the weekly Standard

APPALLING OBAMACARE
JEFFREY H. ANDERSON
MICHAEL ASTRUE • CHRISTOPHER J. CONOVER

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Fall Reading

. . . on Updike's stories, neon lights, World War II double agents, bird brains, Mars, forgotten presidents, J.F. Powers, slow reading, Greenwich Village, & more!

THIS IS A COMBINED ISSUE. THE NEXT ISSUE OF THE WEEKLY STANDARD WILL APPEAR IN TWO WEEKS.

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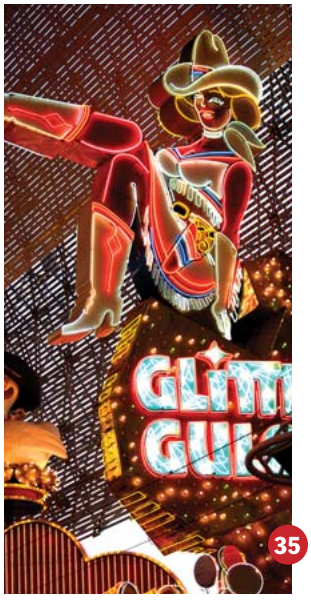


COVER: EMILY DICKINSON BY MARK SUMMERS

Fast and Furious—Still Infuriating

With the economy still cratered, a slew of foreign policy debacles, and a government shutdown, most Americans probably haven't thought much about the Fast and Furious scandal in recent months. The Scrapbook doesn't know what it says about the times we live in that the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms, and Explosives' homicidal negligence is all but forgotten a few years later, but we're pretty sure it isn't good.

The ATF is certainly doing everything it can to make sure that Americans don't revisit its inexplicable decision to give thousands of guns to Mexican gangs, resulting in the death of Border Patrol agent Brian Terry and dozens of Mexican nationals. Two years ago, ATF whistleblower John Dodson revealed the incompetence of the Fast and Furious operation, which led to the resignation of a number of top-ranking ATF officials. It also led to Eric Holder becoming the first attorney general in U.S. history to be held in contempt of Congress for stonewalling congressional investigators. To this day, the ATF and its overseers at the Justice Department have refused to provide the House Oversight Committee thousands of documents that would shed light on Fast and Furious and possibly prevent another such debacle from occurring.

Dodson has now written a book about the scandal and his role in bringing it to light. Surely, his story is worth telling. However, the ATF has denied Dodson the right to publish his book, using the excuse that the agency is allowed approval over "outside employment." As if to thoroughly burnish the ATF's deserved reputation for incompetence, here is the note the bureau sent Dodson denying his

John Dodson

request to publish his book, as quoted in the *Washington Post*: "This would have a negative impact on morale in the Phoenix [field division] and would have a detremental [sic] effect on our relationships with [the Drug Enforcement Administration] and FBI."

Well, it's good to know the ATF still has its priorities straight. It doesn't want to tell the family of Brian Terry the full circumstances behind his death, but they're concerned with maintaining morale among employees in a field office chiefly known for concocting the most incompetent sting operation in memory. And bear in mind this letter comes after the Justice Department leaked a document to the press in 2011 that brazenly tried to smear Dodson, suggesting falsely that the whistleblower had set up his own questionable sting operation involving guns. According to Senator Chuck Grassley, one of the authors of the 1989 Whistleblower Protection Act, the document appeared to be "a clear and intentional violation of the Privacy Act as well as an attempt at whistleblower retaliation."

The good news is that Dodson has some powerful friends and allies. Grassley and House Oversight Committee chairman Darrell Issa have both written introductions for the book, and both have decried the ATF's attempt to squash it. The ACLU has also weighed in, slamming the ATF's attempt to censor Dodson and the disregard for his "constitutional protections." Despite the ATF's petty and vindictive behavior, the American people need a full accounting of the Fast and Furious scandal. Dodson's book will go a long way towards that goal, and it should be published as soon as possible. ♦

Hoya, Hoya, Hoya

The Scrapbook has taken note of the federal government's political use of the shutdown: the National Park Service closing down popular attractions and open spaces, scare stories about medical research and air traffic safety, and so on. In the words of Rahm Emanuel, the onetime Obama White House senior aide, "You never want a serious crisis to go to waste."

The reductio ad absurdum of this trend, however, emerges from the private sector, where the School of Continuing Studies at Georgetown University, across town from the White House, has announced it is offering six free courses to furloughed federal workers. "We saw there was a need to really stay connected and engaged," Dean Walter Rankin told the *Washington Post*.

Really? It is estimated that more than half of the federal government is still operating at full speed, and a fair number of public employees seem to be engaged (at taxpayer expense, of course) in dramatizing the Democratic spin on the fiscal impasse: erecting ever-larger barricades, for example, to keep aging vet-

EPA / LANDOV

erans from visiting the World War II Memorial on the National Mall, among other "essential" tasks.

What most intrigues The Scrapbook about Georgetown's gesture, aside from its self-serving, publicity-seeking character, is the implication that a few days, even a couple of weeks, of vocational idleness requires emergency measures to "stay connected and engaged."

Does Georgetown think bureaucrats never take vacations, or that officially designated "non-essential" workers never get the flu and stay home? There have been 17 federal shutdowns since 1977, but we have no recollection of traumatic disconnection or disengagement—whatever those terms might mean—among furloughed workers.

Indeed, the only thing more preposterous than Georgetown's offer of free classes for furloughed bureaucrats is the classes themselves: "Ready, Set, Reset Your Social Strategy" is one, along with a health care course called "Patient Navigation," and (irony alert!) "Innovation and Leadership in Government." ♦

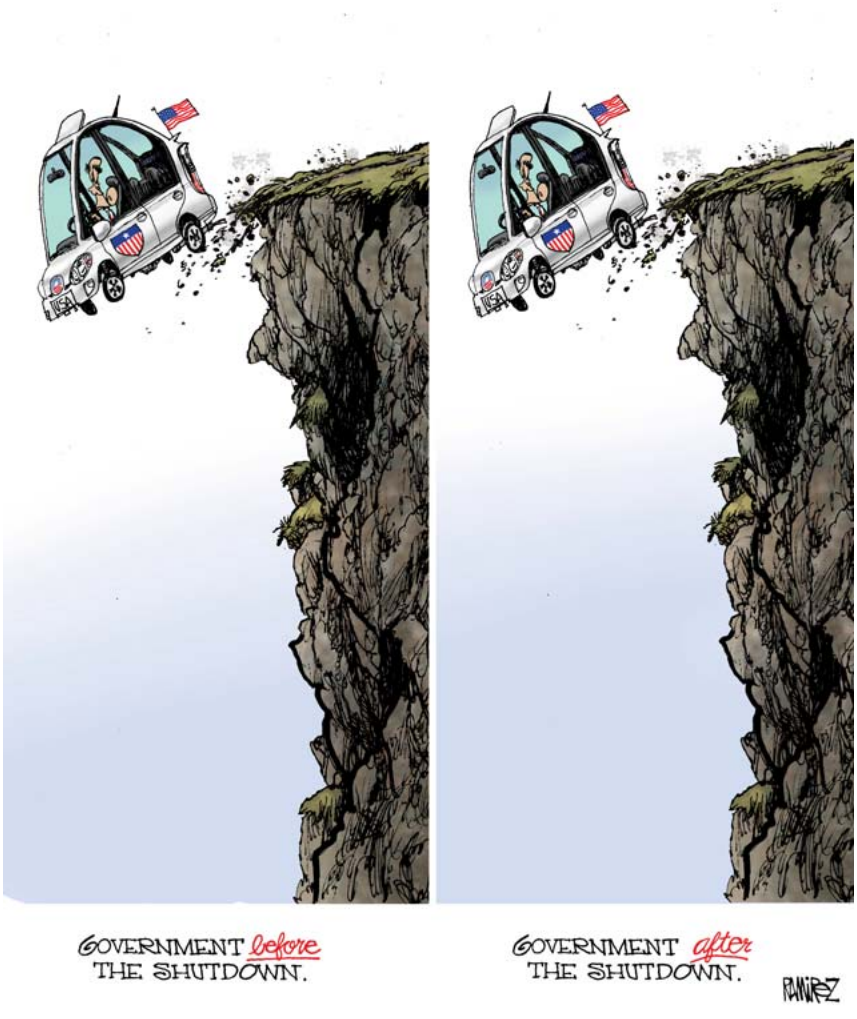
Department of Harassment

Last month, Angel Echevarria, an off-duty Department of Homeland Security official, was arrested in Florida for pulling his gun and shooting a car that allegedly cut him off on the highway. According to police, Echevarria had absolutely no legal authority to do this. The episode was a classic "road rage" incident, and Echevarria is lucky he didn't harm any of the passengers in the car, which included a 2-year-old child.

What's most infuriating about this story is that Echevarria's gun and badge should have been taken from him long before this latest incident occurred. In 2008, Echevarria changed lanes without looking and sideswiped Sean M. Davis in Northern Virginia. According to Davis and a photographer for the Associated Press who witnessed the event, Echevarria demanded Davis give him his name and insurance information but initially refused to identify himself. Davis balked when Echevarria refused to provide his own name, and at that point Echevarria flashed his gun and threatened Davis with arrest. Echevarria then went back to his car and abused his legal authority to run a criminal background check on Davis.

Soon after, Davis filed a long report on the incident with the DHS inspector general, detailing Echevarria's dangerous behavior. Davis never heard from DHS, so a few years later Davis filed a Freedom of Information Act request to see what had become of his complaint. Davis's FOIA request was denied on the grounds that it would reveal the identity of the person who initially filed the complaint. You read that right: DHS didn't want to release Sean M. Davis's personal information to Sean M. Davis. According to Davis, who wrote about the incident and his interactions with the DHS for the *Daily Caller* last year, he was later contacted by a private investigator who alleged Echevarria was misusing his authority to harass a client of the investigator.

Even after Echevarria nearly shot and killed someone in the road rage incident, DHS tried to cover up what happened. "Instead of turning himself in to Boca Police, Echevarria turned himself in to fellow federal agents who may have 'worked the



system' in a way to keep his arrest record hidden," reports BocaNewsNow.com, which had to file another FOIA request to get their hands on Echevarria's arrest record.

As it happens, Davis has worked for Texas governor Rick Perry and Oklahoma senator Tom Coburn. He was previously the CFO of the *Daily Caller* and currently writes for the *Federalist*. Davis, in short, has influential friends in politics and the media, and he knows how the arcane disciplinary system for federal employees is supposed to work. And still, Davis was unable to get DHS to do anything to even respond to his complaint, let alone rein in a rogue officer who would seem to have no business carrying a gun. If Davis can't get the DHS to respond, it's a safe bet that ordinary Americans don't have a chance at being heard. ♦

Vape 'em If You Got 'em

Last week in these pages, Ike Brannon noted that Europe is outstripping the United States in reducing the role of government in the economy ("Europe Leads the Way?" October 14). Now it seems that our European brethren are also taking a more sensible view of the regulatory state. The European parliament surprised observers by refusing to regulate electronic cigarettes as medical devices, which would have subjected them to onerous regulations.

As Ethan Epstein wrote in these pages a few months back ("Thank You for Not Vaping," August 5), e-cigarettes are a healthier alternative to traditional smokes, because "they don't contain many of cigarettes' most harmful substances, like carbon dioxide and tar." Studies have shown they are also useful as a quitting aid. Meanwhile, on this side of the pond, New York mayor Michael Bloomberg is pursuing what Michael Siegel of the Boston University School of Public Health, and a major expert on e-cigarettes, calls a "de facto ban" on the products.

The Scrapbook's Strange New Respect for Europe grows apace. ♦

Sentences We Didn't Finish

'Washington is a place where hundreds of children couldn't play soccer this past weekend; where cafeteria workers, janitors and secretaries aren't getting paid for who knows how long; where Metro trains and buses run empty; where shoeshine guys sit idle; and where Girl Scout troops had to cancel . . . " (Petula Dvorak, *Washington Post*, October 7). ♦

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Nostalgia Organized

A reunion marking the hundredth anniversary of the founding of my high school—Nicholas Senn, on the northside of Chicago—is to be held this month, and I shall not be attending it. I am one of those people who had a good run in high school. A minor athlete, a member of most of the school's better clubs, a boy who went out with pretty and pleasant girls, I had mastered the arts of conformity, and in high school they brought me much happiness. So much so that I sometimes think I may have peaked around the age of 17, and it's been slowly but relentlessly downhill since.

I went to my high school class's fiftieth reunion, which did not do much for me. I did, though, make one notable discovery: that some of the people who as kids were on the periphery of high school social life went on to have interesting lives as painters, drama teachers, entrepreneurs, while the most popular kids in the class tended to take up ordinary jobs, move out to okay Chicago suburbs, and hold unexceptionable views.

Members of the class were invited to send in a paragraph about their lives for our reunion book. Most people responded in an earnest way, expressing gratitude for their good luck in life, or remarking on how much they were enjoying their retirement, or mentioning their eagerness to see old classmates. One woman announced that, after marriage and children now grown up, she has been spending the second half of her life in a lesbian partnership. A more standard entry, though, might report that the classmate and her husband "enjoy golf, bridge, photography, and traveling," and end, "We have seven lovely grandchildren, and next year we're planning a trip to Indonesia."

My entry read: "I've written a few books. For 30 years I taught in the English Department at Northwestern University, and remain on the football team coaching staff there, working exclusively with Jewish wide receivers, which leaves me lots of free time for my writing. I've no complaints at present, but am confident something will turn up soon."

DARREN GYGI

An Italian restaurant on the outskirts of the Loop was the scene of our fiftieth high school class reunion. When I walked into the restaurant, I immediately hit a wall of disorientation. Just who were all these fat bald guys, these white-haired women? Did I actually once have rivalrous feelings toward some of these paunchy men, harbor adolescent fantasies about some of these grandmotherly women?

Roughly 400 attended the reunion. Dance music from our high school days blared. A few people stood at a microphone to utter cliché-laden remarks. Nobody noted what a fortunate generation we were. Born in the late 1930s, we missed the Depression, and the men among us, though subject to the draft, did not have to go off to any wars, being too young for Korea and too old for Vietnam. We lived through decades of unbroken prosperity in the most powerful and culturally interesting nation in the world. We have strong memories of American life before the center ceased to hold, which has given some of us a touch of perspective on the dizzying changes that technology and our radically altered social mores have wrought.

At such functions one can either table hop or let others hop to one's own table. I chose the latter. A few old friends, some from grammar-school days, came up to say hello, briefly filling me in on their lives over the past half-century, then wafted off, probably never to be met again in this life. Two women I much liked when they were girls, both named Roberta (shortened, in the fashion of the day, to Bobby), came up to tell me that they enjoyed my books of short stories. I was pleased to see how still recognizably themselves they looked, how little time seemed to lay a glove on them. In the crowded, noisy room, I tried to identify faces, to rediscover the boys and girls in the now often overly ripened faces of people milling about. At evening's end, I returned home with a melancholy sense of disappointment.

"The future," noted Paul Valéry, "isn't what it used to be." Neither, one might add, is the past. I enjoy a warm bath of nostalgia as much as the next person. But I prefer my nostalgia spontaneous, not organized and crudely sentimentalized, which is what school reunions tend to do to it. The sociologist Robert Nisbet called nostalgia "the rust of memory," and so it often is. School reunions, though, tend to sand down and shellac memory, which is even worse.

I may one day change my mind about all this and decide to attend my hundred-and-fiftieth high school reunion, but between now and then, thank you all the same, no further reunions for me.

Joseph Epstein

the weekly Standard

The Park Police

"We are a nation that has a government—not the other way around."
—Ronald Reagan

The conduct of the National Park Service over the last week might be the biggest scandal of the Obama administration. This is an expansive claim, of course. Benghazi, Fast and Furious, the IRS, the NSA, the HHS mandate—this is an administration that has not lacked for appalling abuses of power. And we still have three years to go.

Even so, consider the actions of the National Park Service since the government shutdown began. People first noticed what the NPS was up to when the World War II Memorial on the National Mall was "closed." Just to be clear, the memorial is an open plaza. There is nothing to operate. Sometimes there might be a ranger standing around. But he's not collecting tickets or opening gates. Putting up barricades and posting guards to "close" the World War II Memorial takes more resources and manpower than "keeping it open."

The closure of the World War II Memorial was just the start of the NPS's partisan assault on the citizenry. There's a cute little historic site just outside of the capital in McLean, Virginia, called the Claude Moore Colonial Farm. They do historical reenactments, and once upon a time the National Park Service helped run the place. But in 1980, the NPS cut the farm out of its budget. A group of private citizens set up an endowment to take care of the farm's expenses. Ever since, the site has operated independently through a combination of private donations and volunteer workers.

The Park Service told Claude Moore Colonial Farm to shut down.

The farm's administrators appealed this directive—they explained that the Park Service doesn't actually *do anything* for the historic site. The folks at the NPS were unmoved. And so, last week, the National Park Service found the scratch to send officers to the park to forcibly remove both volunteer workers and visitors.

Think about that for a minute. The Park Service, which is supposed to *serve* the public by administering parks, is now in the business of *forcing parks they don't administer to close.* As Homer Simpson famously asked, did we lose a war?

We're not done yet. Parking at Mount Vernon was closed by the NPS, too, even though the Park Service does not own Mount Vernon; it just controls access to the parking lots from the George Washington Parkway. At the Vietnam Memorial—which is just a wall you walk past—the NPS called in police to block access. But the *pièce de résistance* occurred in South Dakota. The Park Service wasn't content just to close Mount Rushmore. No, they went the extra mile and put out orange cones to block the little scenic overlook areas on the roads *near* Mount Rushmore. You know, just to make sure no taxpayers could catch a glimpse of it.

It's one thing for politicians to play shutdown theater. It's another thing entirely for a civil bureaucracy entrusted with the privilege of caring for our national heritage to wage war against the citizenry on behalf of a political party.

This is how deep the politicization of Barack Obama's administration goes. The Park Service falls under the Department of the Interior, and its director is a political appointee. Historically, the directorship has been nonpartisan and the service has functioned as a civil, not a political, unit. Before the current director, Jonathan Jarvis, was nominated by President Obama, he'd spent 30 years as a civil servant. But he has taken to his political duties with all the fervor of a third-tier hack from the DNC, marrying the disinterested contempt of a meter maid with the zeal of an ambitious party apparatchik.

It's worth recalling that the Park Service has always been deeply ambivalent about the public which they're charged with serving. In a 2005 Weekly Standard piece about the NPS's plan to reconfigure the National Mall, Andrew Ferguson reported:

> The Park Service's ultimate desire was made public, indiscreetly, by John Parsons, associate regional park director for the mall. In 2000 Parsons told the *Washington Post* he hoped that eventually all unauthorized traffic, whether by foot or private car, would be moved off the mall. Visitors could park in distant satellite lots and be bused to nodal points, where they would be watered and fed, allowed to tour a monument, and then reboard a bus and head for another monument. "Just like at Disneyland," Parsons told the *Post*. "Nobody drives through Disneyland. They're not allowed. And we've got the better theme park."

Yes, yes. They must protect America's treasures from the ugly Americans. No surprise then that one park ranger explained to the *Washington Times* last week, "We've been told to make life as difficult for people as we can."

"To make life as difficult for people as we can"—that would be an apt motto for the Obama worldview. And now even the misanthropes at the National Park Service have been yoked to his project. This is the clearest example yet of how the president understands the relationship between his government and the citizenry.

