* (1904). Written by the so-called Baron Corvo, and admired by D.H. Lawrence, among others, the book opens with a magnificent description of a hack writer suffering from writer's block:

> In mind he was tired, worn out, by years of hope deferred, of loneliness, of unrewarded toil. In body he was almost prostrate by the pain of an arm on the tenth day of vaccination. Bodily pain stung him like a personal affront. "Some one will have to be made miserable for this," he once said during the throes of a toothache. He was no stranger to mental fatigue; but, when to that was added corporeal anguish, he came near collapse. His capacity for work was constricted: the mere sight of his writing materials filled him with disgust. But, because he had a horror of being discovered in a state of inaction, after breakfast he sat down as usual and tried to write. Dazed in a torrent of ideas, he painfully halted for words: stumbling in a maze of words, he frequently lost the thread of his argument: now and then, in sheer exhaustion, his pen remained immobile.

After two hours, the writer—his name is George Arthur Rose—looks "askance" at his manuscript: "He had written no more than fourteen lines; and these were deformed by erasures of words and sentences, by substitutions and additions. He struck an upward line from left to right across the sheet: laid down his pen. . . . He could not work."

The Quest for Corvo
An Experiment in Biography
1934
by A.J.A. Symons

A.J.A. Symons
His Life and Speculations
1950
by Julian Symons

Essays and Biographies
1969
by A.J.A. Symons
edited by Julian Symons

Anyone who writes, or tries to write, will recognize Rose's anxiety, disgust, and weary resignation. But *mirabile dictu*, this Grub Street washout is about to undergo an utterly astonishing, almost miraculous transformation: By the middle of chapter three, George Arthur Rose will find himself ordained a Roman Catholic priest and then, in short order, elected Pope. He takes the name Hadrian the Seventh.

What happens during his papacy is fantastic, occasionally comic, sometimes touching. Corvo's prose, reflecting Rose's new life, quickly grows theologically baroque, even fustian at times, but never releases the reader until the book's shocking finale. In truth, *Hadrian the Seventh* is a novel like no other, with a George Gissing-like power rather than, as one might imagine, a Ronald Firbankian campiness.

But who was this Baron Corvo? According to my thrift-shop paperback, he was actually Frederick Rolfe (1860-1913), a minor literary figure of the *fin de siècle*, which didn't tell me much. An even fuller answer, I was informed, could be found in the tantalizingly titled *The Quest for Corvo* by someone named A.J.A. Symons. On a trip to New York, I scoured half-a-dozen used bookstores before I found a copy of the first American edition, published in 1934. It cost only $2, mainly because of "bad covers," as a penciled note inside succinctly summed up the worn spine and loose binding. I took a break from my slow-going dissertation and settled down for a bit of rest and recreation.

Subtitled "An Experiment in Biography," *The Quest for Corvo* opens with a much quieter hook than *Hadrian the Seventh*, but it seizes the reader's attention nonetheless:

> My quest for Corvo was started by accident one summer afternoon in 1925, in the company of Christopher Millard. We were sitting lazily in his little garden, talking of books that miss their just reward of praise and influence. I mentioned *Wylder's Hand*, by Le Fanu, a masterpiece of plot, and the *Fantastic Fables* of Ambrose Bierce. After a pause, without commenting on my examples, Millard asked: "Have you read *Hadrian the Seventh*?" I confessed that I never had; and to my surprise he offered to lend me his copy—to my surprise, for my companion lent his books seldom and reluctantly. But, knowing the range of his knowledge of out-of-the-way literature, I accepted without hesitating; and by doing so took the first step on a trail that led into very strange places.

The next 293 pages recount Symons's adventures. Rather than simply present a biography of Frederick Rolfe from cradle to grave, Symons chronicles his own efforts to discover all he could about the author of *Hadrian the Seventh*. At times, the book risks becoming a dossier of press cuttings, letters, and archival material; that it never does so is due to a soothing prose style and a subtle attention to framing and rhythm, as well as a contrast of humor and pathos, light and shadow. Chapters introduce us to bookish clergymen, eminent publishers and novelists, quiet eccentrics, and even a mysterious millionaire spymaster, nearly all of them victims of the ruthlessly demanding Rolfe, who made friendship "a minor experiment in demonology."

At the start, fellow biographer and bibliographer Millard lends Symons some scandalous Rolfe letters, packed with accounts of pederasty in Venice and written (says Symons) "in

Michael Dirda's On Conan Doyle *received the 2012 Edgar Award from the Mystery Writers of America for the best critical/biographical book of the year.*

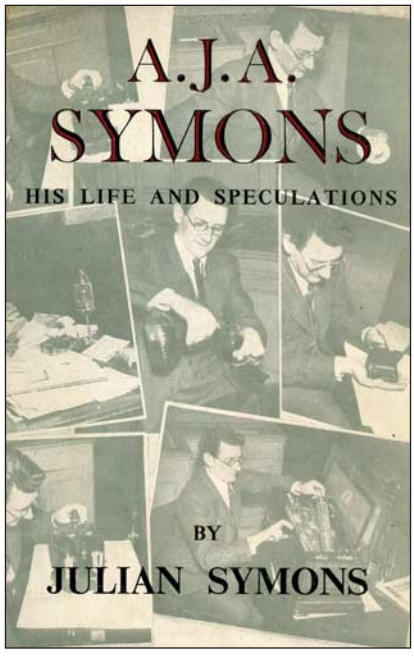
the most beautiful handwriting I had ever seen, in red, blue, green, purple, and black inks." Millard then points him to a biographical article by Shane Leslie in the *London Mercury*, which provides several leads to further information. Before long, Symons discovers a magazine article by Rolfe, sensationally titled "How I Was Buried Alive," but also a vituperative attack on both its veracity and the character of the author from the *Aberdeen Free Press*.