—Jonathan V. Last

Who's Extreme?

Earlier this month, California congressman George Miller took to the floor of the House of Representatives and, in a vitriolic speech, shouted that the Republicans were shutting down the government because of a "jihad" against Obamacare. Miller is a far-left liberal, but he is no backbencher. A 38-year veteran of the House, he is the ranking member of the Committee on Education and the Workforce, serving as its chairman during the efforts to pass Obamacare. His comments are not far out of the mainstream of liberal rhetoric on the shutdown, either, with Democratic politicians and leftist opinion writers using words like "terrorists," "arsonists," and "anarchists."

In the age of Obama, a go-to liberal complaint about conservatives is that they have some sort of mental illness. The president himself once suggested as much, saying that the bitterness of small-town residents is what keeps them from embracing his policies. But this recent line of attack suggests rational behavior—and seditious behavior. Conservatives, so the new liberal logic goes, hate the government so passionately they want to burn it down. We don't send people like that to the loony bin; we send them to jail.

Two hundred fifteen years ago, the Federalists thought much the same of their Jeffersonian opponents. And they had the courage of their convictions: Genuinely believing that the Jeffersonians threatened the government, the Federalists outlawed their political activities via the Sedition Act. Since Rep. Miller, the talking heads on MSNBC, and the opinion writers at the *New York Times* have so far not called for a reconsideration of the Sedition Act, it seems that today's talk from the left is merely that.

History certainly argues against the Republicans-as-criminals meme. After all, partial government shutdowns (and this one has only closed about 17 percent of the federal government, measured by expenditures) have not been an uncommon occurrence in modern times. Shutting down the government over Obamacare is not outside the realm of historical precedent, either. Though its expenditures mostly happen off-budget, the budget debate in this country is implicitly universal. Everything is up for grabs. As for the debt ceiling, that has also been a political football over the years. Voting to raise the debt ceiling is a tough vote for a congressman because it is difficult to explain to the constituents back home. Unsurprisingly, politicians have often extracted concessions for debt ceiling increases, or simply rolled them into omnibus budget packages.

So this talk is just hyperbole from Democrats. The Internal Revenue Service might be scrutinizing Republican tax returns a little more closely, but John Boehner, Mitch McConnell, and Paul Ryan are not going to be busted for RICO violations anytime soon. Rather, the Democrats' rhetorical goal is, as always, the mobilization of bias: to identify conservatism as outside the mainstream of American society, not worthy of serious consideration by serious people. When Republicans are out of power, merely complaining about liberal policy, "crazy" is sufficient. Now that they are partially in charge, the rhetoric must be ratcheted up accordingly.

How should Republicans respond? One answer is: Turn the tables by arguing that Obamacare is the truly radical innovation in the American body politic.

Republicans have been arguing a version of this for a while, but with limited success. Usually, they emphasize Obamacare's takeover of upwards of 20 percent of the economy, the choices taken away from patients and doctors and given to bureaucrats, and so on. It's all true, but Democrats have some easy retorts: The law is based on Mitt Romney's health care law; it promotes a marketplace and therefore competition; it promotes individual responsibility.

What we have now is a kind of rhetorical stalemate: Obamacare remains decisively unpopular, but the public has not taken action to get rid of it and does not support Republican efforts to do so.

The GOP must think harder about just how radical Obamacare really is, remembering Harold Lasswell's definition of politics: who gets what, when, and how.

For 80 years, American politics has centered around two goals: growing the economy, and ensuring that the surplus generated by growth is spread to all sectors of society. They have defined the boundaries of our two-party conflict, with both sides "merely" disagreeing about the best approach to accomplish these shared goals. There has long been one crucial sub-point of agreement: Government never takes anything from the middle class; government either gives to it or leaves it unaffected. Naturally, the two sides bicker, accusing one another of violating this norm, but it is a sign of the centrality of the custom that redistribution never takes from the center.

Until now. Obamacare creates a vast array of winners and losers. Plenty of public policies have done so over the years, but Obamacare is unique in that its losers come almost entirely from the middle class. All across the country, middle-class families are receiving letters from insurance providers telling them their rates are going up, dramatically so. This sets Obamacare apart from most other social welfare programs, especially Medicare and Social Security, whose benefits are universal. It's "radical" in the sense that it departs from the shared norm that has governed public policy for generations. Democrats are speaking hyperbolically about Republicans violating the rules of the game, but in passing Obamacare, the Democrats have done precisely that.

Talking about limited government, the virtues of competition, and personal decision-making is all well and good. But it has not been enough to induce the public to action. If

Republicans hope to win this battle, they need to turn the rhetorical tables on the Democrats. They need to show the public that Obamacare—rather than their own efforts to undo it—is actually the radical innovation.

—Jay Cost

No Mandate

Contrary to many pundits' expectations, congressional Republicans seem to have zigzagged their way to a reasonable position in the ongoing budget battles. To be sure, their clumsy manner of getting there has helped to obscure this conclusion. Nevertheless, the GOP has the better argument in the battles over funding the federal government and raising the debt limit.

Perhaps the strongest testament to this is the dogged determination of the Obama administration and congressional Democrats to misrepresent the Republican position. Treasury Secretary Jack Lew alleges that Republicans have offered "this ridiculous choice where either you repeal the Affordable Care Act"—i.e., Obamacare—"or you shut down the government or default on the United States." House minority leader Nancy Pelosi says that while President Obama has been "extending the hand of friendship over and over," ungrateful Republicans have responded by saying that "we will only open [the] government if you eliminate the Affordable Care Act." Senator Chuck Schumer claims that House speaker John "Boehner said on TV . . . 'Repeal Obamacare or we're not dealing with the debt ceiling.'"

In fact, Boehner said nothing of the sort. House Republicans are not making a budget deal (or a debt-limit increase) contingent on repealing Obamacare. They are not making it contingent on defunding Obamacare. They are not even making it contingent on delaying all of Obamacare. Rather, they are making it contingent upon delaying, for one year, the unpopular individual mandate—and eliminating the lawless Obamacare congressional carve-out. House Republicans passed legislation that would fund the government under those conditions, and they did so before the shutdown.

One can understand why the Obama administration doesn't want the Republicans' actual position to come to light. For the more that the American people understand what the Republican position actually is, the more likely they are to side with the GOP in this standoff. That, in turn, means it's important for Republicans to emphasize their position more consistently and assertively than they have to date.

Of all of the unpopular aspects of the 2,700-page behemoth that is Obamacare, the individual mandate has long been the most hated. Set to kick off on January 1 (Happy

New Year!), the individual mandate commands Americans, for the first time in the country's history, to buy a product or service of the federal government's choosing, merely as a condition of living in the United States. The Democrats claimed that their unprecedented mandate was constitutional under Congress's power to regulate interstate commerce—a claim that would have transformed that clause into a power to *compel* commerce. The Supreme Court rejected that argument. The mandate survived only because the Court ruled—in a 5-4 vote—that the mandate could be construed as a novel tax of sorts (which Obama had emphatically denied that it was) and could therefore be upheld under Congress's taxing power. Mitt Romney—who once famously said, "I like mandates"—didn't press the issue during the presidential campaign. But the mandate is now back in the public eye, and the public appears to loathe it as much as ever. For the individual mandate is the aspect of Obamacare that makes its architecture of coercion most evident to ordinary Americans.

If the looming implementation of the individual mandate weren't already objectionable enough, Obama announced on the cusp of the July 4 weekend—via an underling's blog post—that he was delaying Obamacare's employer mandate for a year. Obama had no legal authority to do this, yet he did it anyway. House Republicans responded by passing a bill to delay the individual mandate—lawfully—and were joined by 22 Democrats. The bill passed by a margin of 77 votes, or 70 more than the margin by which House Democrats passed Obamacare. But Majority Leader Harry Reid has refused to bring the bill to the Senate floor, and Obama has said he'd veto it.

Obama then pushed the Office of Personnel Management to carve out an exception to Obamacare for the benefit of congressional members and their staffs. Under this exception—a lawless departure from Obamacare's written text—those in Congress will be the only Americans who will get to use employer health care contributions to buy insurance through Obamacare's regular exchanges. Staffers making in excess of $150,000 will thus get their Obamacare-based insurance subsidized by taxpayers, while (according to Kaiser Health's Obamacare calculator) a typical 30-year-old making $35,000 in, say, Ohio, won't get a penny's worth of subsidies. (Of course, that 30-year-old could always rectify this by going to work on Capitol Hill.)

In response to these Obama-initiated developments, Republicans passed legislation on September 30 that would fund the federal government in the new fiscal year, delay the individual mandate for a year, and end the illegal congressional carve-out. Senate Democrats and Obama have subsequently refused to negotiate, and Obama insists he "will not negotiate" over the debt ceiling.

In the meantime, the Obamacare exchanges opened on October 1 with an embarrassing clunk. So the Democrats are requiring Americans to buy insurance that the Obama administration isn't prepared to sell.

Polling by Rasmussen Reports indicates that Americans favor a delay of Obamacare's individual mandate by 56 to 26 percent. A poll conducted by GEB International for Independent Women's Voice says that Americans oppose preferential treatment for Congress under Obamacare by 94 to 4 percent. Meanwhile, CBS polling shows that only 23 percent of Americans agree with Obama that the debt ceiling should be "raised without conditions," while 75 percent think it should either be raised in connection with spending cuts or else not raised at all.

In light of all this, why won't Obama and the Democrats go along with the Republicans' rather moderate proposal, or at least negotiate in response to it? The answer is that much of Obamacare cannot function without the individual mandate—its coercive core. Accordingly, Obama and his fellow Democrats think that even a one-year delay would be too dangerous—because it might open the door to further delays, and to further questioning of the whole structure of Obamacare.

The administration has been clear about this in the past. Here's what Stephanie Cutter once wrote on the White House blog:

> The Affordable Care Act . . . bans insurance companies from discriminating against people with pre-existing conditions. However, unless every American is required to have insurance, it would be cost prohibitive to cover people with pre-existing conditions.
>
> Here's why: If insurance companies can no longer deny coverage to anyone who applies for insurance—especially those who have health problems and are potentially more expensive to cover—then there is nothing stopping someone from waiting until they're sick or injured to apply for coverage since insurance companies can't say no. That would lead to double digit premiums increases—up to 20%—for everyone with insurance, and would significantly increase the cost [of] health care spending nationwide. We don't let people wait until after they've been in a car accident to apply for auto insurance and get reimbursed, and we don't want to do that with healthcare. If we're going to outlaw discrimination based on pre-existing conditions, the only way to keep people from gaming the system and raising costs on everyone else is to ensure that everyone takes responsibility for their own health insurance.

In other words, the individual mandate is one piece of Obamacare that can't be removed. Without it—by the administration's own admission—Obamacare would become "cost prohibitive."

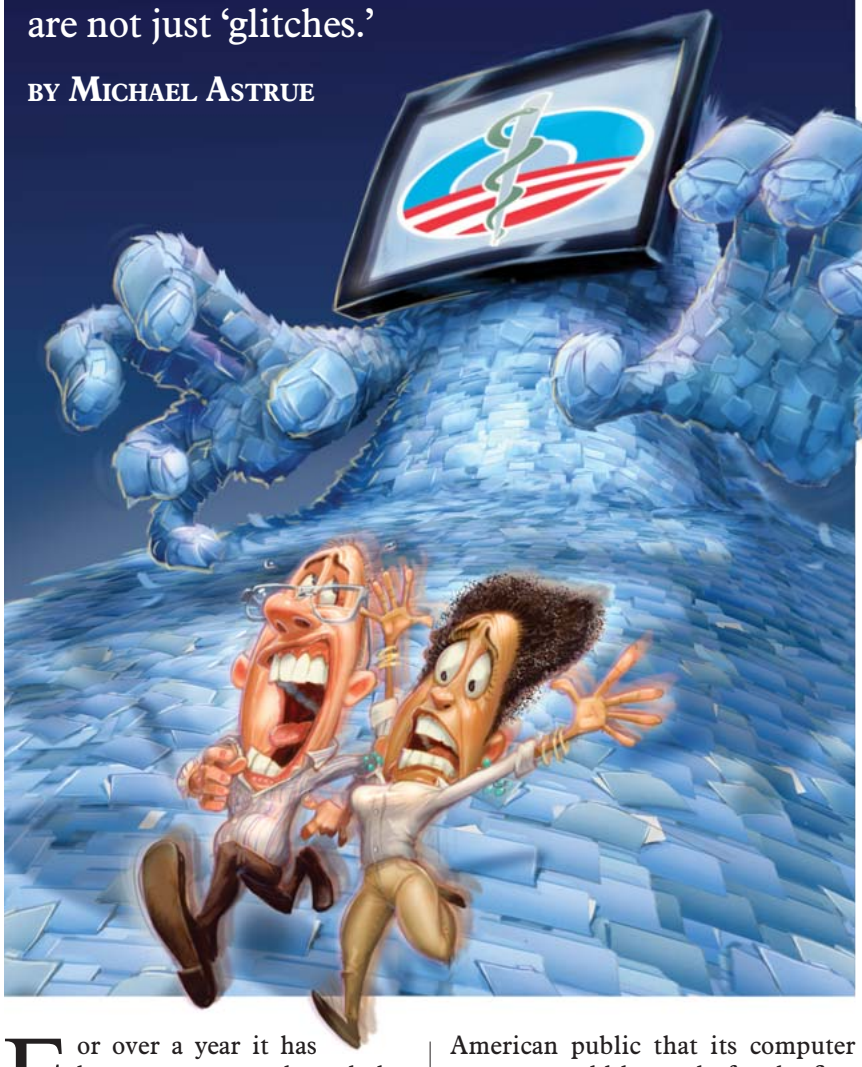
This means Americans ultimately have two choices: learn to live with the unprecedented mandate, or repeal Obamacare. The individual mandate is Obamacare's cornerstone, and Obama is desperate to put it in place. That's why Republicans should keep pushing as hard as they can to fend it off.

—Jeffrey H. Anderson

An Inauspicious Debut

The health exchange meltdowns are not just 'glitches.'

BY MICHAEL ASTRUE



GARY LOCKE

For over a year it has been common knowledge within the Obama administration that the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) could not launch its network of health exchanges for the Affordable Care Act in a minimally acceptable way. That knowledge did not stop the HHS publicity machine from constantly assuring the American public that its computer systems would be ready for the first enrollment period. That knowledge did not stop carefully scripted HHS employees and contractors from making similar false assurances to two House committees just weeks before the botched October 1 launch.

As the HHS day of reckoning approached, the publicity machine shifted gears and began acknowledging the likelihood of "glitches," a brilliant rhetorical technique designed to dismiss all HHS failures as minor and fixable. President Obama echoed this "glitches" theme, and it worked. A mesmerized *USA Today*, for one, characterized the catastrophic October 1 breakdowns as "glitches" despite ample evidence of meltdowns in the HHS systems. Nobody in Hawaii could access prices for the plans; North Carolina recorded only one policy purchase. The launch has even interfered with the Massachusetts exchange, which functioned well for years prior to being integrated into the HHS systems. The federal exchange was inaccessible for much of the week, and was taken out of service the first weekend for repairs.

The new HHS talking points assert that the department will quickly fix last week's failures. Many in Congress and the media are parroting those points, even though almost every prediction HHS has made to date about the exchanges has turned out to be untrue. Its newest assurances are untrue as well.

The department will surely ameliorate some problems in the coming months simply by buying additional capacity and fixing sloppy code. More enduring problems, however, will continue to plague HHS.

HHS blundered when it allowed states to rely on self-attestation to verify eligibility for public subsidies in states that built their own exchanges. Experience with the Earned Income Tax Credit and other programs strongly suggests that in states that rely on self-attestation a high percentage of those who receive subsidies—probably 20-25 percent—will be ineligible. HHS has refused to explain how it will recoup payments from ineligible recipients. The official responsible for preventing this waste, fraud, and abuse, the HHS inspector general, has been silent about this problem as well.

HHS also blundered when it built its computer system in violation of the Privacy Act. In short, if you enroll in a health plan through an exchange, family members and recent ex-spouses can access the system and change your coverage without the legally required

Michael Astrue served as HHS general counsel (1989-92) and commissioner of Social Security (2007-13).

written permission. Traditional consumer and privacy advocates, such as Public Citizen and the American Civil Liberties Union, have taken a dive on this issue, and again the HHS inspector general has remained silent.

HHS opened the door to large-scale fraud by providing funding for tens of thousands of "navigators"—people who are supposed to persuade the uninsured to apply for coverage and then assist them in the application process. Instead of hiring well-screened, well-trained, and well-supervised workers, HHS decided to build political support for the Affordable Care Act by pouring money into supportive organizations so they could launch poorly trained workers into their communities without obtaining criminal background checks or creating systems for monitoring their activities.

As a practical matter, these navigators are unaccountable, and yet they will be asking people for Social Security numbers and other sensitive information. It will not take long for navigators to become predators, and HHS has no plan to deal with the new breed of predators it is creating. The somnolent HHS inspector general has been silent about this scheme that will inflict widespread fraud and identity theft on vulnerable Americans.

Finally, we should all remember that the Minnesota exchange illegally disclosed the Social Security numbers of 2,400 of its state's citizens 18 days *before* its exchange opened for business. With HHS's convoluted patchwork of contractors, including the data centers of "the cloud," tens of thousands of people have now gained access to our personal data. The churning of marginal employees through the lowest bidders of "the cloud" particularly increases the risk of massive disclosures like those that Edward Snowden recently inflicted on the intelligence community and Bradley Manning inflicted on the military. Our greatest vulnerability may not be the hardware or the software, but the integrity of the contractors who use these tools. With regard to this issue, the HHS inspector general has once again maintained his unblemished record of inertia and silence.

You will be told many times in the coming months that continuing computer issues are mere "glitches." Instead, failures of the exchanges will be common and serious. These failures will wreck the lives of many Americans when their identities are stolen by hackers or navigators, or their Social Security numbers are inadvertently disclosed by an unaccountable Affordable Care Act bureaucracy. When you hear assurances about "glitches," remember that their purpose is to mislead. ♦

The Persian Gulf Power Vacuum

America's Middle East allies are getting nervous.

BY LEE SMITH

Despite the administration's hype of President Obama's "historic" 15-minute phone call with the ostensibly moderate Iranian president Hassan Rouhani, the looming prospect of direct engagement with the regime in Tehran over its nuclear weapons program, and all the other symptoms of Rouhani fever gripping Washington, the White House says it won't be suckered by the Iranians. American allies aren't buying it.

Israeli prime minister Benjamin Netanyahu made his skepticism public in his speech before the U.N. General Assembly two weeks ago, when he argued that the way to deal with the Iranians and their nuclear program is to "distrust, dismantle, and verify." America's allies in the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC)—Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates, Kuwait, Bahrain, Qatar, and Oman—are playing it closer to their vests than the Israelis, sharing their grievances with the administration in much less public settings. They are, after all, just across the Persian Gulf from Iran.

"There are no public statements from the GCC states detailing their position," Tariq al-Homayed, a columnist for *Asharq al-Awsat*, the Saudi-owned London-based pan-Arab daily, told me. "GCC officials are all very diplomatic, but when you talk to some of them, they say it clearly. They see the administration's approach to Iran in light of its confusing Syria policy. I asked one senior GCC official what he thought about Obama's Syria policy and he responded, 'What day is it today, what hour? Because in half an hour the White House will have another position.' With Iran, they're worried about the administration falling into the [Tehran] regime's game, and they're watching it very nervously." The prospect that Obama is taking Khamenei's supposed *fatwa* against nuclear weapons seriously is patently absurd to Iran's Arab neighbors.

American allies in the Middle East do not trust the Obama administration, but, says Brookings Institution scholar Michael Doran, "they are restrained in expressing it openly. Their fear is that if they show publicly how much they distrust the White House, they are likely to get even less of what they want. So whatever criticism we are hearing publicly, raise that to the power of 10 and you get a sense of where our allies are."

Behind the scenes, the GCC is preparing for the possibility that, after 70 years of dominance, America may be bowing out of the Persian Gulf. The

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Arabs, like many Israeli officials, now assume that the United States is withdrawing from the region, at least for the time being, and perhaps permanently. Some Gulf states are taking matters into their own hands. "The idea is that we did it with Egypt," explains Homayed, referring to the support and money the GCC states poured into Cairo after General Abdel Fattah al-Sisi overthrew Mohamed Morsi while the White House declined to stake out a position. "So why wait for Obama with Syria?" says Homayed.

Indeed, since taking over the Saudi National Security Council, Riyadh's former ambassador to Washington Prince Bandar bin Sultan has been eager to assert Saudi interests. With the White House leaving a vacuum in Syria, Bandar has wrested control of the rebel forces from Qatar and lined up the UAE and Jordan as useful allies. This is precisely the sort of alliance building that, up until now, had been the role of the United States.

If some in the administration, including the president, believe that these are positive developments, that it's high time the Arabs learned to pull their own weight, the reality is the Arabs know they can't go it alone, and so should the White House. The GCC could manage Egypt, as Homayed says, and is making a go of it in Syria, but with Iran it needs the United States. Without Washington, the Arabs are looking to hedge their bets. For instance, sources say that Kuwait has socked away several billion dollars as a future gift to ingratiate itself with either Iran or Russia, depending on who winds up winning the regional sweepstakes now that the White House doesn't want to play.

Even Bandar seems to understand that there is a limit to what the Arabs can do on their own. His much-publicized recent visit to Moscow, where he offered to buy $15 billion worth of Russian arms if only Vladimir Putin would scale back his support for Syrian president Bashar al-Assad, was meant largely to get Obama's attention. The Saudis recognize that even if Putin has managed to enhance his position at Obama's expense, he doesn't have the capacity, or the blue-water navy, to replace the United States. Moreover, with Russia helping advance Iranian interests in Syria, it is not likely to work against Tehran, and on behalf of Saudi interests, in the Persian Gulf.

The GCC states also recognize who else sees the region the way they do—Israel. When Netanyahu announced in his U.N. speech that if Israel has to stand alone to prevent a nuclear Iran, "we will be defending many, many others," he was referring to, among others, the GCC. Relations between Israel and the Gulf Arab states, especially Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates, have never been warmer, with key, albeit unnamed, Arab officials reportedly visiting Jerusalem for high-level consultations on Iran. "Israel," says Homayed, "is the most important player in the Middle East right now regarding Iran. They are capable of convincing Congress, and if anyone can convince Obama, it's Israel. They drew the red line on Iran, and that makes everyone in the region happy."

This strategic convergence has been a long time in the making. Dore Gold, president of the Jerusalem Center for Public Affairs and Israel's former ambassador to the U.N., explains that Israel and GCC relations need to be seen in a larger context. "Going back to the late 1990s, Saudi Arabia was the primary funder of Hamas," says Gold. "Thirty years earlier, Saudi Arabia had provided sanctuary for Muslim Brotherhood members fleeing from Egypt and Syria. But by 2005, Iran had replaced Saudi Arabia as the primary funder of Hamas, and leading members of the royal family, like Prince Nayef, repudiated the Muslim Brotherhood. This represented a huge shift in Saudi policy, which narrowed the degree of conflict it had with Israel."

As the Iranian threat became even more apparent, Gold explains, Israeli and Arab interests further converged. "The GCC countries face a situation very similar to Israel," says Gold, whose scholarly work has focused on Saudi Arabia. "Israel is encircled by Iranian-supported insurgencies—Hezbollah to the north, and Hamas to the south. In comparison, the GCC faces an Iranian-backed insurgency in Yemen, an Iranian-backed Shia government running Saudi Arabia's northern neighbor Iraq, while Bahrain's opposition is supported by Tehran, an arrangement that has implications for the Shia community in Saudi Arabia's eastern province."

The 2006 war between Israel and Hezbollah, says Gold, marked an important turning point. "While large parts of the Muslim Brotherhood fervently supported Hezbollah, the Gulf states were either silent or opposed to what Hezbollah was doing."

If some wags joke that Obama's legacy in the Middle East will be to have driven Israel and the GCC into each other's arms, the reality is that it's not clear how durable this relationship can be. After all, the much-heralded strategic alliance between Turkey and Israel that was forged in the '90s on the basis of military and security ties proved more fragile than was hoped, crashed by Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan's ambition to lead the region.

To be sure, as Homayed explains, "the Israeli position and Arab position is one—Iran cannot be allowed to have a nuclear weapon." But it's not clear what that means in practice. Even Homayed acknowledges that while Israel is the most important actor in the region right now, it still needs the White House on its side against Iran. Jerusalem's significance, from his perspective, is that only Israel has the ability to make its case to Congress and the president—like the Arabs, Israel can't do it alone.

"There are real limits to how far the GCC-Israel relationship can go," says Doran, who was Middle East director in the George W. Bush White House. There are cultural limits as well as operational ones. "Saudi textbooks are filled with anti-Semitic material," says Doran. "Whatever coordination that might exist must be clandestine because if it were in the open, Riyadh would come under attack regionally and domestically for making common cause with a people typically described as enemies of Islam." Further, asks Doran, "what does cooperation look

like? What can the Saudis give the Israelis that they don't have already?"

Aside from perhaps granting Israeli jets tacit overflight rights on their way to strike Iranian nuclear facilities, and maybe money for various clandestine projects, it's not obvious that the Saudis have anything Israel really needs. What Jerusalem wants above all, short of a U.S. strike on Iran's nuclear facilities, is the sort of political and diplomatic clout that only Washington can muster. However, by holding Rouhani in a close embrace as his partner in resolving the nuclear issue, Obama has effectively erected an antimissile defense system around Iran's nuclear facilities. If Netanyahu gives the order to go, Israel isn't just going without the United States, it's also undermining an Obama priority.

Sure, it would be a bonus to have quiet support from the GCC in the event of a strike. But what happens after that? These two American allies have been forced together by a reality that hasn't quite sunk in yet. A superpower they've counted on for decades has gone missing, perhaps never to return. ♦

Why Is Ali Harzi Still at Large?

From Benghazi to Tunis.

BY THOMAS JOSCELYN

During a press conference on July 26, Tunisian interior minister Lotfi Ben Jeddou listed the suspected terrorists thought to be responsible for two high-profile assassinations in his country. Among the names was one Ali Harzi—the same name as one of the chief suspects in the September 11, 2012, terrorist attack on a U.S. diplomatic mission in Benghazi, Libya. On September 12 of this year, *Al Jazeera* connected the dots in a piece titled "The Benghazi link to Tunisia's assassinations."

Ali Harzi

Early on in the Benghazi investigation, as first reported by the *Daily Beast*, Ali Harzi became one of the most wanted suspects because he "posted an update on social media about the fighting shortly after it had begun." U.S. officials tracked him down in Turkey, where he was apprehended and deported to his native Tunisia in October 2012.

The FBI was finally allowed to question Harzi two months later, in December, but for only three hours. Harzi was released the following month, on January 7, 2013, when a Tunisian judge ordered him freed owing to a supposed lack of evidence.

Just weeks later, on February 6, a left-wing Tunisian politician named Chokri Belaid was assassinated. Ali Harzi was directly involved, according to Tunisian officials. On July 25, another popular politician, Mohamed Brahmi, was killed. The following day the Tunisians said that Harzi was involved in Brahmi's slaying, too.

Ali Harzi's story is emblematic of the U.S. government's many failures in the wake of the attack in Benghazi. Although he was one of the only suspects in custody, his release, as even *Al Jazeera* noticed, "provoked a muted response from Washington."

In late January, shortly before Belaid was killed, then-secretary of state Hillary Clinton told senators that the Tunisians had "assured" the United States that Harzi was "under the monitoring of the court." In February, during his confirmation process to become CIA director, John Brennan went so far as to claim that Harzi's release was, in effect, no big deal because the U.S. government "didn't have anything on him." Brennan's claim is simply implausible. The United States certainly does have intelligence on Harzi, even if it couldn't be presented in a court of law.

The U.S. government has struggled to explain what happened in Benghazi, but the more closely one looks at the players the more obvious the al Qaeda ties become.

The Tunisian government says that the head of Ansar al-Sharia Tunisia, Seifallah ben Hassine (aka Abu Iyad al-Tunisi), personally ordered the slayings of the two popular politicians.

Ansar al-Sharia has not hidden its relationship with Harzi, who was previously identified in press reporting as a member of the group. In December 2012, the group posted a video online of a lawyer complaining about Harzi's brief detention. Ansar al-Sharia added its own criticisms of the Ennahda-led government. Then, Hassine's group stalked the three FBI agents who were sent to Tunis to question Harzi, posting the agents' pictures online and again lashing out at Ennahda. And when Harzi was released from prison in January, Ansar al-Sharia Tunisia members were waiting to greet him, posting a celebratory video of their newly freed comrade online.

Not only are Harzi's ties to Ansar al-Sharia obvious, so are Ansar al-Sharia's ties to al Qaeda.

Seifallah ben Hassine is a well-known terrorist with ties to al Qaeda's senior leadership. In 2000, he cofounded the Tunisian Combatant Group (TCG) "in coordination with" al Qaeda, according to the U.N. The TCG acted as an arm of al Qaeda in Europe and also helped execute the September 9, 2001, assassination of Northern Alliance commander Ahmed Shah Massoud. The killing of Massoud was

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an integral part of al Qaeda's September 11 plot, as it removed a key enemy of the Taliban from the battlefield.

Hassine was released from prison following the Tunisian revolution, and he quickly moved to establish Ansar al-Sharia. He has not hidden his affinity for al Qaeda. Hassine eulogized Osama bin Laden after the al Qaeda master was killed in May 2011. He and other Ansar al-Sharia members have repeatedly praised al Qaeda, and his organization's social media pages are littered with pro-al Qaeda propaganda. Al Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM) has, in turn, openly praised Ansar al-Sharia, and Tunisian authorities have repeatedly said the two groups are closely linked.

In September, Ansar al-Sharia Tunisia released a statement saying it has been loyal to al Qaeda and the global jihad "from the first day and we are not ashamed to renew today our declaration with a louder voice."

Other Ansar al-Sharia leaders also have well-established al Qaeda pedigrees. One, a U.N.- and U.S.-designated terrorist named Sami Ben Khemais Essid, was formerly the head of al Qaeda's operations in Italy, where he plotted to attack the U.S. embassy in Rome.

All of this has a direct bearing on not just our understanding of Benghazi, where members of another chapter of Ansar al-Sharia took part in the attack on the American mission, but also what happened three days later in Tunisia.

On September 14, Ansar al-Sharia Tunisia orchestrated an assault on the U.S. embassy in Tunis. In its annual Country Reports on Terrorism, published in May, the State Department noted that Hassine "was implicated as the mastermind behind the September 14 attack" on the U.S. embassy, which involved "a mob of 2,000-3,000" people, "including individuals affiliated with the militant organization Ansar al-Sharia."

Ali Harzi's story exposes a web of connections between al Qaeda's global network and the twin attacks in Benghazi and Tunis in September 2012. Instead of being in custody and questioned about his knowledge of these events, however, Ali Harzi continues to serve Ansar al-Sharia. ♦

Health Reform Breaks Bad

The deceptions and disasters of Obamacare

By Christopher J. Conover

Breaking Bad is the story of a seemingly well-intended but very misguided man who turned to cooking meth in order to amass enough wealth to provide for his family once he dies of cancer. The consequences of that unfortunate decision—not to mention the lies and deceptions to keep it on track—pyramid alarmingly over the course of five seasons, culminating in mayhem and a head-spinning body count.

Obamacare isn't a TV drama. But it will unleash its own tsunami of unintended consequences: more than a million jobs lost, an economy increasingly made up of part-time workers, higher health spending (at least a half-trillion dollars just over the next decade), a decline in medical innovation (and attendant loss of life).

While Obamacare undoubtedly will do a modest amount of good, the urgent question is whether the law's supporters will come to see that the good pales in comparison to the damage. Obamacare may still crash and burn (see Medicare Catastrophic Coverage Act of 1988), or it may endure as a monument to government ineptitude and inefficiency (see U.S. Postal Service, whose deficit last year alone was $15.9 billion, despite being exempt from taxes, regulations, and even parking tickets!).

While there are many cooks who spoiled this particular broth, there's little question that but for Barack Obama himself, this monstrosity would unlikely ever have been signed into law. Health policy scholars have known a dirty little secret for decades: When it comes to "universal coverage," Americans have never been willing to put their money where their mouth is. Public opinion polls going back to the 1940s rather consistently show a majority of Americans in favor of "national health insurance" (as it was called then) or "universal coverage." But such opinions were in response to open-ended questions that gave no sense of how such a program might affect respondents' taxes. Starting about three decades ago, pollsters began taking a more sophisticated approach that probed the willingness to pay for expanded coverage of the uninsured. If one took the results of such polls at face value, i.e., assumed one could collect the actual amount of taxes respondents said they were willing to pay, the combined amount of taxes would cover only one-third to two-thirds of the cost of universal coverage.

This hard truth was so pervasively known in the health policy community that it was the theme of a Christmas card sent out by Princeton health economist Uwe Reinhardt in the late 1980s: Eighty-five percent purported to favor universal coverage, yet only 20 percent were willing to pay more than $50 a year in taxes to achieve this purpose. In short, pursuit of universal health care was either a fool's errand (from a political standpoint) or would require the wool to be pulled over the eyes of the American public.

In Barack Obama, reformers found a candidate willing and able to rise to the occasion. Notwithstanding a campaign pledge to "always be honest with you about the challenges we face," candidate Obama offered Americans the moon: He would cover most (albeit not all) of the uninsured; to the degree higher taxes were required to deliver on this promise, every penny would come out of the pockets of "rich" Americans; not only would middle-class Americans not have to pay a penny in new taxes for this dramatic but expensive new entitlement, the "typical" family of four would save $2,500 a year in premiums (before the end of his first term); *and* the plan would not add a dime to the deficit.

Another hard truth had emerged from the spectacular failure of the Clinton health reform initiative in 1994: The majority of Americans are generally satisfied with their own coverage and deeply resistant to anything that might threaten it. No problem. Obama had that covered as well: If you like your plan (and your doctor), you can keep them. These were the deceptions that brought us Obamacare. Let us examine them in turn.

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Deception #1: universal coverage

Obama's promise: "I will sign a universal health care bill into law by the end of my first term as president that will cover every American" (June 23, 2007).

Reality: Politifact.com views this as a campaign promise kept since President Obama signed into law a plan that included an individual mandate with few exemptions. And keep in mind this promise, unlike the others, actually was doable. However, the Affordable Care Act will not deliver universal coverage. According to the latest CBO projections, when fully implemented, Obamacare will cover fewer than half of the nation's uninsured (leaving 31 million uninsured in 2023). Nevertheless, this turned out to be the closest the president came to keeping one of his promises. As we will see, the others missed by a mile.

Deception #2: no new taxes on the middle class

Obama's promise: "I can make a firm pledge under my plan, no family making less than $250,000 a year will see any form of tax increase. Not your income tax, not your payroll tax, not your capital gains taxes, not any of your taxes" (September 12, 2008).

Reality: By 2022, Obamacare will have imposed just over $1 trillion in new taxes. It's true that $318 billion of this will come in the form of taxes on payroll, dividends, capital gains, and other investment income specifically targeting taxpayers earning over $200,000 (singles) or $250,000 (married).

The remaining taxes, however, represent a laundry list of levies and limitations that will hit the pocketbooks of both middle-class and low-income families. One could argue that the Cadillac tax on high-cost health plans ($111 billion) will tend to hit higher-than-average income workers (though certainly not just the top 1 or 2 percent). That may be true initially, but the threshold for determining which plans are taxed is indexed to general inflation rather than medical inflation. Consequently, Bradley Herring, a health economist at Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health, estimates that as many as 75 percent of plans could be affected by the tax just in the next decade.

As well, Obamacare's employer mandate penalties ($106 billion) assuredly will hit the lowest-income workers, since they are the ones least likely to be covered through employer health plans. Similarly, taxes levied on health insurers ($101.7 billion), drug manufacturers ($34.2 billion), and medical device manufacturers ($29.1 billion) nominally are levied on big corporations. But everyone knows these ultimately will be passed along to consumers in the form of premium increases or higher out-of-pocket spending.

How do we know this? Because the Congressional Budget Office told us so, in November 2009, months before Obamacare was actually signed into law. Oliver Wyman, a well-known international consulting firm, has estimated the health-insurers tax alone is expected to increase premiums for single coverage by a minimum of $2,150 over the next 10 years while boosting family premiums by $5,080 during the same period. Even older people on Medicare Advantage plans, who tend to have lower-than-average incomes, will see premiums go up by $3,590 over 10 years according to the Oliver Wyman calculations.

Even for progressives who might fantasize that these corporate levies will somehow come out of big business's (presumably obscene) profits, there can be little doubt that the individual mandate ($55 billion)—which, in fairness, wasn't a tax until Chief Justice John Roberts declared it to be—will hit the little guy. Likewise, the new limits on Flexible Spending Accounts ($24 billion) and the higher threshold for deducting medical expenses from one's income tax ($18.7 billion) will hit average families squarely in the pocketbook.

In short, when all is said and done, the very folks the president assured wouldn't see taxes go up a dime to bankroll health reform will shoulder close to 70 percent of Obamacare's tax burden. The president has shown himself to be a diligent student of former Louisiana senator Russell Long: "Don't tax you, don't tax me, tax that fellow behind the tree."

And that's just in the short term. Despite repeated pledges to make "hard decisions" and have an "adult conversation" over entitlements, the president has put us on a fiscal path that his own Treasury Department has declared "unsustainable." Health entitlements (including Obamacare) will grow so rapidly that federal spending as a share of GDP will rise by more than 40 percent by the year 2085. Rising health entitlements will account for *every penny* of that increase! All this from a president who assured us last year that "it is not a bigger government we need."

Deception #3: annual premium savings of $2,500

Obama's promise: "We'll lower premiums by up to $2,500 for a typical family per year. . . . We'll do it by the end of my first term as president of the United States" (June 5, 2008).

Reality: Taken literally, we know this promise failed spectacularly. According to the authoritative annual Kaiser Family Foundation/HRET Employer Health Benefits Survey, average premiums for family coverage (i.e., the kind of private coverage the "typical" family has) were $13,375 in 2009 and $16,531 in 2013. In short, average premiums for family coverage grew by $2,976 by the end of President Obama's first term. Thus, we can accurately say that both in direction and magnitude reality turned out to be the opposite of what the president pledged.