Having written letters "in all directions," Symons is soon in correspondence with Rolfe's lawyer-brother Herbert, the novelist Frank Swinnerton, man of letters Vincent O'Sullivan, several clerics, and the publisher Grant Richards. He learns that Fr. Robert Hugh Benson, now remembered chiefly for his occult religious thrillers such as *Come Rack, Come Rope*, had once been a friend and admirer of Rolfe. (R. H. Benson was the brother of essayist A. C. Benson and novelist E. F. Benson, the latter revered today for his comic Lucia novels and a handful of surprisingly gruesome ghost stories.)

As the "quest for Corvo" continues, the reader—I might honestly say the enthralled reader—gradually acquires a fuller understanding of Rolfe, this failed priest and paranoid author. "In person," writes Canon Carmont, "Rolfe was about 5 ft. 7 in. in height—perhaps slightly less. He was pale, rather demure and ascetic in expression, wore eyeglasses, smoked rather heavily." According to one Roman Catholic clergyman, Rolfe knew more about astrology than anyone then alive, while his appetite for gossip and scandal was insatiable. Vain to the point of megalomania, he once painted a wall portrait of St. William of Norwich in which all 149 mourners, and the saint himself, were given his own features. Another time, he hinted that Kaiser Wilhelm II was his godfather.

Throughout his life, Rolfe suffered from persecution mania, constantly turning against friends and well-wishers, often unleashing torrents of abuse. A master of invective, he opened one letter "Quite cretinous creature," and ended many with "Your faithful enemy." As he once said, he considered all men to be "too vile for words to tell." Given such a hypersensitive and quarrelsome character, it's not surprising that Rolfe was usually broke, and sometimes on the verge of starvation. He once asked to be certified insane so that he might have free quarters in the local asylum. In Venice, he applied for a job as a gondolier.

But that was near the end of his life. In his youth, he yearned for ordination but was found unsuitable. For a while, he painted religious tableaux; then he tried to establish himself as a photographer. Surviving pictures betray his idolization of youthful adolescents, as does his first book, *Stories Toto Told Me* (1898), in which an Italian peasant lad charmingly conflates pagan myths with saints' lives. The legend of Perseus, for example, is reworked into a Christian allegory starring Saint George. Symons notes that the early Toto stories appeared in the notorious *Yellow Book* and compares them to Oscar Wilde's fairy tales.



But Rolfe didn't just write semi-autobiographical novels and fiction of a rather fantastic cast. His monumental *Chronicles of the House of Borgia* (1901), once respected enough to be included in the Modern Library series, is in part an apologia for the notorious Renaissance family but also a grab bag of bizarre lore. (One chapter examines "the legend of the Borgia venom.") This book, and some of his others—such as the novels *Don Tarquinio* (1905), *Don Renato* (1909), and the homoerotic Venetian romance *The Desire and Pursuit of the Whole* (written during 1910-13, published in 1934)—vividly display Rolfe's linguistic preciosity and his liking for such recondite words and neologisms as "subturpiculous," "insulsity," "macilent," "effrenate," and "torose."

While I enjoyed *The Quest for Corvo* immensely, by its final pages I found myself hungering to know more about the tall, thin, bespectacled A.J.A. Symons. Who was he?

Today's readers are liable to confuse Symons with several other almost-contemporary writers. There is the Renaissance historian and translator of Cellini's *Memoirs*, John Addington Symonds (1840-1893). There is Arthur Symons (1865-1945), the poet and literary critic whose *Symbolist Movement in Literature* greatly influenced the young T.S. Eliot. And, not least, there is the distinguished crime novelist Julian Symons (1912-1994) who, as it happens, was the 11-years-younger brother of our Symons. In 1950, he brought out a superb short biography of his brother "A.J." Only when I traveled to Oxford did I finally find a copy of *A.J.A. Symons: His Life and Speculations* in a used bookshop—and I had to pay £6 for it. (There has since been a paperback reissue.) The book opens as dramatically as both *Hadrian the Seventh* and *The Quest for Corvo*:

> One day in the last month of 1922 a young man named Vyvyan Holland was walking along Pall Mall. It was his habit to walk along the street staring firmly at the ground; but when about to turn from Pall Mall into Lower Regent Street, he departed from this custom so far as to look up at the first floor windows on the opposite side of the road. He saw there, written upon a large signboard, and also painted across two windows, the words The First Editions Club.