Candidate Obama's claim that he could pull off this astonishing feat before the end of his first term was not some off-script bit of puffery in a campaign speech. As Kevin Sacks at the *New York Times* reported: "Mr. Obama's economic policy director, Jason Furman, said the campaign's

estimates were conservative and asserted that much of the savings would come quickly. 'We think we could get to $2,500 in savings by the end of the first term, or be very close to it,' Mr. Furman said."

Nevertheless, some supporters have argued the president's promise meant not that premiums would go down, but that they would be $2,500 a year lower than they would have been otherwise. Moreover, while he made the promise repeatedly on the campaign trail, he usually didn't claim it would be accomplished by the end of his first term. Yet even if we cut the president some slack on both points and give Obamacare 12 years to "bend the cost curve," the best available estimates still show this promise will fail miserably. For three consecutive years, the Office of the Actuary at the Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services has released 10-year projections that compare national health spending under Obamacare with spending assuming Obamacare had never been implemented. In each instance, the ACA increases aggregate national health spending above and beyond the amount that such spending would have increased otherwise.

The latest version of these projections, released just last month, shows that between 2010 and 2022, aggregate health spending will be $621 billion higher under the Obamacare scenario. For a typical family of four, this amounts to $7,579 over that 13-year period.

Some have argued that technically it would be possible for health spending to increase for the 30 million formerly uninsured Americans even as premiums dropped for those already covered. In fact, we've known since 2008 that the average uninsured individual generates just under $1,000 in uncompensated care costs each year. We've also known that three-quarters of those uncompensated care costs are borne by taxpayers (federal, state, and local), leaving at most $285 (2013 dollars) per capita uninsured to be shifted to those with private health insurance, a small fraction of the premium increases we'll be seeing.

In truth, no well-informed American ever should have believed this absurd promise. At the time Obama made it, Factcheck.org charitably deemed this claim to be "overly optimistic, misleading and, to some extent, contradicted by one of his own advisers." Rather than scale back his extravagant claims, President Obama on July 16, 2012, doubled-down, assuring small-business owners that "your premiums will go down." He made this assertion notwithstanding the fact that by that time, in three separate reports between April 2010 and June 2012, the Medicare actuaries had demonstrated that the ACA would *increase* health spending. To its credit, the *Washington Post* fact-checker dutifully awarded the 2012 claim Three Pinocchios ("Significant factual error and/or obvious contradictions").

Deception #4: no increase in the deficit

Obama's promise: "I will not sign a plan that adds one dime to our deficits" (September 9, 2009).

Reality: This pledge was made in President Obama's speech before a joint session of Congress—well before either chamber had voted on a plan. Using rules that everyone recognized were grossly misleading, the CBO scored the plan as a small deficit reducer. However, the president was well aware that his plan was "full of gimmicks and smoke-and-mirrors" (in the words of Rep. Paul Ryan) many weeks before the final bill was passed. Ryan's analysis left no doubt that the president was trying to stuff a $2.3 trillion health plan (over 10 years) into a $1 trillion wrapper. Pleading ignorance is no excuse when it comes to breaking this particular promise.

According to former CBO director Douglas Holtz-Eakin and Michael Ramet of the American Action Forum, "A more comprehensive and realistic projection suggests that the new reform law will raise the deficit by more than $500 billion during the first 10 years and by nearly $1.5 trillion in the following decade." Indeed, based on a more realistic (i.e., accurate) alternative fiscal scenario to the one CBO was forced to use to score Obamacare originally, the ACA has put us on a path to add $6.2 trillion (2011 dollars) to the deficit over the next 75 years. Reasonable people might quibble about the president's level of knowledge when he first made this pledge, but there is little doubt it has turned out to be a promise broken—by a rather extraordinary margin.

Deception #5: you can keep your plan if you like it

Obama's promise: "If you like your doctor, you will be able to keep your doctor, period. If you like your health care plan, you'll be able to keep your health care plan, period. No one will take it away, no matter what" (June 15, 2009).

Reality: Virtually all Americans will see changes in their health insurance coverage, whether they want them or not. These changes will increase the cost of coverage for most Americans.

Some rules apply to all health insurance plans, even those that are "grandfathered": (1) Plans can no longer impose annual or lifetime limits on how much health care coverage people may receive; (2) they must offer dependent coverage for young adults until age 26; (3) plans cannot retroactively cancel coverage because of a mistake made by plan members when applying; and (4) waiting periods for new employees cannot exceed 90 days.

Unless grandfathered, health plans will also be required to cover certain preventive care services at no cost. This is as idiotic as requiring auto insurers to pay for oil changes. You might wonder, if gas and oil are necessities for your car, what's the big deal if auto insurance pays for them? Well, for starters, consumers become less price-sensitive knowing that all or nearly all of any higher price they pay for something will be borne by a third party. Steven Brill's *Time* exposé last year and a more recent *New York Times* piece on the high cost of colonoscopies should settle any questions about whether this phenomenon is widespread in American medicine. In general, Americans pay the highest medical prices on the planet.

Consumers may also undertake preventive activities more frequently than they would otherwise (changing oil every 1,000 miles instead of every 3,000). Case in point: About one-quarter of Medicare patients undergo colonoscopies more often than clinically recommended. Clearly, some of this wasteful spending can be avoided by erecting rules and monitoring to preclude this, but these in turn lead to higher administrative costs.

When someone else pays the bill, the payer always will need to undertake at least some form of monitoring activity to ensure that the service was needed/allowable, that it was actually provided to the customer (the most common forms of Medicare fraud are durable medical equipment never provided and services never performed), and that the price did not exceed some specified "reasonable" level. Otherwise that payer may be subject to massive fraud or excessive payouts. Even if consumers remained prudent shoppers (though there is no incentive to do so when someone else is paying most of the tab) and somehow are cajoled into using precisely the amount of preventive care that they would if they paid for such care on their own, these administrative costs make buying the service through a third-party payer more expensive than if the identical bill had been paid directly by the consumer.

This explains why we do not see auto insurance policies that cover the costs of fill-ups and oil changes, or homeowners' policies that cover the cost of mowing the grass. It's more sensible and less expensive to let consumers handle such expenses on their own. But when it comes to our bodies, Obamacare takes away that choice.

Other rules apply only to the individual and small-group markets (whether or not coverage is provided through the Obamacare health exchanges). Beginning in 2014, Obamacare will require all nongrandfathered health plans in the individual and small-group markets to cover essential health benefits (EHB), a broad range of services. These run the gamut from mental health care to preventive and wellness services. Many of these benefits were already routinely offered in employer health insurance plans, but others, such as dental care for children, were far less common. According to a study at HealthPocket.com, "less than 2 percent of the existing health plans in the individual market today provide all the Essential Health Benefits required under the Affordable Care Act."

Obviously, higher premiums will result in any plans

that formerly lacked these benefits. One of the most controversial of the "essential" health benefits is the contraception mandate—a threat to religious liberty so egregious that it has spawned at least 60 different lawsuits. According to the American Action Forum, "premium increases associated with coverage of the essential health benefits have ranged from 0.13 percent in Rhode Island to 33 percent in Maine, with most states expecting single-digit increases."

Apart from telling individual and small-group plan members what benefits they must have, the law put a floor of 60 percent on the actuarial value of coverage, meaning that such plans had to be arranged to cover at least 60 percent of the expected costs for the average enrollee. This will result in further premium increases given that more than half the plans currently available on the individual market do not meet this 60 percent threshold. Indeed, 12 percent of individual and small-group plans have an actuarial value between 35 percent and 49 percent.

Premiums in the individual and small-group markets will escalate further owing to "modified community rating" (which prohibits insurers from charging their oldest subscribers more than three times the amount charged to any younger subscribers) and "guaranteed issue" (requiring insurers to take all comers, including those with preexisting conditions).

The bottom line is that a large number of those who now buy in the individual market (19.4 million Americans) and small-group market (28.5 million) will face significant changes in benefits as well as higher premiums. People now buying their insurance in the individual market will see the greatest rate shock. The American Action Forum recently compared premiums for the lowest-cost plan available in the nongroup market in January 2013 to the lowest cost bronze plan available on the exchange on October 1, 2013. On average, a healthy 30-year-old male nonsmoker will see his lowest-cost option increase in price by 260 percent. The amount varies by state, but an increase was observed in every state and in the District of Columbia, ranging from a low of 9 percent in Massachusetts to a high of 600 percent in Vermont. A Manhattan Institute analysis similarly concluded that 27-year-old males who purchase the least-expensive plan through the exchange will see their rates go up by an average of 97 percent (with only two states experiencing lower average premiums, Colorado and New Hampshire). For 27-year-old women, the average increase will be 55 percent (only four states would see lower average premiums, Colorado, New Hampshire, Ohio, and Rhode Island). For 40-year-olds the projected increases were 99 percent for men and 62 percent for women.

The small-group market will also see higher prices. The *National Journal*'s independent assessment concluded that even after taking into account subsidies available on the exchanges, 66 percent of workers with single coverage and 57 percent of workers with family coverage will face higher premiums on the exchange compared to what they would pay for employer-sponsored coverage. Admittedly, these increases will be smaller for grandfathered plans, but only about half of small-group workers are enrolled in grandfathered plans. Already this is a decline from 2011, and eventually all plans will lose their grandfather status.

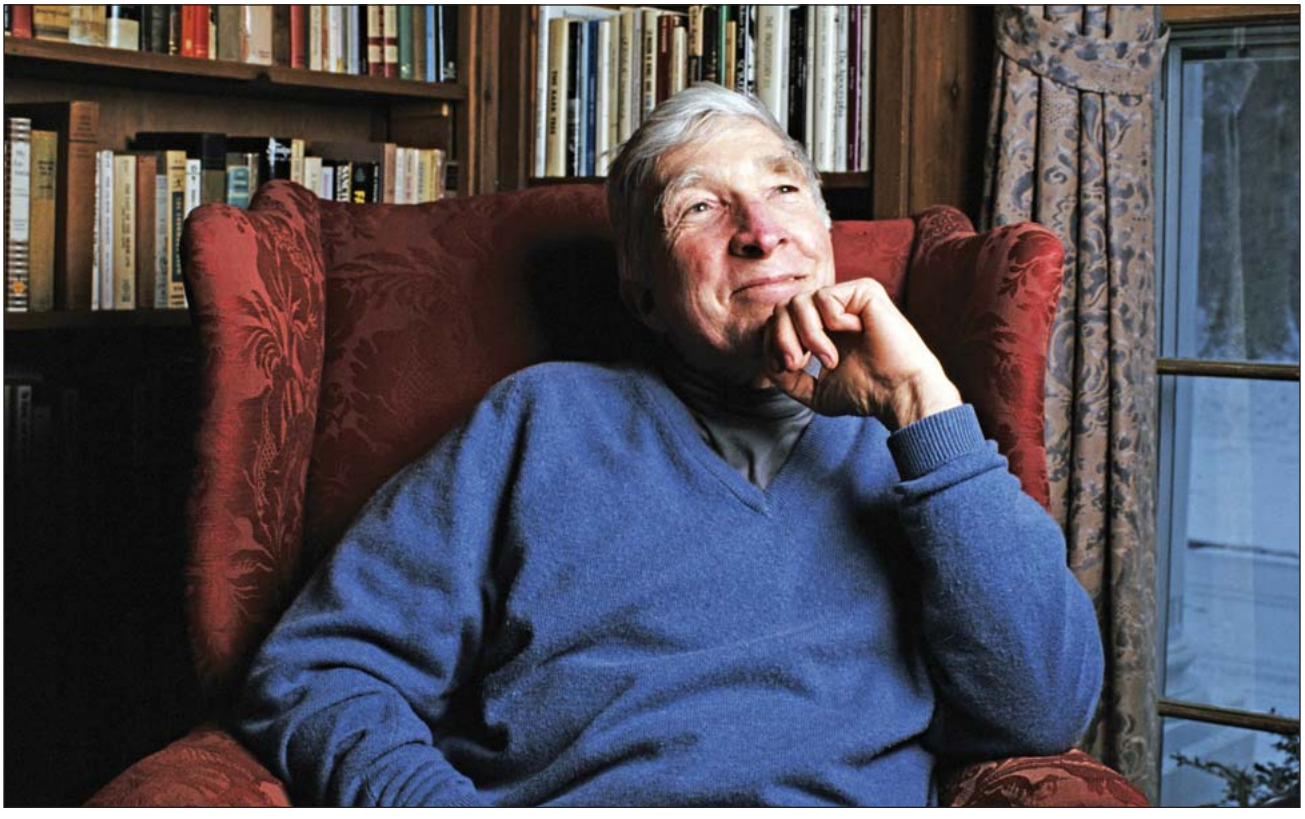
Defenders of Obamacare say the enhancements in benefits are worth the added premiums, but this defies common sense. There was nothing stopping plans from including any of the benefits now being forcibly imposed under Obamacare. That they did not do so voluntarily implies that the added premium costs associated with such plan enhancements were *not* worth the added cost to their customers. By definition, in forcing people to do what they would not do voluntarily, Obamacare reduces the social welfare of vast swaths of Americans.

It's one thing for the content or price of one's coverage to be changed by meddlesome regulations. It's quite another to lose one's coverage entirely. Yet Obamacare also will cause some employers to drop coverage, knowing that their employees can obtain coverage through the exchanges. Estimates of how many will do so are all over the map, with CBO estimating only 9 million employees will lose their employer-sponsored coverage, the Medicare actuary projecting the figure will be 14 million, and former CBO director Douglas Holtz-Eakin calculating the total may be as high as 35 million. As well, Obamacare will slash payments to Medicare Advantage plans, culminating (according to the Medicare actuary) in about half of Medicare Advantage plan members losing their coverage and being forced back into the wasteful and inefficient Medicare fee-for-service system.

'I did it for myself'

One of the most satisfying scenes in *Breaking Bad*'s final episode is when meth kingpin Walter White finally comes clean with his wife Skyler (and himself) and admits his real motivation: "I did it for myself." He may have started out with the intention of providing for his family, but what kept him going even when it was clear that the end could not possibly justify the means was self-interest.

I don't doubt the sincerity of President Obama's desire to reform health care to make things better for the American people. But in light of the gargantuan gap between what was promised and what is now being imposed, it's reasonable to wonder whether he is stubbornly plunging forward because he has deceived himself into thinking he's making things better, or is desperately clinging to his legacy with little regard for what damage it will do to the people who elected him. ♦



John Updike, 1994

Teller of Tales

The definitive Updike, in two volumes. BY WILLIAM H. PRITCHARD

There have always been readers of John Updike's work who find his most impressive achievement to be his short fiction rather than his novels.

Excepting the four Rabbit Angstrom novels, this is a plausible judgment. About 10 years ago, Updike collected the stories he had written between 1953 and 1975; his death in 2009 left the remainder of them uncollected. So it is an event of some moment to see 186 stories (the ones about the Maple family and about Henry Bech have been saved for later publication) chronologically arranged and splendidly edited by Christopher Carduff for the Library of America.

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

John Updike
Collected Early Stories
edited by Christopher Carduff
Library of America, 800 pp., $37.50

John Updike
Collected Later Stories
edited by Christopher Carduff
Library of America, 800 pp., $37.50

Carduff has already brought out posthumous volumes of Updike's prose and the uncollected essays and reviews of his art criticism. The editorial contribution here, a very large one, consists of pertinent notes to the stories, along with the date that they were submitted for publication, and when and where they were ultimately published. In addition to this well-executed labor, Carduff has provided a 40-page chronology of Updike's life that constitutes a mini-biography, with all sorts of information previously unknown to readers, certainly to this one. To read through the stories in the order of their writing and publication is to experience the astonishing feat of personal and artistic creation that was Updike's.

After the *New Yorker* accepted his story "Ace in the Hole," about a Rabbit-like ex-basketball star, Updike signed, in 1954 at the age of 22, a lifetime agreement with the magazine that all his work—fiction, poetry, nonfiction prose—be first submitted to them

GETTY IMAGES

before it was offered elsewhere. Updike managed an enviable relationship with his editors (Katharine White, and then William Maxwell and Roger Angell) and with the magazine until his death. If, as often happened, they rejected a story he sent in, he invariably placed it elsewhere. It is surprising to see, through Carduff's editorial comment, how, for one reason or another, such a fine story as "Varieties of Religious Experience," written after 9/11, was rejected. Indeed, the assumption that Updike had a free pass on anything he sent the *New Yorker* is contradicted by the fact that of his last 10 stories, written between 2008 and 2009, 5 were declined for one reason or another, even though one sees no decline in the quality of the writing.

In his foreword to *Collected Early Stories* (2003), Updike noted that happiness has never been the subject of fiction: Instead, "discontent, conflict, waste, sorrow, [and] fear" were its inevitable subjects. Yet, he added, we expect happiness as a reward for reading. "Art hopes to sidestep mortality with feats of attention, of harmony, of illuminating connection"—all in the effort to give, in the final sentence of his foreword, "the mundane its beautiful due."

Updike never wavered from this working assumption. His early memoir, "The Dogwood Tree: A Boyhood," spoke of "middleness" as the primary subject of his art: whether experienced as a boy growing up with his parents and grandparents in a sandstone farmhouse in Pennsylvania; or as a married, then divorced, man negotiating between wife, children, and wife-to-be; or as a man of seven decades looking back over the furniture of his life.

Since his death, my impression is that his reputation has slipped a bit, as if reading fiction about discontent, sorrow, and fear is not to play for high enough stakes. Here, the contrasting example is Philip Roth, whose novels from the last 20 years have qualified for those higher stakes: the obscene extremities of *Sabbath's Theater* (1995); the desolating tale of disaster in *American Pastoral* (1997); the violent end of doomed lovers in *The Human Stain* (2000). No one dies at the end of an Updike story, nor is any character in one a plausible candidate for tragedy. The voice at the end is a composed one—chastened, rueful, ironic, but with some note of confirmation, of control.

In one of his most beautiful late stories, "A Sandstone Farmhouse," a son revisits his mother's house after her death. The story provides much information about how such houses were built in the 19th century, and Updike commented that it was "about *things*—how they mutely witness our flitting lives, and remain when the lives are over, still mute, still witnessing, still resolutely themselves and nothing else." Bearing witness is one of the metaphors he uses to describe his writerly task: the celebration of things that cannot speak for themselves. In "Plumbing," an old plumber explains why a pipe has to be replaced, telling his customer that, replaced, "It'll outlast your time here." The last paragraph gives us the plumber's wide-open eyes, "in the unspeaking presence of corrosion and flow." Its final sentence is its moral: "All around us we are outlasted."

"Plumbing" is one of the many stories Updike wrote that aren't exactly "stories"; that is, they don't have characters or much, if any, plot, but they unfold themselves as meditative, speculative improvisations, fueled by the elegant power of a writer's sentences. Updike himself referred to this mode as "abstract personal," adding that it was not a favorite of his critics. It first surfaces in a very early story, "Toward Evening," where nothing happens except in the thoughts of a young married father who, after supper, looks out from his small apartment across the Hudson toward the Palisades, and remarks the nightly lighting of a Spry sign advertising vegetable shortening. At the story's end, the Spry sign has provoked thoughts about the small cities surrounding it and the black river with its "uncreated if illegible stars."

The story would be predictive of much future Updike, right down to his final tales. He made particular use of this abstract personal mode in stories he wrote in the early 1960s, featuring a man, his wife, and the "other woman" for whom he considers leaving his wife. "Leaves," "The Stare," "The Music School," and "Harv is Plowing Now" are strong examples of this mode.

Updike once said that the book of his he liked best was *Olinger Stories* (1964), the collection of pieces about a young boy growing up ("Pigeon Feathers," "Flight"), going away to college, coming home to visit ("The Happiest I've Been"), and becoming a married man living in Massachusetts who is called home by his father's illness. Two portmanteau stories made up of incidents held together through poetic linkage—"The Blessed Man of Boston, My Grandmother's Thimble, and Fanning Island" and "Packed Dirt, Churchgoing, A Dying Cat, A Traded Car"—are among the finest expressions of the "Pennsylvania thing" he had within him. These endlessly rereadable stories are told through a voice that is, by turns, generous, troubled, daring, guilty, and almost always humorous—humor being a quality that Updike plentifully exhibited in his fiction but that has not been enough remarked on or appreciated by his critics.

One of the challenges of short fiction is ending a story without making it too obviously a wink at the reader or a clever turn of phrase that fails to do justice to what has preceded it. Two of Updike's later stories stand out as ones in which he has triumphantly solved this problem: The first is titled "Journey to the Dead," and is about a woman, dying of a stroke, whom the male protagonist visits in the hospital. Fredericks, the man, had been a classics major in college and thinks about visitations to the dead in *The Odyssey* and *Aeneid*. Bidding the woman goodbye, he says, awkwardly and inadequately, "I'm afraid I have to, as they say, split." She unsmilingly stares back at him, as he "promises insincerely to come again, and, like heroes before him, fled." If it's not heroic, neither is it to be mocked.

The second ending is from the above-mentioned "Sandstone Farmhouse," where the son, having disposed of his mother's farm, feels "guilty, anxious, displaced. He had always wanted to be where the action was, and what action there was, it turned out, had been

back there." This formulation could serve as epigraph for all of Updike's revisitations to the Pennsylvania thing.

Reading chronologically through the later stories makes us more aware of a man growing old, concerned, as the title of one of his stories suggests, with "personal archaeology"—the range of memory playing over the terrain traversed. In Updike's final story, "The Full Glass," a man brushes and flosses his teeth dutifully, prepares his daily batch of pills, and puts in some eye drops; as he does this, he likes to have a full glass of water ready to provide a "healthy swig" to wash the pills down.

The man, in every sense a stand-in for the author, proceeds to recall and review a number of "full glass" moments from his past. As the story ends, the man with his "life-prolonging pills" cupped in his left hand, there is one final reflection: "If I can read this strange old guy's mind aright, he's drinking a toast to the visible world, his impending disappearance from it be damned." I can't imagine a fictional endpoint more poignant, and also more bemused, than this strange old guy celebrating the visible world that Updike made so fully visible to us in his lifetime of writing. ♦

B&A

Presidents at Leisure

Two centuries of lightening the burden.

BY SONNY BUNCH

Philosophers, war heroes, a movie star: A wide variety of men with an even wider variety of cultural tastes have inhabited the White House over the centuries. And evolving standards and technologies have combined with evolving political realities to create a culture the White House's original inhabitants would not likely recognize.

George Washington, John Adams, and Thomas Jefferson were classically educated and the owners of large libraries. And while Washington dedicated much of his reading to farming, he was equally devoted to the ideals of America's founding, notes Tevi Troy. During his term in office, the first president would host dinners, after which "the men retired to the drawing room to drink and discuss matters of consequence. These gatherings were similar in some ways to the famed Georgetown dinner parties of the not-so-distant past." Troy also notes that Adams was an engaged reader: "He filled the margins of his books with his reactions, insights, ideas, and—not infrequently—epithets. In his marginalia, he brands Rousseau a 'coxcomb,' Voltaire a 'liar,' and Condorcet 'a fool,' leaving little doubt what he thought about the authors he was reading."

What Jefferson Read, Ike Watched, and Obama Tweeted
200 Years of Popular Culture in the White House
by Tevi Troy
Regnery History, 416 pp., $18.95

Richard Nixon, 1968

IMAGES: NEWSCOM

Not every president was a deep-reading intellectual. Andrew Jackson, for example, was not burning the midnight oil in an effort to get through *Candide*. But even the hero of New Orleans understood the importance of the intellectual class.

> Despite Jackson's earthy ways and anti-intellectual airs, he was nevertheless aware of ideas and their power to influence. He was the first president to assemble writers and thinkers to support his campaign, enlisting their help with his speeches and encouraging them to write newspaper articles on his behalf. His literary supporters included James Fenimore Cooper, Horatio Greenough, Nathaniel Hawthorne, George Bancroft, and William Cullen Bryant.

Literature was not the only art form to whet the cultural appetite of presidents, of course. Washington was fond of the theater—he even staged a production of Joseph Addison's *Cato* during the brutal winter at Valley Forge—despite the fact that polite society frowned upon the stage at the time. Indeed, plays had been illegal just a few short decades prior in New England.

But not all presidents have been huge consumers of culture. Troy reports that James K. Polk, although a university graduate, claimed to have only been to the theater once—in Alabama, to see the ballet. Ulysses S. Grant purportedly declared, "I only know two tunes. One of them is 'Yankee Doodle' and the other isn't." And George W. Bush, while a prolific reader, did not make much use of one of the White House's better perks: the in-house movie theater. Jimmy Carter, by contrast, practically camped out in the East Wing's screening room: "Our most frequent movie-watching president, [Carter] watched approximately 480 movies in a single term."

That's better than two a week for four years—a rate that even I, formerly a full-time film critic, am impressed by.

The presidential screening room helped turn D.W. Griffith's *The Birth of*

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a Nation (1915) into a hit. In a probably apocryphal anecdote, Woodrow Wilson was quoted as saying that the film was "like writing history with lightning." But when protests later engulfed the picture for its heroic depiction of the rise of the Ku Klux Klan, Wilson was forced to denounce it.

"The *Birth of a Nation* incident pointed to something new in the American presidency—the president's role as chief pitchman, intentional or not, in an increasingly commercial culture," Troy writes. This didn't just go for motion pictures, either: A presidential mention was just as likely to drive book sales. Troy points out that Ronald Reagan—perhaps our most important pop-culture president, given his long career in Hollywood prior to entering politics—almost singlehandedly turned the late Tom Clancy's *The Hunt for Red October* (1984) into a bestseller after calling it "a perfect yarn."

Sometimes a president, having slipped in the polls and lost the press, chooses *not* to highlight a book that has influenced him in order to keep from tarnishing it. Such was the case with Bush, who Troy says was impressed by Juan Williams's *Enough* (2006) but did not want to praise it lest his "interest in the book . . . spoil its influence on policy debates."

Troy is critical of the urge in most modern presidential campaigns to pander to the lowest cultural denominator. He cites Barack Obama's references to *Jersey Shore*'s Snooki, as well as Mitt Romney's rejoinder that he was "kind of a Snooki fan." Troy asks: "Are we really better off with a president who knows who Snooki is? This question gets at a challenge that has faced American presidents for nearly two centuries: Do they wish to be men of the people or men of higher understanding?"

But in an age in which people are targeted in increasingly narrow strips, communication occurs in 140 characters or less, and popular web services specialize in distributing user-made videos that last exactly six seconds, the real question may be this: Do they have much of a choice, any longer, if they want to win? ♦

B&A

Turned Upside Down

The end of World War II meant the end of empires.

BY ALONZO L. HAMBY

Small Wars, Faraway Places
Global Insurrection and the Making of the Modern World, 1945-1965
by Michael Burleigh
Viking, 608 pp., $36

Franklin D. Roosevelt, meeting with his son Elliott at the beginning of the Casablanca conference in January 1943, went out of his way to voice his revulsion at the ugliness of British imperialism by referring to his transit through the tiny British colony of Gambia:

> Dirt. Disease. Very high mortality rate. . . . Life expectancy—you'd never guess what it is. Twenty-six years. These people are treated worse than livestock. Their cattle live longer!

Roosevelt had known nothing of Gambia before the trip. His personal exposure was limited to what he saw as his motorcade took him from the airport of its capital to the harbor, where he transferred to a waiting U.S. Navy cruiser for a night's sleep before flying on to Casablanca. The statistics someone had provided to him were, no doubt, correct; but they begged the question of whether Gambians had been better off before British incursions during the reign of Queen Victoria painted much of the map of Africa pink. (Gambia would become independent in 1965. Forty-eight years later, it remains desperately impoverished.)

It likely never occurred to FDR that his determination to penetrate Britain's imperial-preference trading bloc amounted to a species of economic imperialism. Or that the United States, for a decade under his leadership, had practiced empire with a "Good Neighbor" policy that maintained a firm hegemonic grip on the Caribbean basin by supporting one ruthless oligarchic dictatorship after another, most notably that of the Somozas in Nicaragua.

Michael Burleigh

The United States had come late to the game of formal empire, picking off only a few acquisitions at the end of the 19th century. Encumbered by a liberal perspective, U.S. leaders had already scheduled the Philippines for independence before the beginning of World War II, although they clearly expected to continue as a dominant force there. Roosevelt, in fact, assumed that America, as a matter of course, would be a major international power after the war. Imperial status in some guise was inevitable.

The distinguished historian Michael Burleigh, in this ambitious, if somewhat uneven, book, lays out the way

Alonzo L. Hamby, professor of history at Ohio University, is the author, most recently, of For the Survival of Democracy: Franklin Roosevelt and the World Crisis of the 1930s.

in which World War II left Europeans, primarily the British and the French, too enfeebled to defend their empires. The concomitant Cold War competition with the Soviet Union made the United States an heir to their failures. The most conspicuous, and costly, legacy would be Vietnam.

Burleigh is interested primarily in Third World uprisings. He tells us rather quickly about the 1956 Hungarian revolt and accompanying unrest in Poland, but, in general, has little to say about the most successful of postwar imperial ventures, the Soviet assumption of control over Eastern Europe. Aside from providing air support in the Korean War, and some military hardware in both Korea and Vietnam, the Soviet Union was content to let Mao Zedong's China bear the brunt of anti-imperial engagement in East and Southeast Asia while attempting to woo larger former imperial possessions like India and Indonesia with trade and aid deals.

The author takes us through a global array of colonial uprisings while giving due attention to the politics of the affected great powers that either abetted or sought to quell them. The domino theory, he shows us, appeared very early in the game and was sold as the "ten-pin theory" by the French general Jean de Lattre de Tassigny:

> Tonkin is the key to Southeast Asia. If Southeast Asia is lost, India will burn like a match, and there will be no barrier to the advance of Communism before Suez and Africa. If the Muslim world were thus engulfed, the Muslims in North Africa would soon fall into line and Europe itself would be outflanked.

As they developed, the Third World insurgencies were self-limiting. Some of their leaders were faithful Communists, and most envisioned themselves as radicals. To one extent or another, they embodied not Marxist universalism but the struggles of racially or ethnically distinct native elites to seize power from Europeans. (It is one of the merits of this book that it makes this important point without once subjecting its readers to "subaltern theory.") At times, they were rooted in peasant revolts against exploitation. Local Communists trained in revolution, and receiving varying degrees of support from Moscow or Bejing, frequently participated and attempted to gain control.

In Asia and the Pacific, Japanese conquest opened the way for revolution. The Japanese overthrew colonial rule in the Dutch East Indies, empowered a native civil service to handle the quotidian business of running the country, and made themselves unpopular with a harsh and exploitative military regime. After 1945, the Dutch could not reestablish their rule. Wartime quasi-collaborators led by Sukarno successfully packaged themselves as national leaders of a new Indonesia. A defeated Japan lost Korea, which it had occupied for a half-century. The Soviet Union established a Communist regime in the North; the United States gave birth to a pro-American regime in the South.

Americans returned to the Philippines and inherited a peasant Huk rebellion that had originated in the resistance to Japan, had lived on to fight abusive landlords—and was, perhaps, unjustly tarred as Communist-inspired. Warring on an oceanic archipelago, the Huks were isolated from sources of reinforcement and resupply. Relentless and brutally disciplined, they were nonetheless quelled through a combination of tough anti-guerrilla tactics and a largely unfulfilled promise of reform personified by the charismatic but ill-fated Ramon Magsaysay.

The epic struggle to evict European masters took shape in the Vietnamese sector of French Indochina, a colony about which Franklin Roosevelt seems to have felt as strongly as he did about Gambia. Here, the insurgency enjoyed all the ingredients for success. Its leader, Ho Chi Minh, was a dedicated Communist showered with material assistance and logistical support from Mao Zedong. Its armed force, the Viet Minh, was remorseless and endured appalling conditions:

> The food consisted of cold rice, sometimes enlivened with pungent fish sauce . . . medical facilities were rudimentary, with men expected to "sweat out" bouts of endemic malaria, and quinine tablets, when they were available, were divided into therapeutically valueless ten parts. No time was wasted on badly wounded men and once, when a captured Algerian found his path obstructed by a dying Viet Minh, his guard ordered him to tread on him. . . . Cards, alcohol, sex and smoking were forbidden. Instead there were communal singing and endless political indoctrination sessions.

The French never quite grasped the nature of the enemy, nor developed a viable strategy for coming to grips with him. They decided to lure the Viet Minh into a decisive battle at Dien Bien Phu, a narrow valley surrounded by commanding hills. It would, they believed, become a heavily fortified bastion, akin to Verdun in World War I, against which the enemy would destroy himself in one futile attack after another. French air superiority would establish a reliable resupply much as the road known as the *Voie Sacrée* had sustained Verdun. Instead, they found themselves in a death trap.

An American Foreign Service officer named Howard Simpson was moved to write a satiric doggerel lampooning the futility that ensued:

> *Camembert for the Colonel's table,*
> *Wine in abundance when we're able.*
> *Indochina may be lost,*
> *Our Colonel eats well despite the cost . . .*
> *. . . Parachute the escargot!*
> *Follow them with old Bordeaux.*
> *And on our graves near Dien Bien Phu*
> *Inscribe these words, these very few,*
> *'They died for France, but more . . .*
> *Their Colonel ate well throughout the war.'*

The Americans, accepting the defense of an independent South Vietnam a decade later, would do little better. In the interval, the French would fight another losing effort to preserve the fiction that Algeria was an integral part of France. The British, after suffering the Suez debacle of 1956, and dealing with what the author considers an overhyped Mau Mau insurgency in Kenya, would find themselves forced to the sane conclusion that their African colonies were too costly to defend and best let go gracefully.

The largest and most valuable of

the colonial dominoes to fall was the Belgian Congo, a huge, resource-rich territory roughly equivalent in size to Western Europe. Ruled poorly by a militarily insignificant Belgium, this tribally diverse territory, unprepared for independence, became a case study in chaos. Burleigh capably navigates the complex disorder that ensued: a struggle for power that resulted in the assassination of Prime Minister Patrice Lumumba ("undoubtedly charismatic . . . a disorganized thinker but a gifted demagogue" opportunistically adopted as a Communist by the Soviet Union after his death); the Katanga secessionist movement; the lackluster efforts of a United Nations military force; the death of U.N. secretary general Dag Hammarskjöld in a plane crash. All the while, American CIA and Soviet KGB agents were attempting to bring their own man to power, or at least to block the aspirations of the other side.

The United States prevailed, with the elevation of General Joseph Mobutu (who had been a sergeant in the old Belgian-officered Congolese army). Enthusiastically adopted by John F. Kennedy and a long succession of American presidents, Mobutu unified the new country, after a fashion; gave it an African name, Zaire; and ruled it "as a brutal kleptocracy" for more than four decades. He changed his own name to Mobutu Sese Seko, which translates as "the all-powerful warrior who because of his endurance and inflexible will to win goes from conquest to conquest, leaving fire in his wake."

Burleigh comments: "'Thief' would be shorter." He might also have noted that the Democratic Republic of the Congo, as it is now called, remains a chaotic, happy hunting ground for predatory militias.

Inevitably, Burleigh handles some cases more persuasively than others. In general, he is too prone to write off as dolts Western leaders facing intractable problems with limited resources, or to assume that somehow their personal peccadilloes affected their public performance. It is easy, for example, to make light of British foreign secretary Ernest Bevin's proletarian demeanor while losing sight of his moral fortitude. John F. Kennedy may have possessed the sexual morals of an alley cat, but the author's account of the Cuban Missile Crisis belies the assertion that Kennedy "remains the benchmark aspired to by all who seek to use style to obscure their lack of substance."

Burleigh does not say as much as he might about the often-naïve reactions of Western liberals, all too easily persuaded that colonial insurgents represented the aspirations of "the people" rather than the graspings of well-organized factions motivated by ideology and/or the lure of power. Still, he makes it clear that neither side, in one dirty colonial war after another, had much claim to virtue. From time to time, he evokes a sense of world-weary irony.

In general, the case studies here remind us of Winston Smith's discovery, in Orwell's *1984*, that society is divided into three classes: the High, the Middle, and the Low. Periodically, the High loses its grip and is overthrown by the Middle, which enlists the Low on its side by pretending to be fighting for liberty and justice, before throwing the Low back to its old condition of servitude.

"The liberation-era pieties of Algeria's ruling FLN seem pretty hollow to many unemployed Algerians under 25," Burleigh writes, "particularly if they see the children of the governing elite driving around in Porsches." ♦

B&A

Lone Star Power

What Texas does, and has to do, to stay successful.

BY WILLIAM MCKENZIE

Big, Hot, Cheap, and Right
What America Can Learn from the Strange Genius of Texas
by Erica Grieder
PublicAffairs, 304 pp., $26.99

What Erica Grieder has succeeded in doing with this book is what few journalists have been able to do: The *Texas Monthly* editor and one-time Southwest correspondent for the *Economist* has captured the twin realities of a state that is easy and tempting to mischaracterize. And she avoids the traps that both liberals and conservatives often fall into when evaluating a state with 26 million people, diverse and cosmopolitan cities, and Republican leadership. She also presents a case for why the rest of the nation should pay attention to this state, even if some would prefer to look away.

Liberals reflexively view Texas as a godawful hellhole of poor families, uninsured kids, and cheapskate government. Conservatives cheer on the Texas miracle of sustained economic growth without acknowledging that the state's rapidly changing demographics require some kind of public response.

These mistaken views of Texas pop up regularly, but especially during presidential campaigns. When Rick Perry ran in 2012, critics like Paul Krugman would have had you think Texas was a backwater reachable only by boat or weekly air taxis. No way would you have thought we were the second most populous state in America, with greater job growth than most every state in the country. Nor would you have understood that we are a magnet for transplants from around the country and world.

The most charitable point that could be made about the critiques leveled at our governor is that you could

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see them coming long before Perry's presidential campaign. Similar complaints were hurled at George W. Bush during his 2000 presidential race.

On the other hand, listening to Perry simplify Texas like the cheerleader he was in college was often too much to take. It still is. My Texas roots go back to the 1850s, so I am a proud Texan; but I sometimes cringe when I hear Perry talk in almost condescending tones about Texas being a land of job-creators, low taxes, and minimal regulation. We are doing a good job with those three elements, to be sure. But he can be as reductionist about our complex, multilayered state as Krugman and his crowd. Rarely do you hear Rick Perry say much about the fact that we have an aging Anglo population and a young Hispanic one. Nor do you hear him talk much about how Republicans can apply the notions of limited government to that demographic tension, which will soon become America's tension.

If he did, our governor would be a more interesting figure.