Though he was the son of an auctioneer and left school at 14, A.J.A. Symons transformed himself into one of the great aesthetes, connoisseurs, and dandies of his time. His announced aim was to build and shape his life as

EYRE & SPOTTISWOODE

"an architect plans a house." While living always beyond his means, Symons somehow managed to collect Victoriana, rare books, and music boxes. With determination, he perfected an exquisite penmanship, only sported handmade shirts and bespoke suits, and eventually owned a house in the country with an enviable wine cellar and garden. According to his brother, it was his conviction "that personal property could be both beautiful and useful, whereas money consisted merely of paper and metal pieces which were not, in general, of an appearance aesthetically pleasing." At the same time, Symons loved games and gambling and dreamed of moving in the highest social circles.

Literary societies, combined with a seemingly irresistible personal charm, were the engines of his success. He started The First Editions Club, was elected a member of the exclusive Sette of Odd Volumes, helped edit *The Book-Collector's Quarterly*, and cofounded, with André Simon, The Wine and Food Society. In his biography, Julian Symons describes one of that society's most egregiously lavish banquets: There were 42 courses, with 16 wines and liqueurs. Sadly, this great diner-out and *bon viveur* took ill just as World War II broke out and died at the age of 41, from a stroke caused by an undiagnosed haemangioma of the brainstem.

A.J.A. Symons: His Life and Speculations is one of the most entrancing biographies you will ever read, especially if you share its subject's passion for collecting books, wine, or interesting friends. It is not, however, reverential: Julian Symons concludes, after describing his brother's increasingly sybaritic lifestyle, that "we often think that we are conquering society, when in fact we are adapting ourselves to its remorseless vulgarity, its fathomless destruction of our own idealism."

While A.J.A. Symons viewed himself primarily as a writer, much of his work can be characterized as occasional—comments in *The Book-Collector's Quarterly*, an introduction to a volume of 1890s verse, a retrospective essay on the first 15 years of the Nonesuch Press. Apart from *The Quest for Corvo*, his very best writing can be found in the posthumous *Essays and Biographies* (1969), which includes the fragments of several unfinished books, including a life of Oscar Wilde. This last might have been Symons's *magnum opus*, if only because he was a close friend to both Wilde's son Vyvyan Holland and Wilde's lover Lord Alfred Douglas.

Somewhat surprisingly, Symons did write a short biography of H.M. Stanley and planned another on the African explorers Sir Richard Francis Burton and John Hanning Speke: He always admired risktakers and those who lived extravagantly. Other biographical essays provide brief accounts of Edgar Allan Poe, Regency wit and practical joker Theodore Hooker, and the preacher Edward Irving (the greatest orator of the Romantic age, according to Hazlitt, De Quincey, and others). Symons himself always insisted that "a biographer should choose his subject as a dandy chooses his suit, remembering cut and tone as much as texture; and his subjects should fit his talent as the suit fits the dandy's body: exquisitely."

It's clear that in all these figures, and in Frederick Rolfe too, he recognized aspects of himself.

Writing came slowly to A.J.A. Symons, in part because he aimed for a witty, easygoing prose. Invitations, he declares with a Wilde-like flourish, are "the sincerest form of flattery." A relentless social climber "taxed his constitution like a wartime Chancellor." The women in Poe's fiction, he notes, are "the grimmest heroines in literature." Though he never left England, Symons can evoke the travails and horrors of early African exploration:

> Instead of clustering to barter, the natives abandoned their huts and fields to the invaders; but the felled tree-trunks that blocked the way, the poisoned skewers concealed under leaves, the showers of yet more virulently poisoned arrows, the gigantic, grave-like elephant pits, left no doubt of the temper of these unwilling hosts. And Nature proved more savage than the savages. Quags of stagnant water and decaying vegetation, into which men sank to the neck, damped clothes as well as spirits; and in Africa damp clothes bring fever. Ticks which entomb themselves in the nostrils, bees which frequent the eyes and hair, wasps and hornets whose stings cause sickness, and ants in armies joined with snakes, spiders and lice in plaguing the column. . . . When to these terrors starvation was added (for all game was scared for miles by the noise of the party's progress), the wretched carriers became marching skeletons, the slightest abrasion of whose skin caused sloughing ulcers. Those too weak to march fell by the wayside and were left to die.

Throughout his writing, Symons repeatedly stresses that a biography should aspire to be a shaped work of art, a book that can be reread for "the pleasure of its form alone." Like Lytton Strachey before him, he helped do away with those enormous "memorial sculptures" favored by the Victorians, all those dully respectful multivolume "Lives and Letters":

> Constructed on the simple formula of chronological sequence, they begin, for the most part, with their subject's birth, and describe his curly-headed innocence, his sailor suit. Chapters two and three, which show no diminution of the one or discarding of the other, are headed "Schooldays" and "Alma Mater," and precede "Early Manhood" in which a passing reference to "wild oats" shows that the author also has experienced much; and then chapter five, "Marriage," sets us on the trail for home. "Life in London," "Early Work," and "Later Work" lead naturally to "Last Days" and a deathbed scene, several moral reflections, a list of the books or acts of the victim, and one more biography is on the shelf, probably to stay there.