The prominence of the opposing poles of Texas-bashers and Texas-apologists is what makes Grieder's work so refreshing. She clearly loves Texas, so she is not just some reflexive Lone Star-hater. She gets the economic advantages of a state government that functions differently from the sprawling, taxing approach of a New York or California bureaucracy. Here's how she puts the difference:

> I hate to be gloomy, but California . . . well, given its economic problems, maybe we should look elsewhere for ideas. Texas is the logical choice. Even if some of its politicians don't believe in evolution, it's already managed to evolve. . . . Today, Texas is one of America's genuine powerhouses, and it has all the tools it needs to keep that up as long as it plans accordingly.

At the same time, Grieder owns up to the limitations of our state: "If you want to talk about schools, about health care, about poverty," she writes, "Texas is at the bottom of the pack, keeping company with its bedraggled southern neighbors."

What's more, she notes, "The cheerleaders dismiss Texas' inequities, its glibness, its hubris."

Our challenges start with devising a way to better prepare the Latino students who make up slightly more than half of the state's public school population. In some parts of Texas, such as Dallas, those numbers are even greater. Almost 70 percent of students in the Dallas school district are Hispanic. Texas schools must increasingly become a place where Hispanic students learn to assimilate into the larger culture. And they will broaden the Texas identity, which is just fine. One of the exciting elements of living here is watching the state absorb a large number of immigrants from all over the world. Houston is now America's most ethnically diverse city, according to Rice sociologist Steve Klineberg, whose analysis influences Grieder.

Yet the state also needs to make sure it readies the large number of Latino students for the jobs that will give them economic and social mobility. Their educational progress will allow Texas to grow and attract skilled, higher-paying jobs that could go elsewhere in search of smart workers. A product of Texas public schools, Grieder touches on this reality; but sadly, Texas just took a big step back in meeting this challenge. In their recent session, legislators approved two major bills that will dial back the state's school accountability system and its 30-year emphasis on ramping up academic standards. Perry unwisely signed those bills, which were a retreat from decades of bipartisan focus on improving Texas's educational rigor.

A self-described military brat who spent some of her formative years in San Antonio, Grieder helps the reader understand how Texas got to be cheap and right by delving into our history. What results is a nuanced read that avoids the temptation to go saccharine about Texas's frontier heritage. Yet she embraces the independent streak that gave rise to Sam Houston, who famously opposed Texas leaving the Union.

One of the more revealing parts of this book is Grieder's account of how Texans developed a lean government. It wasn't so much out of meanness, although there has been some of that. Grieder attributes our approach to the fact that Texans developed as a breed that didn't expect much from government, and she traces that attitude back to our cowboy culture and its "proto-libertarian ethos." I doubt those words have been used before to describe the cowpokes who hustled dogies along the Goodnight Trail. But she has a point. Early on, the private sector became a substitute for government, even in the delivery of services.

The resurgence of downtown Dallas is a good example of the private sector's progressive role. The city has developed an arts district within the last decade that includes a prominent sculpture center, an opera house, and performing arts hall. Dallas did that with almost nothing but private money.

As Grieder explains, being pro-business in Texas does not mean being anti-government. Texas has a long history of using government to support businesses. H. Ross Perot's EDS Company got rich, at first, through processing Medicare and Medicaid claims; the oil business benefited from favorable tax laws; and the state's vast agricultural industry has hauled down many federal subsidies.

At the end of the book, Grieder raises the question of how Texas can sustain its model of being pro-business *and* championing limited government. Some Republicans in the state government are thinking about this: At the 2013 legislature's beginning, Speaker Joe Straus toured the state talking about preparing Texas for 2030. His message was refreshing, emphasizing issues such as funding Texas's 50-year water plan. By the session's end in late spring, he and the GOP-led legislature had found a way to do it, and if voters approve their strategy in a ballot measure next month, Texas will be taking care of the infrastructure upgrades it needs in order to sustain its economy and fast population growth.

So, Straus and other Republicans are thinking about how to apply the ideals of limited government to the core needs of the state. I hope they succeed—because that's how Texas can continue to be big, hot, cheap, and right. ♦

B&A

Wattage Industry

There's more to urban lighting than illumination.

BY ELISABETH EAVES

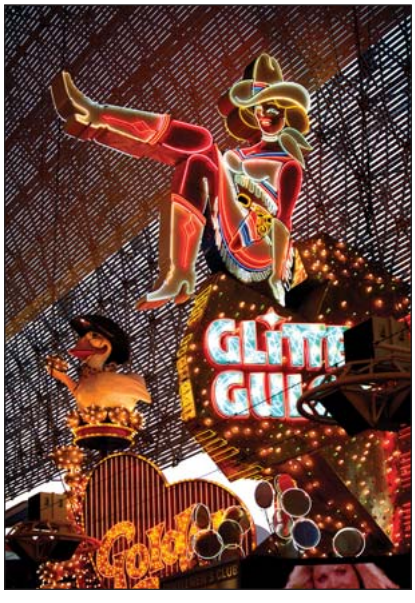
Decades before Hillary Clinton chaired a health care task force and Nancy Reagan urged new drug enforcement laws, Lady Bird Johnson declared war on neon lights. Specifically, she fought for the Highway Beautification Act of 1965, lamenting what she called "endless corridors walled in by neon, junk, and ruined landscape."

Today, neon signs may not seem like a first-lady-worthy scourge. After all, every city-dwelling North American can probably think of a beloved neon landmark, from Boston's CITGO sign (which was replaced by LED lights in 2005) to the smiling pink pachyderm advertising Seattle's Elephant Car Wash. At the time, though, Lady Bird Johnson was not alone in her views: Even before their exuberant heyday in the 1920s and '30s came to an end, neon lights had become, for some, "emblematic of the decline of Western civilization," observes Christoph Ribbat.

Ribbat is a professor of American studies at Germany's University of Paderborn, and his writing is larded with irrelevant detail—"A long-term study shows that 75 per cent of successful country songs between 1960 and 1987 were love songs"—and sometimes baffling. On the other hand, he's done a prodigious amount of research. *Flickering Light* details the history of neon as a medium for advertising and art, beginning with the British chemist William Ramsay's discovery of the noble gas in 1898. Twelve years later, a French engineer, Georges Claude, demonstrated the first neon lights, made with electrified glass tubes.

Elisabeth Eaves is the author, most recently, of Wanderlust: A Love Affair with Five Continents.

Flickering Light
A History of Neon
by Christoph Ribbat
trans. by Anthony Mathews
Reaktion, 224 pp., $30



Glitter Gulch cowgirl

More than a primer on the practical uses of neon lighting over the years, though, this is also a history of neon as a metaphor, generally for either excitement or anxiety about modern times. To this end, Ribbat has scoured the annals of pop culture to deliver what is surely the most exhaustive list of song, album, and book titles that use the word "neon," from the novels *The Neon Jungle* (1984) and *The Neon Bible* (1989), by John D. MacDonald and John Kennedy Toole respectively, to Kraftwerk's "Neonlicht" and XTC'S "Neon Shuffle." Country music, which has given the world a "Neon Moon" and "Neon Women," seems to have a particular predilection for neon symbolism. Ribbat's faithful recording of such minutiae builds into a story about how popular perceptions can change.

Nelson Algren, author of the 1947 short story collection *The Neon Wilderness*, was among those who saw something sinister in the glow. Ribbat writes that, to Algren, neon served "as a dramatic metaphor underlining the struggle for survival in the urban jungle of Chicago." Algren's first book, *Somebody in Boots* (1935), called the light show at the 1933-34 Chicago World's Fair, which used more than 20,000 meters (65,617 feet) of neon tubes, a "zigzag riot of fakery." He situates his cast of down-and-outers below a red, white, and blue neon sign that reads, "A CENTURY OF PROMISE BIGGER AND BETTER THAN EVER."

Later, a parade of writers would seize on the neon lights of Las Vegas to deplore the city. In their 1955 *Las Vegas: Playtown USA*, Katharine Best and Katharine Hillyer singled out racism and segregation in the desert metropolis, which they described as "a totally neonized society." Inevitably, a French philosopher would weigh in: In *Zeropolis* (2004), Bruce Bégout describes the giant neon cowgirl Vegas Vickie, who tops the sign for the Glitter Gulch strip club, as a "celestial and mechanical whore."

Any technology as maligned as neon lights will, of course, soon acquire contrarian enthusiasts. In 1972, architects Robert Venturi, Denise Scott Brown, and Steven Izenour published *Learning from Las Vegas*, in which they compare the Young Electric Sign Company, a prolific builder of Sin City façades, to the 17th-century painting "factory" of Peter Paul Rubens. Tom Wolfe, naturally, is a neon lover, and he did literary justice to the flashing lights in a 1960s essay that describes their colors as "tangerine, broiling magenta, livid pink, incarnadine, fuchsia demure, Congo ruby, methyl green, viridine, aquamarine, phenosafranine . . . scarlet-fever purple, cyanic blue, tessellated bronze, hospital-fruit-basket orange."

These days, the most creative and lasting neon billboards have become objects of nostalgia. There is now a Neon Museum in Las Vegas, and cities across the United States have seen

NEWSCOM

neon-sign preservation campaigns. In 2004, when PepsiCo began to dismantle a 147-foot-long cursive neon Pepsi-Cola sign, which had shone over New York's East River since 1936 (in a color you might call Congo ruby), citizens' protests prompted the company to reverse course. More recently, the builders of a new apartment tower next to the sign set back the lower eight floors in deference to it. Once a symbol of the future, then of despair, the neon sign is now a retro icon.

If there's a lesson here, it may be that we should think twice before condemning every newfangled, distracting, mesmerizing thing. Ribbat notes that, even before neon, urban lighting was controversial. Once invested with the kind of ominous significance that professional worriers would later devote to rock 'n' roll, fast food, and sundry fashion trends, neon lights turned out to be no more and no less than decoration. Their failure to bring about the collapse of civilization is proof that ugly never killed anyone, and that if you let it hang around long enough, it won't even be ugly. Sometimes a sign is just a sign. ♦

B&A

Bodyguard of Lies

A trilogy on military deception.

BY EDWIN M. YODER JR.

Winston Groom's legendary Forrest Gump is the iconic bystander who stumbles into the company of historically significant figures—and even, in the case of Elvis, supplies signature bodily gyrations. What follows will claim no such force or influence. But when it comes to unusual brushes with historic figures, it may qualify as a minor footnote.

In 1957, Adlai Stevenson came to Oxford University, a noted home of lost causes, to collect an honorary degree. For reasons now obscure, Willie Morris and I were invited to tea with the former presidential candidate, perhaps because we had collaborated on a piece about him for the student press.

Our host, then provost of Worcester College and university vice chancellor, and Stevenson's official host, was a donnish figure named John Masterman, who looms large in Ben Macintyre's three savory books on World War II strategic deception. Masterman had been chairman of the Twenty Committee, known as the Double-X or Double Cross, which succeeded (as he himself revealed several decades later) in "turning" every German spy sent to England during the war. He is described by Macintyre as a dedicated gamesman (cricket) and a figure of monkish austerity, who slept in bombed-out London on the cold floor of a former barbershop. Had I known all this, as a youth barely into my 20s, I would have paid closer attention to our teatime host.

Across Oxford, at Rhodes House, dwelt Bill Williams, former chief of intelligence to Field Marshal Montgomery and the youngest brigadier in the British Army during World War II. Williams was a dry, witty, engaging, sometimes astringent host to visiting scholars, given to teasing Americans with lines like, "I am a very right-wing Tory, much to the left of anything you have in the U.S." When, a few years later, Montgomery's memoirs paid high tribute to Williams as the architect of the second Battle of Alamein, I reviewed the book and described Williams as being "at his best with a glass of something and a good cigar." He wrote to say, with tongue in cheek as usual, that he was glad his mother was no longer living, since she had been active in the temperance movement and I had described him "as an intoxicated reactionary."

What we young acolytes didn't know then was that he was also one of the few who were privy to the Enigma decryptions, the greatest intelligence coup of that or any other war. Far from incidentally, these decodings of German signals enabled British counterintelligence tricksters to monitor the results of their deceptions.

Ben Macintyre, of the *Times* of London, writes gripping narratives that go down like milkshakes. The first, *Agent Zigzag*, tells the story of a hoodlum and safe-cracker who, pursued by the police, escaped to the Channel Islands (then German-occupied) and was recruited as a German secret agent. He was parachuted back into England, equipped with a wireless transmitter and other spy paraphernalia, and promptly turned himself in and volunteered as a double agent. There was an implicit bargain that, as a reward for his double-agent labors, his crimes would be overlooked.

Agent Zigzag's masterpiece of faux sabotage was the "blowing up" of the de Havilland aircraft factory, where an all-wood light bomber called the "mosquito" was made: a pest of special dislike and inconvenience to the

Agent Zigzag
A True Story of Nazi Espionage, Love, and Betrayal
by Ben Macintyre
Broadway, 384 pp., $15

Operation Mincemeat
How a Dead Man and a Bizarre Plan Fooled the Nazis and Assured an Allied Victory
by Ben Macintyre
Broadway, 432 pp., $15

Double Cross
The True Story of the D-Day Spies
by Ben Macintyre
Broadway, 416 pp., $15

Edwin M. Yoder Jr. is the author, most recently, of Vacancy: A Judicial Misadventure.

Germans. The effort demanded not only the sly and meticulous craft of the Double Cross managers, but the *trompe l'oeil* help of a professional magician. Agent Zigzag, aka Eddie Chapman, was among the half-dozen most colorful of the tribe of double agents who were assisted in their devious work by dozens of wholly invented agents and imaginary incidents.

Macintyre's second in the series, *Operation Mincemeat*, tells the macabre story of the most celebrated of disinformation hoaxes: an imposture designed to persuade the Germans that the Allied invasion of Europe following victory in North Africa would occur in Greece and/or Sardinia, rather than Sicily. Winston Churchill (a fan and follower of the Double Cross deceptions) observed that "anybody but a fool" could see that Sicily *had* to be the target; but a couple of brilliant managers (see below) managed to fool German intelligence.

The centerpiece of the effort has been known since the early 1950s as "the man who never was," a Welshman named Glyndr Michael who, friendless and obscure, died of rat poison in a probable suicide in wartime London. Michael's corpse was obtained, with some legal corner-cutting, and was dressed as a Royal Marines major and courier for eminent military correspondents. "Major Martin" was supplied with a believable history and personality and was transported by submarine from western Scotland. He was preserved with dry ice in a custom-made canister, and was launched, with a strapped-on briefcase, off the Spanish coast. He washed shoreward, as hoped, and was found by a fisherman. Eventually, the clues and indications contained in the "secret" letters he carried (including a reference to "sardines") made their way to the heart of German intelligence—to the attention of Hitler himself. The designers of the hoax supposed, correctly, that the Spaniards, notwithstanding their neutrality, would share the find with the Germans.

It was a fabulous success and saved many days of fighting, and many lives. One effect of Mincemeat was that Erwin Rommel was dispatched to Greece to arrange for the defense of the Peloponnesus.

Finally, there is *Double Cross*, Macintyre's narrative of the Twenty Committee's multiple deceptions calculated to divert or weaken German defenses in Normandy in 1944. The book is rich in evocations of the colorful, sometimes high-living double agents, with names like "Tricycle" (so called, allegedly, because of his fondness for *ménage-à-trois* trysts), although, as a story, the book lacks the focus and intensity of *Zigzag* and *Mincemeat*. One diverting example of the pre-D-Day hoaxes was the enlistment of an Australian actor, serving in a humdrum capacity in the British Army, as a look-alike impersonator of Montgomery. His role was to visit Gibraltar and Algiers, conspicuously and noisily, on the eve of the Normandy invasion. If the ground commander of the Allied invasion force was traipsing about far from the scene, surely the invasion (then days away) could hardly be imminent!

Eddie Chapman ('Agent Zigzag') in disguise

POPPERFOTO / GETTY IMAGES

The greedy reader of these deadly but amusing tales will constantly ask himself not only why these deceptions so often worked so well, but what it was (or is) in the English character and culture that made them so good at deceiving. German susceptibility—conditioned by fearfulness and deadly rivalries and also, as one Twenty Committee eminence remarked, by "wishmanism" and "yes-manship"—can hardly be discounted. A willing seller needs a willing buyer. But it is familiar lore that beneath their pose of stiff lips and understatement, the English inhabit a hidden world of drama and gamesmanship. Protected as their small island is by John of Gaunt's "moat," they allow themselves uncommon space for eccentricity and imagination.

It is hardly surprising to read that Ewen Montagu, one of the eminent masters of counterintelligence, was the brother of a known Communist and a connoisseur of exotic cheeses. Charles Cholmondeley (pronounced "Chumly"), pictured here in full Bedouin kit, was a postwar bug-hunter and devotee of plagues of locusts in the Near East; it was he who came up with the Trojan horse idea that bore the body of "Major Martin" into Nazidom. It didn't hurt that many of the Double Cross masters had been classically educated.

Perhaps, after all, we have known the inner secret of the Double Cross since at least the time of Shakespeare: All the world's a stage, and the English are hereditarily accomplished players in the often ironic comedies of human folly and illusion. Certainly, as I read these three marvelous books, I thought back to those Oxford scenes of the 1950s, and my clueless brushes with this cast of characters, and marveled at the steely self-discipline that kept their wartime secrets so well-corked for so long. ♦

B&A

Bird Brains

The hidden life, and surprising depth, of the avian mind. **BY DAVID GUASPARI**

"What is it like," asks Tim Birkhead, "for an emperor penguin diving in the inky blackness of the Antarctic seas at depths of up to 400 m[eters]?" And what is it like "to feel a sudden urge to eat incessantly, and over a week or so become hugely obese, then fly relentlessly—pulled by some invisible force—in one direction for thousands of miles, as many tiny songbirds do twice each year"?

He acknowledges that these questions can't really be answered—so this book can't really make good on its subtitle. A sighted person cannot explain to one blind from birth what sight is like, and a blind person cannot explain to a sighted one what it's like to navigate without it. And these are easy cases, beginning as they do from a mutual understanding of what purposes our abilities serve: the wants and needs and lives of humans.

What *Bird Sense* does provide is fascinating: a survey of current knowledge about birds' abilities to sense and respond to their environment. Until relatively recently, Birkhead says, the subject was a backwater, one he himself avoided as a graduate student. He tells of meeting a scientist who had spent his career studying the sensory biology of birds, but, having stirred little interest in his work, burnt his papers on retirement. When Birkhead asked to discuss them, the man was both "dismayed and delighted."

This book is, necessarily, a bit of a miscellany—anecdote, experiment, history—but two general themes emerge: that the sensory world of birds has persistently proven richer than was previously supposed, and that vast amounts remain to be discovered. Separate chapters cover their vision, hearing, touch, taste, and smell, as well as "the magnetic sense" and emotions. Each begins with a story from the field. The chapter on sight quotes a 19th-century account of falconers capturing their birds—using a pigeon as bait and a shrike as falcon detector. At the approach of a raptor far too distant for a human eye to see, the shrike would become agitated, and in its behavior an experienced falconer was said to be able to read not only that a bird of prey was approaching, but also what species, how fast, and how low.