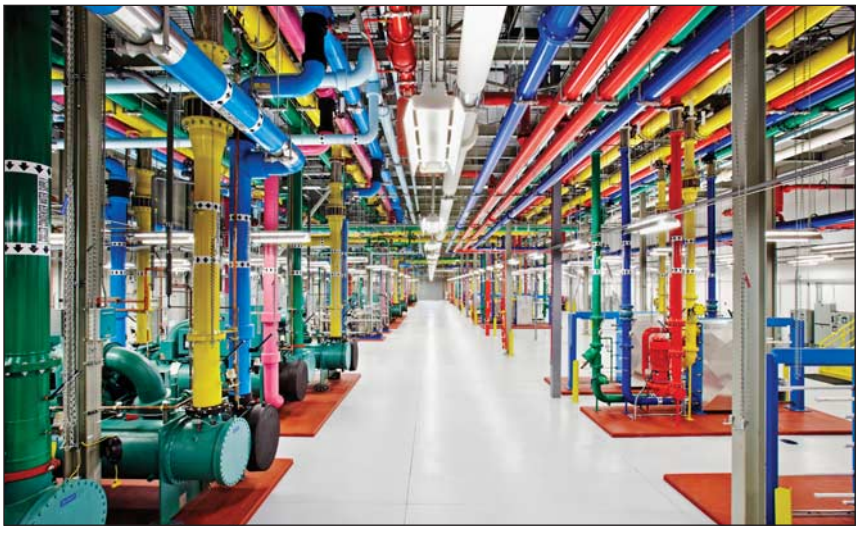
Such is not the case with *The Quest for Corvo*, though, as a repository of facts about Frederick Rolfe, the book has long been superseded by the work of more recent biographers—chiefly Donald Weeks and Miriam J. Benkowitz. But one can reread anything by Symons—and *A.J.A. Symons: His Life and Speculations*, too, for that matter—just for the stylish prose and the chance to spend some time in the author's delightful company. Along with that unique autobiographical fantasy, *Hadrian the Seventh*, all these interconnected books just might become, as they have for me, personal favorites in your own reading life. ♦

B&A

Totally Tubular

The nuts and bolts and cables of the Internet.

BY JAMES BOLOGNA



Google data center, Douglas County, Georgia

Recently, Google unveiled a new feature on its website: the ability to tour, via "street view," its Lenoir, North Carolina, data center, one of its numerous, highly guarded campuses. Google is attempting, at least partially, to lift the iron curtain—for which it has been much maligned—and show the world one of the physical strongholds where our personal data are stored. Might we trust the behemoth more if we can catch a glimpse of it from inside?

The Internet is largely thought of as a nebulous cloud of information, floating around us everywhere but existing nowhere—light, ephemeral, omnipresent. But our general concept of the web couldn't be further from the truth. As Andrew Blum explains here, the Internet is very much a solid structure, grounded in the need for electricity, undersea crossings, and transcontinental fiber-optic cables. The Internet hangs on poles outside our homes, it slithers underneath our office buildings, and gets converted into wireless cell phone signals by operator towers made to look like pine trees.

Tubes
A Journey to the Center of the Internet
by Andrew Blum
Ecco, 304 pp., $26.99

When things happen—natural disasters such as Hurricane Sandy, a fallen tree in Ohio causing the 2003 East Coast power outage, or, as Blum writes, "a seventy-five-year-old grandmother in the country of Georgia slicing through a buried fiber-optic cable with a shovel, knocking Armenia offline"—the invincible Internet stops working. Not quite an information superhighway, the Internet is more like a network of airports (which are vulnerable to weather conditions), where bits of information are shuttled to and from hubs all over the world.

Fortunately, instead of a mind-numbing recitation of technical statistics (although he certainly can speak that language), Blum opts for a compelling tale that could be considered travel literature. Starting in his own neighborhood, he reaches out to network engineers and far-flung experts in his journey to visit the physical place that is "the Internet." He drives along the Jersey Shore in an attempt to locate where the underwater cable from Europe rises out of the Atlantic. He visits Portugal to see where Europe and Africa really connect. And he enters the subterranean world of New York's utility workers, men in hardhats who lay mile upon mile of optical fiber under the metropolis each night.

One of his stops is in Ashburn, Virginia, in the suburbs of D.C., about three miles from Dulles airport, where the massive tubes of the Internet literally come out of the ground. This network warehouse farm—like others Blum visits in Los Angeles, New York, Oregon, London, and Frankfurt—is where the routing (and "peering") of global Internet traffic takes place. As he explains, it is in facilities such as these that the zeros and ones of our Netflix streams, cat meme emails, and Honey Boo Boo tweets are redirected either to networks feeding our computers or to giant data centers (such as Google's in Lenoir) which contain the servers that house websites.

In these giant routing warehouses (such as the ones in Ashburn), with no windows, few doors, heavy security—airlocks, bulletproof glass, biometric scanners—and lots of air conditioning, sit rows and rows of router towers, filled with the same routers you might rent from Comcast or Verizon, but on steroids. These warehouses, strategically located all over the planet, are places for companies to lease space for their routers, and for their networks to plug into other networks (a network of networks!)—Verizon's routers sit next to Amazon's routers and Comcast's routers and Netflix's routers, and so on. In a sea of yellow and blue wires, a handful of network engineers, dwarfed by the colossal heat-throwing machines, continually string new networks together. Cables on top of cables all converge into one final box with blinking lights, the last box before the mother lode of tubes exits the building and enters the soil.

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James Bologna is a writer in Washington.

That tube leads to thousands of other tubes just like it, transporting all our web traffic to other parts of the world. But where, exactly, are our pictures, videos, e-books, and emails stored? When Blum attempts to find out—by "touring" one of Google's data centers from the outside—he's guided around nondescript Silicon Valley buildings, encircled by layers of barbed-wire fencing, surrounded by handlers unwilling to answer even basic questions.

But the street view of the Lenoir campus is a baby step toward Internet transparency. It's important because more and more of our digital lives are moving to these web-based data centers—pictures on Facebook, files in Google Drive, music on Apple's iCloud, books and entire libraries in electronic formats—and these campuses, some totaling more square footage than six U.S. Capitol buildings, grow larger and more energy-hungry each year. (Two percent of global power consumption is already attributed to data centers, and that number expands 12 percent annually.)

So much for the reviewer's perquisite of a new volume for my bookshelf, though: I read this book entirely in electronic format, having downloaded it to my Kindle, tablet, and smartphone. As I flipped the "pages" of the e-book on the subway, I got to wondering which data center had housed my copy: Was it in Oregon? California? Nearby at Amazon's servers in Ashburn? *Tubes*, which makes a valiant effort to transform the intangible world of the Internet into a concrete thing and place, had become, itself, an intangible resident of the web. ♦

B&A

Postmodern Cézanne

This is what happens when politics distorts art.

BY MAUREEN MULLARKEY

Five months before he died, Paul Cézanne attended the unveiling of a bust of Émile Zola, his old soulmate, at the Bibliothèque Méjanes in Aix. Numa Coste, friend to both, addressed the gathering. He reminded the attendees of Zola's autumnal insistence that "one thinks one has revolutionized the world, and then one finds out, at the end of the road, that one has not revolutionized anything at all." The elderly painter cried at the words.

John Rewald, preeminent authority on late-19th-century French painting, extended Zola's regrets to Cézanne himself. Concern with revolution was irrelevant, Rewald wrote in his 1986 biography of the painter. What mattered was that Cézanne had succeeded in adding "a new link in the chain to the past." Implicit in Rewald's tribute was recognition that artists build upon antecedents. Great art is as much the harvest of what came before—angles off precedents, bends in common practice—as individual endowment.

Cézanne
A Life
by Alex Danchev
Pantheon, 512 pp., $40

It was the concession of a scholar of the old school, for whom the discipline of history preceded the poetics of art appreciation. By contrast, Alex Danchev, self-described "unorthodox Professor of International Relations," is a jack-of-all-disciplines writing under the dispensations of the cultural studies movement. Traditional history, from Danchev's perspective, is a gray, unsmiling thing with the smell of the stacks about it; cultural studies, conversely, is blithe and nimble. In a 2009 essay on the presumed intersection of art and politics, Danchev illustrated the difference:

> Cézanne is supposed to have said of Poussin that he put reason in the grass and tears in the sky. Reason and tears may be as good an encapsulation of International Relations as any.

Even metaphors obey some kind of logic. This one signals wide interpretive latitude: "Reason and tears" is a gnostic generality for rent; it can be leased to any purpose.

At the nerve center of *Cézanne: A Life* is a grand pronouncement: Cézanne is "a life-changer," the sine qua non of modernism. We moderns are the fruit of his prismatic dreams. In character and works, Cézanne is the third person in the trinity of disruptive shapers of the modern world and the modern mind:

> His way of seeing radically refashioned our sense of things and our relationship to them. . . . The revelations of Cézanne are akin to those of Marx or Freud. The transformational potential is as great. The impact on ourselves and our world is far-reaching.

Audacity is in the air these days. Even so, we might expect a claim this gaudy to submit to customary standards of evidence. Instead, it outfits itself with a battery of literary conceits, belletristic curtsies, and subjective impressions posing as hard fact. No encomium is too hyperbolic, self-serving, or incoherent not to be taken at face value. Biography is simply the carrier for Danchev's true concern: the aestheticization of politics. Call it politics by another name. Again, from his 2009 essay:

> If the way artists see and shape the world is intensely political, this has profound significance for those of us in a field that tries to make sense of the characteristics of that world and *to intervene in it* [emphasis added]. . . . Thinker-poets, thinker-painters . . . may help us glimpse unseen possibilities for thinker-politics—and actor-politics.

Our biographer sees himself as an activist: "For us, there must be politics

Maureen Mullarkey is a painter who writes about art and culture.

in our observations." Accordingly, his Cézanne is an artifact of ideology.