Bird Sense
What It's Like to Be a Bird
by Tim Birkhead
Bloomsbury, 288 pp., $16

Like most people, I take a sub-scientific interest in the gaudy and the amazing, including a fondness for animals possessing Clark Kent-like powers and abilities far beyond those of mortal men. The basic evidence comes from anatomy and behavior. The shrike's behavior shows it has detected a great deal about the approaching bird, but doesn't tell us how that trick was done. Comparing the bird's eye to a human eye gives one answer, without ruling out the possibility that other mechanisms are also involved. A fovea is a structure in the retina capable of especially sharp image processing—identifiable by a high density of cones (photoreceptors responsible for both color vision and acuity) and the absence of blood vessels and non-photosensitive neurons. A human eye has one fovea; the eye of a shrike (and falcon and eagle) has two.

Anatomical explanation often invokes the plausible principle that the relative size of an organ (and of the part of the brain that processes its signals) indicates its importance. The ratio of eye size to body size in birds is typically twice that found in humans. This principle is well and astonishingly displayed in the large seasonal variations that can occur in the size of a bird's internal organs: e.g., the part of a male songbird's brain associated with singing grows in preparation for the mating season and shrinks thereafter.

We all can see birds respond to song, and an anatomist can find in birds analogues to the structures of a human ear (inner-ear bones, cochlea, hair cells), so we easily credit birds with hearing, sometimes in a superhuman way. Birkhead reports that in the large, densely packed colonies of guillemots he has studied, parents and chicks can identify one another's calls even against a background cacophony of others. Well-known experiments have shown that owls can hunt in complete darkness, tracking their prey by sound—to which Birkhead adds a poignant detail: Owls are not keen to *fly* in complete darkness, except in surroundings that they know; and even then, an owl that has seized its prey will fly straight back to its perch, retracing a path known to avoid obstacles.

It was much harder for ornithologists to discover the structures responsible for touch, taste, and smell. Whether birds have such senses was, for a long time, in dispute, despite an abundance of anecdotal and behavioral evidence. Not until the 1970s were the first avian taste buds discovered—in the tip of a duck's bill. And Birkhead notes a brilliant speculation about taste from Alfred Russel Wallace, co-discoverer with Charles Darwin of natural selection. Some caterpillars are brightly colored, as if to flaunt their presence; they seem to be asking for trouble. And the colors cannot be useful in mating displays, since caterpillars are sexually immature. Wallace suggested that bad-tasting caterpillars would have an adaptive benefit from looking conspicuously different from those that tasted good. Subsequent experiments found birds acting as if they found the brightly colored caterpillars distasteful.

David Guaspari is a writer in Ithaca, N.Y.

Audubon himself, Birkhead says, performed a highly influential but flawed experiment purporting to show that turkey vultures lacked the sense of smell and had to locate food by sight alone. His error was to test his theory with putrefying carrion; turkey vultures like it fresh. My favorite of the amazing smell stories is evidence that superimposed on the ocean is a "landscape" of smells related to underwater topography, and that far-ranging petrels and albatrosses, whose brains have huge olfactory bulbs, use not only local plumes of smell to locate food, but also the olfactory landscape to find their way back to the tiny island specks on which they nest. They can't do it if their olfactory nerves are cut.

Birds' feats of navigation have been a subject of wonder and speculation for centuries, and ingenious tracking technology has made it clear just how spectacular they can be. Geolocators, for example, are electrical devices that make it possible to track a bird's movements by periodically recording the level of ambient light. From these data, one can determine the length of day, which correlates with latitude, and the time of solar noon, which correlates with longitude.

Important early studies of migration were based on caged birds, which can become restless at migration time, hopping up and down. Placed in "orientation cages," allowing them to see the night sky, they hop in the direction of their migratory destination. These experiments provided evidence that some birds could use the stars for navigation; but more is involved, since some could orient themselves in total darkness. That realization revived a possibility, first suggested in the 19th century, that birds have a compass able to detect the earth's magnetic field. The suggestion had been dismissed because there seemed to be no physiological mechanism to account for it. But experimenters in the 1950s showed that changing the magnetic field inside the cage with externally applied magnetic coils caused birds to reorient their hopping to the direction of this new field.

Birkhead sketches the two leading explanations for how this happens. The more charming goes like this: Magnetic fields can affect the rate at which certain chemical reactions take place; thus, the rate of reaction can serve as a detector. Further, those reactions are also induced by light; so a magnetic field may alter a bird's response to light, which suggests that the presence of a magnetic field may be, literally, visible. This possibility gets support from astonishing experiments showing that a robin's magnetic compass works only if the bird can see clearly out of its right eye. (An obvious question not discussed: Why, then, don't humans also see magnetic fields?)

Birkhead begins his chapter on emotions with the story of a goose whose mate had been shot, and who spent the next week doing what might be described as standing vigil beside the body. Although we can explain this, he says, without reference to emotions—as a programmed response—we don't have to. Fair enough. Birkhead is inclined to believe that birds do experience emotions, and hopes that behavioral observations and physiological measurements (birds secreting certain hormones, as humans do, in presumptively "emotional" situations) will be illuminating. It's hard to see, however, how such measurements can ever count as evidence against the view that birds are simply automata. The point of Thomas Nagel's famous essay "What Is It Like to Be a Bat?" is not (merely) the difficulty of knowing what it is like to belong to some other species, but that "no presently available conception gives us a clue" how an essentially subjective experience could be accounted for by a purely physical explanation.

Bird Sense cites a claim that we are currently in the golden age of sensory research on humans and expresses the hope that a golden age in the study of sensation in birds is to come. Perhaps Tim Birkhead will be able to write its chronicle in the not-too-distant future.♦

B&A

On to Mars?

An astronaut makes the case for exploration.

BY JOSHUA GELERNTER

On July 21, 1969, Edwin "Buzz" Aldrin joined Neil Armstrong on the moon's surface and launched a new epoch of human history. It's safe to say that this is the best-known item on Buzz Aldrin's résumé.

Less known is the item that won Aldrin his spot in the space program to begin with: Buzz of NASA is also Dr. Buzz of MIT. Before he was inducted into the astronaut corps, Aldrin wrote a doctoral thesis on orbital rendezvous that impressed the National Aeronautics and Space Administration enough to land him a job. Buzz Aldrin is not your basic cosmic cowboy: He has a big mind that ranked among those assembled for the biggest science project ever pulled off. Since crossing the space-race finish line 44 years ago, Aldrin has continued to bring his ideas to bear on the nation's gradually atrophied space ambition. His latest effort is this book.

Mission to Mars
My Vision for Space Exploration
by Buzz Aldrin and Leonard David
National Geographic, 272 pp., $26

For a man whose life is ripped from the pages of science fiction, Aldrin is remarkably practical. He doesn't want us going to Mars to have a quick look around and come home, the way we did with the moon. (There were only six moon landings, and they spanned less than three years.) Real progress,

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says Aldrin, means being on Mars permanently; he wants us to colonize, not visit. And, being practical, he knows that the United States has limited funds to spend on its space program.

Mission to Mars is a point-by-point plan for making the trip to Mars as cheap and simple as possible. First, forget racing China and Russia back to the moon; America has nothing to gain by rerunning a race we've already won. Let the other spacefaring countries put men back on the moon: We'll trade them our experience for "an occasional seat on their landers." And while they take charge of establishing an international moon station, the United States will conserve "the precious dollar resources needed for the great leap to Mars."

Next, forget Mars. Going directly from planet to planet is impractical. Fortunately, Mars comes equipped with a convenient way station: Phobos. With the same surface area as Delaware, Phobos is the larger of Mars's two little moons—and, being little, it has the advantage of also being light on gravity and atmosphere. A planet's worth of gravity makes comings and goings take a lot of energy, and an atmosphere means having to withstand a lot of heat and friction on the way to the surface.

Not so for Phobos, where a pre-Martian colony will allow astronauts to make remote-control landing preparations that are impossible from more-distant Earth. When the Phobos astronauts are ready for the final descent, Mars will be a scant 6,000 miles beneath them.

To get ready for Phobos, which is essentially an asteroid, Aldrin says we need to land on an asteroid: Further from the Earth than the moon but (potentially) much nearer than Mars, a passing asteroid would give astronauts a chance to practice Phobian landings on trips measured in weeks instead of years. Landing on an asteroid passing near Earth would also mean being prepared for the statistically inevitable day when we have to deal with an asteroid heading straight for us.

To make it to the practice asteroid, we need money and enthusiasm. For that, Aldrin turns to the free market. Space tourism is about to become big business, with the Virgin Atlantic spinoff Virgin Galactic leading the charge. (Its first space flight with paying passengers is scheduled to take off later this year.) Last year, a private company called SpaceX delivered supplies to the International Space Station; two years from now, they'll be delivering people. And a half-dozen other companies have similar plans.

Aldrin hopes the promise of adventure will lure tourists to space—and the promise of customers will lure private enterprise. Plus, in a decade or so, big business can start strip-mining heavenly bodies. Aldrin's timeline has us visiting an asteroid in the early 2020s, Phobos in the early 2030s, and Mars by 2035. I'd rather it be sooner—but Aldrin is 83, and 60 years older than me. So if he can wait, I suppose I can, too.

When that 2035 Mars mission rolls around, it won't mean anything to Aldrin if it's a one-off. His plan demands a steady supply of new, permanent residents—and while the prospect of permanent Martian residence might be daunting, Aldrin fairly points out that when the Pilgrims arrived in the New World, they weren't expecting a return trip to the Old World. He wants adventurers to homestead Mars, to set up frontier towns, warm the atmosphere, plant some plants, and establish humanity as a two-planet species.

To ensure a continual stream of new arrivals, Aldrin reaches back to the orbital rendezvous research that got him started in space in the 1960s. He wants a series of spaceships constantly cycling between Earth and Mars, on a sort of continuous dual orbit of the two planets. Picture a bus on a beltway that travels 22,000 miles-an-hour and never stops. You get on and off by leaping to and from a rendezvous bus that matches speeds. By relying on gravity and the two planets' predictable orbital patterns, this cycler would take minimal energy to keep on course and at speed. And by being reusable, it will keep airfare to Mars reasonable. The trip will take six months and a stout heart.

The Martian landscape, 1997

After the Obama administration shelved plans for NASA's return to the moon, America's manned space program appeared to be dying. A year later, the space shuttle was retired, and American astronauts had no way into space other than hitching rides on Russia's decrepit Soyuz capsules. That seemed like the last nail in the coffin.

Mission to Mars is a white paper for getting us back on track, complete with math, science, and diagrams—though Aldrin and his coauthor put it all together with clear and quick-moving prose. If you're at all interested in space, this is a page-turner; and if you're a Weekly Standard reader with a secret hankering for a new life on a new planet, Buzz Aldrin has got some real estate he'd like to show you. ♦

B&A

Less Is More

In the presidency, obscurity is not the same as unimportance. **BY MICHAEL ROSEN**

It's sometimes the case that the most forgettable historical figures furnish the most enduring lessons. Here, Michael J. Gerhardt excavates the remains of some of our least memorable—and least popular—chief executives, along the way adroitly reconstructing the political, legal, and historical legacies that descended, along with these forgottens, to a shallow grave.

> The stories of forgotten presidents illustrate how presidential power expands over time because the presidency's unique capacity for flexibility, determination, efficiency, and energy works to its advantages in protracted contests with other branches and the states.

Take John Tyler, for instance, who "produced one of the richest constitutional legacies of any American president," despite his wide unpopularity. By raw numbers alone, Tyler's brief tenure (1841-45) was momentous. Our 10th president, a Whig, exercised his veto six times, the most of any president up to that point. He was also the first chief executive to have his veto overridden, the first to face an impeachment investigation, and the first to be expelled by his own party. Tyler subverted the Whigs' majoritarian governing philosophy, which disdained strong executive powers, most prominently by deploying his veto so frequently and skillfully. "Mere regard to the will of the majority," he declared in an 1841 veto message, "must not in a constitutional republic like ours control this sacred and solemn duty of a sworn officer."

An unlikely exponent of "energy in the executive," Tyler nonetheless vigorously defended his appointment and removal powers ("I cannot perceive anywhere in the Constitution . . . any duty resting upon the House . . . by which it may become responsible for any such appointment"). He also bolstered the president's prerogative in foreign affairs and deflected congressional investigations through the use of executive privilege.

Stated differently, this is the law of unintended consequences, and it characterized many 19th-century presidents. "All four Whig presidents," Gerhardt writes, "who had pledged as candidates to weaken the presidency and secure congressional supremacy over domestic policymaking, actually fortified presidential prerogatives and buried their party's governance principles—and ultimately their party."

The Forgotten Presidents
Their Untold Constitutional Legacy
by Michael J. Gerhardt
Oxford, 336 pp., $34.95

Franklin Pierce, 1857

The same was true in a different way of Franklin Pierce (1853-57), an antebellum Democrat and another largely failed president, whose extreme strict constructionism wound up reinforcing the nascent Republican cause. The only popularly elected president not to be renominated by his own party, Pierce ignominiously lost to his own ambassador to Britain, James Buchanan. It was, in Gerhardt's view, Pierce's unyielding political philosophy that got him in trouble: In his Inaugural Address, the 14th president declared that the federal government must "confine itself to the exercise of powers clearly granted by the Constitution." Indeed, by Gerhardt's count, Pierce vetoed nine bills on constitutional grounds, including, notoriously, legislation promoted by Dorothea Dix that would have allocated millions of acres of federal land to treatment facilities for the mentally ill, because (in Pierce's words) Washington lacked constitutional authority to act as "the great almoner of public charity."

Pierce's extraordinarily tight reading of the Constitution carried over into his cabinet, where he appointed a young Jefferson Davis as secretary of war and Caleb Cushing, an equally strict constructionist, as attorney general. It also permeated his policies, especially on slavery; he pushed vigorously to repeal the Missouri Compromise, which barred slavery in the territories, and to pass the Kansas-Nebraska Act, which empowered states to reach their own conclusions about slavery, independent of federal meddling. Predictably, these policies further polarized the nation, sparked "Bleeding Kansas," and, ultimately, provoked the War Between the States.

The tenures of subsequent forgotten presidents are variations on the theme. Chester Alan Arthur (1881-85), another accidental one-termer and "Stalwart" Republican, burned his personal papers and has no presidential library to his name—but he enacted major civil service reform. Benjamin Harrison (1889-93) presided over passage of the Sherman Antitrust Act and invigorated the president's appointment power, but was otherwise undistinguished. And Grover Cleveland (1885-89, 1893-97),

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whom Gerhardt fittingly describes in two splendid chapters, evolved from his first to his second discontinuous term into an avowed exponent of executive power, expanding our reach to the Hawaiian Islands and deploying federal troops to disrupt a rail strike, declaring "in this hour of danger and public distress, discussion may well give way to active efforts . . . to restore obedience to law and to protect life and property."

While Gerhardt's tour of the 19th century supports his main thesis, his examination of the lesser lights of the 20th century is less even, but no less fascinating. The presidencies of William Howard Taft (1909-13), Calvin Coolidge (1923-29), and Jimmy Carter (1977-81) have been recounted many times over, but Gerhardt unearths interesting and pertinent nuggets about each. (Taft, who appointed six Supreme Court justices in his single term and later became chief justice himself, was the only president to work full-time as a law professor after his presidency concluded.) But ultimately, "the most important lesson of the forgotten presidents [is that] the Constitution genuinely matters," writes Gerhardt. Our founding document has both outlasted and been shaped by our Founders, from the memorable giants down to the single-termers. ♦

B&A

Literary Postcards

The writer's vocation in J.F. Powers's correspondence.

BY JOSEPH BOTTUM

One of the things you learn when you read the letters of great writers is how rarely great writers talk about literature in their letters. Mostly they talk about money. The letters of Henry Ford show more interest in big ideas and artistic principles than do those of James Joyce. When Joyce wrote a letter, it was usually a complaint about how expensive everything seemed—and would the recipient mind enclosing a small check in his next reply?

The primary reason for this, of course, is that great writers are often poor. The devotion to literature is a time-consuming one, and the remuneration isn't typically all that great—at least not at the moment of writing. Although the heirs often seem to do all right; it's said that the royalties from Andrew Lloyd Webber's musical setting of *Old Possum's Book of Practical Cats* paid more money into the Eliot estate, all by itself, than T.S. Eliot managed to make from his poetry during his lifetime, including the cash from the Nobel Prize.

Suitable Accommodations
An Autobiographical Story of Family Life: The Letters of J.F. Powers, 1942-1963
edited by Katherine A. Powers
Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 480 pp., $35

But there's a second reason that writers' letters are often so relentlessly unliterary, and it's the same reason that carpenters' letters usually contain little about carpentry. Who needs a busman's holiday? When you sit down after a hard day's work to drop a note to mom or an old college chum, you don't want to engage the same deep thoughts about literature and the human condition that you spent the day struggling to get into your novel. Oh, a few writers indulge themselves; but those mad letter-writers—Charles Dickens and George Bernard Shaw, for example—are usually mad writers *simpliciter*, pounding out prose at prodigious rates. If you're a slow writer—as, say, the fiction master J.F. Powers was—you can't afford to pour the soul of your craft into a letter.

That's not to say that the letters of J.F. Powers are dull. They aren't, exactly. Now collected by his daughter in *Suitable Accommodations*, covering the years 1942 to 1963, the letters are lively, restless, comic, more than a little selfish, and unceasingly smart—much like Powers himself, one imagines. He never undertook the novel that he said he long planned to write, a tale of family life to match his tales of the lives of bachelor priests; but he tried out some of its themes in his letters.

Or so at least his daughter claims, noting in her introduction that Powers was "not only living" the unwritten novel, "but creating and embellishing it in his correspondence." Named after Powers's friend Katherine Anne Porter—who helped convince *Accent* magazine to publish "Lions, Harts, Leaping Does," Powers's first important short story—Katherine Anne Powers wrote a long-running column on books for the *Boston Globe* and, later, for the *Barnes & Noble Review* under the title "A Reading Life." A dutiful daughter, she has been a good shepherd of her father's reputation, but we should probably take those words "creating" and "embellishing" as signs that she doesn't fully agree with the picture of the family, with five young children, that Powers put in his correspondence.

A handful of the letters gossip with other writers, especially those from the Yaddo crowd: Porter, Robert Lowell, Elizabeth Hardwick, Jack Conroy. And another handful are to friends he met while living in the extremely Roman Catholic section of Minnesota, around Collegeville and St. John's. But many, many of the letters—close to a majority—are to two correspondents: Powers's wife Betty and Father Harvey Egan, a Minnesota priest who became Powers's promoter, sounding board, and patron.

I confess to not much enjoying these letters. What emerges from the ones to his wife is just how often he was gone. He was, as his daughter observes, always on the hunt for suitable accommodations, moving through the Midwest and

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Ireland in search of a perfection that always eluded him: an ideal house, a fitting job where he could teach writing, a rich Catholic social setting, a compelling view from his study window. Even without her replies in the collection, Betty comes across as wry, intelligent, and long-suffering.

Much of the religious discussion is in the letters to Father Egan: remarks on the Catholic journals, the latest papal encyclicals, the continuing influence of the *Catholic Worker*, Dorothy Day, and the "Detachment movement" (a school of 20th-century Catholic thought, under the influence of which Powers would go to prison as a conscientious objector during World War II). But there is, in these letters to his priest-supporter, a tone of performance, even of the duty a client owes a patron, that make them seem less informative than they might have been had the friendship been more balanced.