The tilt is conspicuous at the start. Danchev prefaces his *Life* with aggressive disdain for Bouguereau—the man as well as his art. He mocks the reigning academician as one who "did voluptuary by numbers." Discount his having pioneered the admission of women to the French academies. Dismiss the proximity of Matisse's later advice for training artists to Bouguereau's own. Boot the dodo to the attic!

Abandoning scholarly obligation to periods of taste different from his own, Danchev declares allegiance to the dashing Young Turks against the old duffers. It is a telling kickoff. What follows is a stylish—so seductive, the animated prose—oddly nostalgic replay of that aging trope: *Ni Dieu, ni maître*. Among academics of a certain age, it always was, and forever shall be, 1968.

'Mont Sainte-Victoire and Hamlet near Gardanne' (ca. 1888)

Cézanne: A Life offers an anecdotal comb-through of the canonical sources: Rewald, Theodore Reff, Joachim Gasquet, the painter's own correspondence, the recollections of his son Paul, dealer Ambroise Vollard, Pissarro, Émile Bernard, and Matisse, among others. Add to that the wealth of cultivated, self-conscious uses to which Cézanne is put by littérateurs exercising their craft and artists establishing their place-by-association on the art historical timeline. The voluminous record is cherry-picked to amplify the painter into a Nietzschean figure whose works have "colonized our consciousness," and on whom modernity turns.

The story opens with an engaging reprise of Zola's accounts of his schoolboy years with the eager, poetically inclined artist-in-waiting. Initially explored by Rewald's *Cézanne et Zola* (1936), the friendship remains an instructive window into Cézanne's early apprenticeship in the idioms of self-romance and its obligatory texts: Baudelaire, Victor Hugo, Balzac, Hippolyte Taine (for his vision of what an artist should be), and—crucially—Delacroix's journals.

A carefully educated banker's son, Paul Cézanne was financially secure from his early twenties. A modest allowance freed him to paint without the distractions of earning a living. Practical cares were met by "what I've been able to get out of my father." The elder Cézanne seems to have been a decent benefactor despite disappointment in a son he considered unemployed. During the Franco-Prussian War, Louis-Auguste Cézanne purchased a substitute conscript for his son. (Danchev mentions only "draft-dodging," a term that evokes Vietnam-era deferments rather than the cold luxury of a cash-poor proxy.) Papa also left Paul an ample inheritance that enabled the painter to have a coachman drive him to his Provençal motifs.

Yes, he was 35 before he sold a painting outside a circle of friends and sympathizers. And yes, he felt the smart of serial rejections from the official Paris Salon. Material and critical success eluded Cézanne for many years. Nevertheless, Danchev admits, he ate well. And he lived as he chose. On the balance sheet of human suffering, his entry was slim. Burnished by schooling, buttressed by connections and dividends on which to depend, Cézanne was hardly a man who "lived on the margins, beyond the pale." However much he assumed the role of solitary bohemian, he did so by the grace of bourgeois annuities.

Danchev glides on to Cézanne's afterlife in cultural memory. Steeped in what Walter Sickert dubbed "the cult of Cézanne" some 90 years ago, the narrative widens into a Whitmanesque series of begats through the 19th and into the 20th century. In the courage of present times and all times, Cézanne was the man—he suffered, he was there. ("For Kitaj, Cézanne was the Man.") He rescued the drifting company, from Allen Ginsberg to Pierre Boulez, Hemingway to Heidegger, Rainer Maria Rilke to Jacques Derrida, Adorno, Beckett, and Merleau-Ponty. Jasper Johns, too—on down to names you might have missed. Danchev, still doing Whitman, even says of Cézanne: "He contains multitudes."

A daze of documentation blunts attention to the superficiality of the central claim. Marx and Freud were momentous secularizers: Their mythologies of redemption, in concert with Darwin's positioning of man firmly in the animal kingdom, destabilized Western civilization's Judeo-Christian axis. No artist approaches such consequence. As the age lost its taste for God, it developed a taste for Art instead. Cézanne was a beneficiary, never the agent, of that transfer.

The fragmentations of modernism, reflected in the arts, owe more to Flanders Fields than to any marks on a canvas. Paul Valéry put it best: World War I exposed our civilization as mortal. Distinctions between revelation on that scale and a method of painting will not dissolve in the warm bath of aesthetic sensibility. But in the eye of the professor, art is the

universal solvent for turning the past into an endorsement of particular values in the present. He values the painter as a promoter of dissent from established norms. Danchev prizes what is said about Cézanne because the commentary locates reality in subjective responses.