The letters in this (presumably) first volume of correspondence end around the time Powers won the 1963 National Book Award for his first novel, *Morte d'Urban*. It was the peak of the Catholic literary renaissance in America: Walker Percy had won the award the year before for *The Moviegoer*, the dying Flannery O'Connor was at the height of her early fame—and Powers seemed the next young star in that firmament.

What's more, he deserved it. Consider just the delicacy with which Powers handles the broad humor toward the end of *Morte d'Urban*. A worldly priest has sustained a golf injury (of course), which gives him the headaches that will lead to his death. Powers writes:

> His severest attacks now came in pairs, the first one lasting about a minute, with an interval of perhaps forty seconds between them. . . . When somebody was in the office, and he felt the first section coming down the tracks, he swiveled around in his chair, saying, "I'll be with you in a minute, Father," and opened his breviary, and closed his eyes, and waited until both sections had come and gone. Thus he tried to disguise his condition from others, and thus, without wishing to, he gained a reputation for piety he hadn't had before, which, however, was not entirely unwarranted now.

The picture of the human condition and its possible sanctification may never be bettered than in that quiet and ironic phrasing: "which, however, was not entirely unwarranted now."

Shortly after Powers's death in 1999, a Catholic magazine asked me for something on him. At the time, I felt the need to be a cheerleader for his work: Here was one of the great writers of the mid-20th century, and his reputation was fading as fast as the sunset. "J.F. Powers, 81, Dies; Wrote About Priests" the *New York Times* had dismissingly titled his obituary. And all of his books were out of print.

In the years since, the publishing imprint of the *New York Review of Books* has brought out new editions of all his fiction; his reputation as a prose stylist has been somewhat restored and his place in literary encyclopedias established. If, in the 1990s, he was mentioned as an afterthought to Flannery O'Connor and Walker Percy, he now often leads that list of Catholic writers in America. This doesn't mean he's read or anthologized as much as a novel like *Morte d'Urban*—or a short-story collection like *Lions, Harts, Leaping Does*—deserves to be. If you haven't absorbed J.F. Powers, the letters in *Suitable Accommodations* are not the place to start. But they may be the place to end up. ♦

B&A

It Takes a Village

Bohemia at the bottom of Manhattan.

BY FRED SIEGEL

Greenwich Village has always been a matter of geography imbricated by doctrine. Exempted from the 1811 grid plan for numbering Manhattan's roads north of 14th Street that came to define most of the island, Greenwich Village, bordered on its west by the Hudson River, retained a crazy-quilt layout of named streets. Heterodox in design, over time it attracted a population of Irish and Italian dockworkers and unorthodox thinkers. By the start of the 20th century, said Malcolm Cowley, it was "not only a place" but "a mood, a way of life: Like all Bohemias, it was also a doctrine."

The interaction of dockworkers and intellectuals in the Village's lively bars and taverns fermented a quasi-Marxist outlook for some, but even more fundamental was a hostility to the American middle-class way of life. The Village alternative was defined by a cult of creativity. Strip away the crushing carapace of bourgeois convention—including marriage between the sexes, insisted the bohemians—and human creativity would effloresce.

In the late 1960s, home from graduate school, I was thrilled to be taken to the Lion's Head Tavern on Christopher Street by my writer friend David Walley, who was editor of the short-lived *Jazz and Pop*. A famous hangout for writers and journalists from the *Village Voice* such as Paul Cowan and Jack Newfield and Vic Ziegel, as well as Sidney Zion and Heywood Gould of the *New York Post*, the tavern crackled with belligerent conversation and no one seemed to notice when the noted folksinger Dave Van Ronk, already in his cups, wobbled

The Village
400 Years of Beats and Bohemians, Radicals and Rogues: A History of Greenwich Village
by John Strausbaugh
Ecco, 640 pp., $29.99

Fred Siegel is scholar in residence at St. Francis College in Brooklyn and a fellow at the Manhattan Institute.

his way into a booth. The bearded Van Ronk, who mocked the clean-cut Kingston Trio of the folk revival as "Babbitt Balladeers," is one of the many figures profiled here. *The Village* is an enjoyable collection of vignettes about the sometimes-eccentric artists, writers, singers, actors, and wannabes who gave Greenwich Village its character.

One of the writers who makes repeated appearances is the marvelous novelist Dawn Powell, who was at the peak of her powers in the 1950s. She reduced Thomas Wolfe's mega-novel *Of Time and the River* to eight lines:

Oh Boston girls how about it
Oh Jewish girls, what say
Oh America I love you
Oh geography, hooray
Ah youth, ah me, ah beauty
Ah sensitive, arty boy
Ah busts and thighs and bellies
Ah nooky there—ahoy!

John Strausbaugh, a prolific journalist who, for a time, turned the now-defunct *New York Press* into a weekly worth reading, is at his best in short sketches and scathing asides, as when he describes Jack Kerouac as "the free spirit who never cut his mother's apron strings, the prophet of the open road who never learned to drive." He places the rise of performers and film stars such as Marlon Brando, Harry Belafonte, Rod Steiger, Walter Matthau, Elaine Stritch, Wally Cox, Bea Arthur, and Bernie Schwartz (Tony Curtis) in the context of the Village. They were all taught to act at the New School for Social Research by the Brecht collaborator and sometime devotee of the Soviet Union Erwin Piscator.

Strausbaugh also has an eye for forgotten but important Village figures, such as the novelist and professional wrestler Rosalyn Drexler (dubbed "the first Marx sister") and Moses Asch, eldest son of the Yiddish novelist Sholem Asch. Born in 1905 in Poland, Asch made his first recording of the Bagelman Sisters singing in Yiddish. He went on to found Folkways Records in 1948, where he brought Lead Belly to prominence. Strausbaugh also spends time on the musical polymath David Amram (who is still performing), as well as the rise of The Living Theater and Off- and Off-Off-Broadway.

The commercialization of bohemia was a roaring success. As early as 1917, the Village was so successful in selling itself to tourists that Sinclair Lewis wrote a satire for the *Saturday Evening Post* entitled "Hobohemia." Malcolm Cowley, who would go on to edit Kerouac's *On the Road*, worried in the 1920s that the Village was dying of success, because so many would-be bohemians were flocking to its streets—one of the many false alarms about the Village's decline from its peak in the years around World War I. By the mid-1960s, however, the Village's vitality was genuinely on the wane. Its prominence, said a 1966 guidebook, "as a relatively isolated and exclusive enclave of outsiders had ended"; it was becoming "little more than an offbeat shopping and modern-living center."

Strausbaugh halfheartedly disagrees, and *The Village*'s closing pages are a less-than-enlightening attempt to come to grips with the decline of the Village's verve. Strausbaugh can't acknowledge it, but the very doctrine that gave birth to the vitality of Greenwich Village was also its undoing. When American middle-class culture was alive and flourishing, flouting convention was a going business. But when convention collapsed in the mid-1960s, the Village was left behind, culturally—new money moving into its ranks aside. Little more than a nostalgic aftermath remained, defined by merchants selling relics of the Village's original moment.

The Village had long prided itself on anticipating the future. But its successors, such as Williamsburg in Brooklyn, live by mining American culture with heavy-handed irony. Brooklyn's hipsters cannibalize the styles of the past so that their male denizens—the "trustafarians" supported by successful bourgeois parents and/or grandparents—walk about in full mix-and-match costume of porkpie hats and wife-beater T-shirts. The freelance intellectuals and dockworkers who gave Greenwich Village its engaging appeal are now long gone, replaced by the vast bureaucratic apparatus of New York University, which has absorbed wide tracts of the Village, and by young professionals who, in an earlier decade, would have been described, derisively, as Yuppies.

The once-distinct Village hasn't been absorbed into the Manhattan street grid, but just as the *New York Times* has turned into a daily edition of the *Village Voice*, the intellectual life of Greenwich Village, such as it is, is now indistinguishable from the rest of gentrified Manhattan and Brooklyn. ♦

JOSEPH SCHWARTZ / CORBIS

Artist at work, Greenwich Village, ca. 1935

B&A

Paradox of the Book

The chaos of the Internet makes reading easier.

BY THOMAS L. JEFFERS

Plato is smarter than you. That's how an experienced teacher once began a series of lectures on the Greek philosopher. And a good beginning it was, for it put students on notice that, as they read, their first duty was to attend and learn. Plato didn't have the final word—there would be Aristotle, Epicurus, and others—but no one could enter that ancient conversation without conning the books.

Same with us, only we have a problem: Compared even with people half-a-generation back, we lack the necessary time and patience. We read plenty, but it's mostly skimming online news and compressed Twitter or Facebook messages. What's needed, David Mikics argues, is a return to the close-reading practices inculcated by teachers whose influence might be said to have peaked in the 1950s and declined in the late '60s, with the shift to a politicized pedagogy. That shift changed the game, and many English departments now prefer the label "cultural studies," not least because it allows them to jettison traditional poems and stories for the sake of TV, hip-hop, fashion ads, graphic novels, and comic books—whatever facilitates (as in "makes facile") sloganizing about gender, race, and class.

Plato isn't the smartest anymore. That title has passed to the trendy professor hectoring from the lectern or bloviating on his blog. Which goes a long way toward explaining why the English major, once the flagship of the humanities in our colleges, may soon be of interest only to archaeologists. In 1971, 7.6 percent of undergraduates majored in English; today it's 3.1 percent.

Slow Reading in a Hurried Age
by David Mikics
Belknap, 336 pp., $27.95

One reaction is to rejoice, for the reading and writing of literature can now go back to where it thrived, before the advent of criticism as an academic discipline in the 1920s and '30s. Till then, English departments, if they existed at all, innocently taught philology and hard-fact literary history. Inspired by the dazzling analyses of I. A. Richards and William Empson, not to mention the smartly diverging discriminations of writer-critics like T. S. Eliot and D. H. Lawrence, professors like F. R. Leavis, Yvor Winters, and Lionel Trilling made "English" the go-to place for many of the best undergraduate minds. But that, even for today's middle-aged teachers, was almost inconceivably long ago.

For all of us, but especially for Generation X and Y sorts, a sustained and quiet read is harder to get than ever. The nagging, omnipresent digital media have produced a version of the Attention Deficit Disorder that psychologists began identifying in children decades ago: Continuous Partial Attention (CPA). A former Apple employee, Linda Stone, coined the term in 1998, differentiating it from multitasking, or the pairing of a "fairly automatic" activity, such as eating lunch, with one requiring concentration, such as making a phone call. CPA results from "a desire not to miss anything," to be plugged into sources keeping us "in the know" and, artificially, at high alert. Between smartphone, laptop, e-reader, Twitter, Tumblr, and YouTube, says novelist Walter Kirn, we're like the "stiff-backed lady operators" in old movies, "rapidly swapping phone jacks from hole to hole as they connect Chicago to Miami, reporter to city desk, businessman to mistress."

As the slow-food movement has tried to refine our fast-food habits, so (Mikics believes) a slow-reading movement might correct CPA's neurotic mix of "over-stimulation and lack of fulfillment." He would have us concentrate on one book at a time, and with the web's ever-exploding "library" blacked out. The blackout can be achieved, I was delighted to learn, through something called the Freedom app, which allows one at the keyboard to focus on his or her word processor, and nothing else—the digital equivalent, Mikics suggests, to maintaining celibacy at an orgy.

Mikics locates the origin of word-by-word analysis at Harvard, where, in the 1950s, Reuben Brower taught a humanities course that spawned a large number of future English professors. Through the work of Trilling at Columbia, complementing Leavis at Cambridge—the moral imagination joined with the rigors of close reading—criticism became a formidable subject indeed. Rather than offering what Brower pooh-poohed as "the old-time appreciation course in which the teacher mounted the platform and sang a rhapsody which he alone was capable of understanding and which the student memorized," the postwar cohort of literature teachers presented the text as an aesthetic and ethical nut to crack.

Those code-crackers insisted that literature qua literature does not illustrate ideologies, historical events, or even moral ideas—though of course they are all in play. A literary work is, like a living person, a complicated and ambivalent organism: We have to live with it awhile if we hope to comprehend it properly. The cultural studies squad certainly doesn't sweat the complications and scarcely bothers with the particular words. It just asks students to grasp the salient

Thomas L. Jeffers is the author, most recently, of Norman Podhoretz: A Biography.

points, usually regarding who, in a given setting, is oppressing whom.

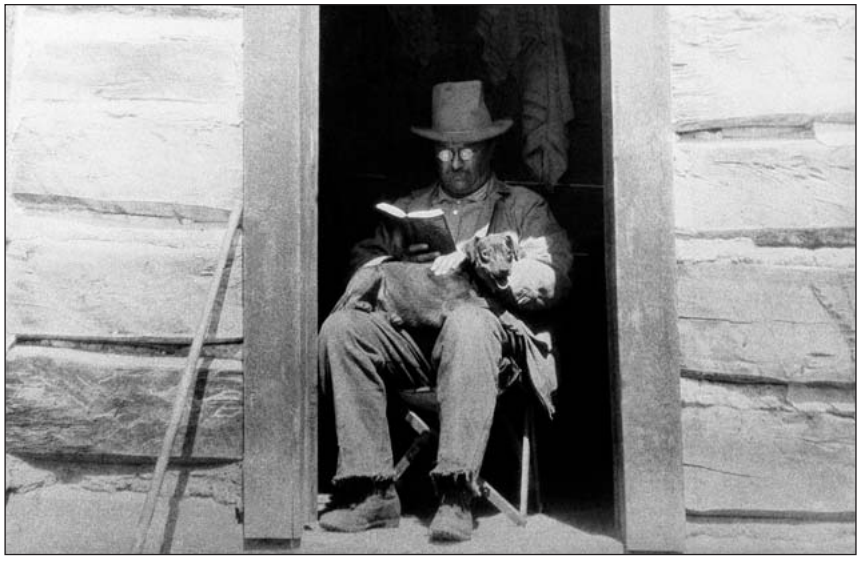
Of course, it's smart to know who's oppressing whom: It enables us to survive and, possibly, to help others do the same. But as Harold Bloom says, the best books offer something prior: self-knowledge. By discovering what authors think, feel, and care for, we find out who *they* are. By entering into dialogue with their books—annotating in the margins when we agree or disagree or when we aren't sure—we define who *we* are.

So far, you might say, so schoolmasterish. There's more than a trace of the self-help book in *Slow Reading*, which comes complete with 14 rules—from "Be Patient" to "Identify Signposts" to "Find Another Book"—that promise to fix what's broken in our mental and emotional life. But this is entirely forgivable, given the impoverishment that, without enough slow reading, so many of us suffer. And as slow readers of great books, we take away not just trivia for *Jeopardy!* It's what Elizabeth Bowen said of the books she read as a child, which provided a feeling for "incalculable" characters: "It appeared that nobody who mattered was capable of being explained. Thus was inculcated a feeling for the dark horse."

Literature presents not only characters but ideas that are "dark" (i.e., richly ambiguous), such that interpretation can be edifyingly difficult. Mikics shows how key words in the works of philosophical writers such as Machiavelli (*virtù* and *fortuna*) and Edmund Burke ("rational liberty") are contested and qualified in ways that, as their meanings unfold, require the reader to do a lot of the work: apprehending what's on one page, and connecting it with similar and dissimilar statements on other pages.

There's nothing flagrantly amiss in Mikics's formulations of the pagan, Christian, Romantic, or modernist themes explored in works by Homer, Plato, Shakespeare, Blake, Yeats, Chekhov, Philip Roth, and others. But the more I reread his two-to-four-page summations, the more I felt that, like many of us, he's seduced by a professorial fondness for verbal solutions—nuggets of interpretive wisdom that can seem all right as we stand above a great poem, play, or novel, but that evanesce as we descend to details.

Mikics offers sound synopses of a number of predictable classic works as well as, happily, some unexpected ones—Lawrence's "Fragment of Stained Glass" and Willa Cather's *The Professor's House*, for instance. His hope is that, stimulated by his aperçus, we will find these works for ourselves and, after careful study, will return to *Slow Reading* to review and debate his commentary.



Theodore Roosevelt and friends, 1905

Good luck with that. A better strategy is followed by Francine Prose in *Reading Like a Writer* (2006). She reprints long extracts from fiction that illustrate most of Mikics's common-sense principles ("Identify the Voice," "Notice Beginnings and Endings") and that get us far enough into the works to make us feel we're truly *reading* them. The motivation to finish the job is strong. But the best strategy, surely, was pursued by classic textbooks, such as Cleanth Brooks and Robert Penn Warren's *Understanding Poetry* or Trilling's *The Experience of Literature*, which present full texts and thorough—often up to half-a-dozen-page—critiques, the utility of which, shown time and again in midcentury classrooms, was to enable students to proceed to "do things with texts" quite on their own, thanks.

This is precisely what we should want. The groves of academe are now a brownfield, and it will take a generation, maybe more, for them to grow green again. It's happened before. In the 1930s, literature departments, following the lead of intellectuals at the *New Republic*, *Partisan Review*, and elsewhere who were looking for total solutions to massive political and economic problems, went all-in for Marxism. It took the cogent counter-revolutionary exertions of those aforementioned close readers, joined by the moral-imagination luminaries at Columbia and Cambridge, to restore a measure of sanity—not to say intellectual honesty.

With encouragement from professors like David Mikics, we could see another such purgation-and-restoration. But not any time soon. The tenured radicals of the 1960s and '70s, and now their own students, are too ensconced in the lecture halls and seminar rooms of our universities. Let English departments become what Harold Bloom, in *The Western Canon* (1994), predicted they would: ever-smaller cadres expressing, ever-more opaquely, resentment against things as they were and are. Let literature repair to the garret and, with the Freedom app locked on, to the coffeehouse. ♦

ASSOCIATED PRESS

"An official al Qaeda website that is restricted to members of the terrorist group opened its first Twitter account this week in what U.S. officials say is an effort to resolve a major split over Syria's Islamist rebels."

—Washington Free Beacon, *September 27, 2013*

Al Qaeda (@UsayAlQaeda_IsayAlQaida) on Twitter

7 TWEETS | 18 FOLLOWING | 7,372 FOLLOWERS | Follow

Tweets

Al Qaeda @UsayAlQaeda_IsayAlQaida — 23 September 13
Resist the western usurpers, do not let them divide you, remain committed to jihad above all. Expand

Al Qaeda @UsayAlQaeda_IsayAlQaida — 24 September 13
We must remain united in effort to expel the infidels from land that is ours by right of god. Expand

Al Qaeda @UsayAlQaeda_IsayAlQaida — 25 September 13
OMG just had the cured goat strips at Noor's…DE-lish! Also, of course, keep the jihad in your heart, it is your duty. Expand

Al Qaeda @UsayAlQaeda_IsayAlQaida — 25 September 13
Honor Allah with jihad, etc, etc, but also if you know of a torrent to watch @BreakingBad finale, let me know! Expand

Al Qaeda @UsayAlQaeda_IsayAlQaida — 26 September 13
@allahbackgirl, Just saw video for @MileyCyrus's new song, 23—that b*%&h is cray #americanb*%&$esbeunchaste Expand

Al Qaeda @UsayAlQaeda_IsayAlQaida — 26 September 13
@woulda_qudsa_shoulda, if you haven't yet, check out memes at icanhajcheezburger—#hilariousandpious Expand

Al Qaeda @UsayAlQaeda_IsayAlQaida — 26 September 13
just saw trailer for new @DavidORussell movie American Hustle—@JenniferLawrence is such a babe #JihadMeAtHello Expand