Danchev's *Life* gratifies the susceptibilities of the author's own generation, one that came of age enamored of the stock motif of radical breaks from the shackles of bourgeois convention. Cézanne "skirted the bounds of the traditional proprieties. . . . He found the forms and trappings of civilization irksome." That certifies him as the apotheosis of the artist as a *type*. He wore his hat as he pleased, indoors or out. He ate with his knife. All creeds and schools in abeyance:

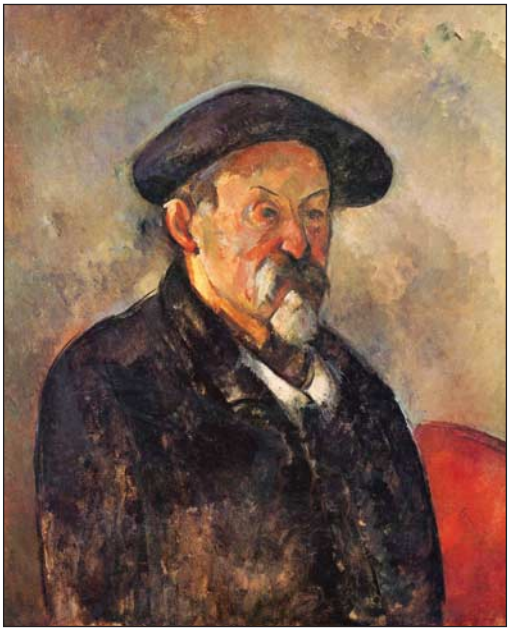
> Given his temperament, it was only to be expected that he was not a good impressionist, just as he was not a good Catholic. Denominations were not his style. Impressionism could not contain him; no movement could.

Later, the refrain repeats: "The One True Church (whatever it might be) could not contain him; followership was one of the many things he could never quite believe in."

John Rewald cites 1891 as the year Cézanne, in his early fifties, embraced his natal tradition and became a devout Roman Catholic. Danchev denies it, yet submits no contradiction beyond the painter's vague "All my compatriots are arseholes beside me." Not much to go on, but it would never do to have us thinking of the great insurgent as a reactionary Catholic. Perhaps that explains the text's reticence about the divide between Zola and Cézanne over the Dreyfus affair. (Zola's defense of Dreyfus did not sit well with the painter, according to others.)

Quotations accumulate. Danchev's approach resembles that of *Sacred Spring*, Robert Whalen's 2007 study of the birth of modernism in *fin-de-siècle* Vienna. But while Whalen brought skepticism to a discussion of Wagnermania, Danchev asks no questions of Cézanne cultists, makes no inquiries, offers no analysis, makes no distinction between rhetoric and substance or between fictional characters modeled on the painter and the man himself.

Clive Bell proclaimed Cézanne "the Columbus of a new continent of forms." Danchev purrs: "Deep in his selfmost straits, Cézanne discovered a new world." Picasso, slyly endorsing his own egoism, declared of Cézanne: "It is not what an artist does that counts, but what he is." Danchev takes him at his word. Roger Fry genuflected like a communicant waiting to be aspersed at High Mass: "The smallest product of his hand arouses the impression of being a revelation of the highest importance." Danchev leaves him on his knees.



'Self-Portrait with Beret' (ca. 1899)

Danchev accepts any flight of devotional writing in order to arrive at the predetermined conclusion that Cézanne (in the words of Peter Handke) is "the teacher of mankind in the here and now." By the time David Sylvester croons that Cézanne's work edifies with "a moral grandeur which we cannot find in ourselves," we know we are out of art history and into Butler's *Lives of the Saints*.

Painting is rendered invisible in the glow of so much effulgence. Cézanne represents no seismic break with the past. Far from being isolated, he was intricately tied to the prevailing artistic currents of the 19th century. The hackneyed assertion that Cézanne made us *see* differently is a pious fiction. We see as our species has always seen; so did Cézanne. His optic nerves worked the same as those of prehistoric draftsmen in Lascaux. Just as yours and mine do. What distinguishes Cézanne is what he *did* with what he saw—in tandem with what he *knew* about chromatic dances of color, one touch against another. His discernment was the gleaning of a long, luminous pedigree that stretches past his beloved Delacroix, back to the persistently inventive Constable.

It does not diminish the amplitude of Cézanne's talent to say that his art would have remained unrecognizable if not for features inherited from predecessors and shared with contemporaries. Begin with Delacroix's color theories, which developed from Constable's experiment in juxtaposing unmixed spots of color, leaving them to blend in the eye. Enter Manet and Courbet, to whom Cézanne acknowledged his debt. Add Pissarro, whose painting Cézanne studied by copying. While each studied the other, both were indebted to Daubigny and the Barbizon School, who took their canvases outdoors to paint *sur le motif*. All gained from the example of Corot, who was schooled in nature and bent on harmonizing invention with truth-to-the-landscape. No chasm separates the forests of Fontainebleau from the pines above Château Noir. None.

Would modernism, as manifested in painting, have occurred without Cézanne? It was already in progress. A more honest question would ask: Could there have been a Cézanne without Courbet, Corot, or the inheritance of Delacroix? Without the varied innovations of that fluid fellowship, Impressionism? Not likely. In the end, what matters to us now is how long a culture's fidelity to the past can survive flashy theorizing, fashionable improvisation, and mystification. ♦

B&A

Unreal City

Is it possible not to feel good after seeing a feel-good movie? **BY JOHN PODHORETZ**

Jennifer Lawrence, Bradley Cooper

All movies are made up of ludicrous falsehoods—unbelievable characters, unrealistic plots, impossible twists of fate—and they work only when they convince you that, in spite of all the obvious silliness, something honest or vivid or emotionally accurate is going on. This is sometimes called the "willing suspension of disbelief," but the term gets it wrong. You don't actually need to suspend anything: You can both understand that what you're seeing could never happen in real life and still think you're watching something that is, in some sense, *real*.

I never believed that for a second watching *Silver Linings Playbook*, this year's Oscar entry in the "small heartfelt sleeper" category. (Last year, the category was filled, equally unconvincingly, in my view, by George Clooney's *The Descendants*.) *Silver Linings Playbook* features two extremely glamorous stars trying very hard to behave like pathetic Philadelphians who deserve one last chance at happiness in a film deliberately designed to look gritty and rough and unpolished by its very accomplished writer-director, David O. Russell.

Silver Linings Playbook
Directed by David O. Russell

Bradley Cooper, who was *People* magazine's Sexiest Man Alive in 2011, plays Pat, whom we meet in a mental hospital in Baltimore, where he's doing a stint for having nearly beaten his wife's lover to death. The extremely likable Cooper might be capable of charming his wife's lover nearly to death, but that's about it; he embodies about as much danger and menace as Justin Bieber.

Pat is supposed to suffer from auditory hallucinations and a delusional hope of restoring his marriage to a woman who has a restraining order out on him. But Cooper's stock-in-trade as a performer is his open accessibility; he moves too lightly to bear a soul in turmoil. Russell's camera swoops in and out around the vicinity of Cooper's face to create tension and discomfort the actor himself cannot really evoke.

Perhaps he's not meant to evoke it, not really, because this is a sweetened-up version of bipolar disorder—one in which the crime for which he was committed is only seen in momentary flashes. The movie is, in essence, a romantic comedy, as Pat is paired up with Tiffany, the gorgeous, widowed sister of his best friend's wife.

Tiffany is a piece of work. At one moment she's tough-talking and unfiltered; at another she's depressed; at another she's nymphomaniacal; at another, she turns out to be shrewd and clever and worldly. In the final analysis, she's not a character at all—she's whatever Russell needs her to be at any given point. And that includes being interested in Pat, who deserves and earns no such interest. Except, of course, for the fact that Pat is really the Sexiest Man Alive, and all his craziness is just an outfit Bradley Cooper is putting on here to try to win awards.

Jennifer Lawrence, the star of *The Hunger Games*, stunningly beautiful and all of 22, once again proves herself one hell of an actress—she's so good, in fact, that she occasionally comes close to making some kind of sense out of Tiffany. But what's the use? All of a sudden, she's tricking Pat into becoming a ballroom dancer and entering a competition with her, which then becomes the subject of a high-stakes bet on which the future of Pat's family comes to center.

So what we have here is a gritty drama/romantic comedy/dance competition picture laced with sitcom elements. Robert De Niro is Pat's father, who's supposed to have some form of obsessive-compulsive disorder centering on the Philadelphia Eagles, but just seems like a nice guy who loves his boy.

The Australian actress Jacki Weaver every now and then throws out a punchline or two as Pat's put-upon mom. Then there's Chris Tucker, from the *Rush Hour* movies, playing Pat's racially diverse buddy from the loony bin. He's delightful, and I wonder where he's been, and I wish he'd be in more stuff.

The point is: There aren't three consecutive truthful seconds in *Silver Linings Playbook*—not in the setup, the characters, the setting, the relationships, or the plot developments. This is not a majority view. People claim to love *Silver Linings Playbook*. Critics have garlanded it, and it's won some end-of-year prizes.

Bah. Humbug. ♦

THE WEINSTEIN COMPANY

John Podhoretz, editor of Commentary, *is* The Weekly Standard*'s movie critic.*

She sat there, sunglasses on, not looking up from her *New York Times* as I entered.

"Where's my coffee? The prime minister's to be here any minute, I haven't had my coffee, and why is this disgusting plant still sitting in my office? Throw it out. No, burn it. And bring me my coffee."

"W-w-well," I stammered. She looked up.

"Who are you? Are you the ambassador? Are you the ambassador to the Court of St. James's? Because I could have sworn that was me. I could have sworn that I was the ambassador, and that you were just some pug-faced intern from the foreign office whose only reason for being at this moment—the only meaningful moment he will experience in a dreary and unfortunately long life—was to bring me a cup of hot coffee."

"W-w-well—"

"That's all. And dear God, is that a *teal* tie? *Teal? Really?* Are you here to sell me a Kia? Am I to buy an Isuzu from you, you petulant fetus? Take it off."

"Well—"

"Glad you finally mastered that word. Kudos. And yet, for some reason, I still see that putrid, moldering fern in the corner, and there is—let me doublecheck—there is *still* no cup of coffee in my hand and it is now six minutes past nine o'clock. What do you have to say for yourself? Nothing. No wonder I left this soggy pile of mud in the first place. Go get me my coffee before I cram you and your wrinkled suit back into the sardine can that birthed you, you simpering twit. And take off that tie. The prime minister's to be here any minute."

"I am the prime minister," I wanted to scream. "I am David Cameron!" But I dared not. As I left, feeling quite shell-shocked, I realized I had forgotten to ask how Ambassador Wintour took her coffee