
ESCAPE FROM OBAMACARE
JEFFREY H. ANDERSON & SPENCER COWAN
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ANDREW FERGUSON on Ambrose Bierce
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Snowing the EPA

Truth to tell, The Scrapbook has gotten as good a laugh as anyone out of the saga of John C. Beale, the retired Environmental Protection Agency official—Princeton grad, onetime deputy assistant administrator in the Office of Air and Radiation, congressionally certified expert on global warming—who has been sentenced to 32 months in prison for stealing nearly a million dollars from the federal government.

As often happens, Mr. Beale began his life of crime on a modest scale: padding expense accounts, arranging first-class travel for himself (at EPA expense), and taking off one day a week—allegedly on government business—to relax at home. But one day became two, and then Mr. Beale would be gone for weeks and months at a time. Indeed, between 2000 and June 2008, his desk at the EPA (annual salary and benefits: $206,000) seems to have been unoccupied for a total of two-and-a-half years.

The best part, however, is the reason Mr. Beale gave the EPA for his frequent absences: He was on special assignment for the CIA, he would explain, sometimes at the fabled Directorate of Operations in Langley, sometimes on interagency task forces in Washington—and sometimes in the mountains of Pakistan, fighting the Taliban. Mr. Beale was not just a committed environmentalist and authoritative voice on global warming; he was every schoolboy's dream Secret Agent as well.

Except, of course, that he wasn't. Mr. Beale was never in Pakistan, never consulted by anyone on anything to do with intelligence or terrorism, and never set foot inside CIA headquarters in Langley. The closest he might have come to dealing with the Taliban was seeing them on his television set at his residence, at taxpayers' expense.

"With the help of his therapist," Mr. Beale's lawyer explained to the court, "[he] has come to recognize that, beyond the motive of greed, his theft and deception were animated by a highly self-destructive and dysfunctional need to engage in excessively reckless, risky behavior." Which, from The Scrapbook's perspective, seems all too obvious.

What strikes us as equally dysfunctional, however, and probably more destructive, is the casual atmosphere over at the Environmental Protection Agency, which, in the words of its (we hope embarrassed) inspector general, suffers from "an absence of even basic internal controls."

Look at it this way: Suppose you told your boss that you hadn't shown up for work on Monday and Tuesday because you were on special assignment with the CIA—which, of course, you were not at liberty to describe in detail. In the real world, this would be greeted with either (a) hearty laughter or (b) instant dismissal. But John Beale seems not only to have pulled it off, but to have pulled it off repeatedly, brazenly, obsessively, and profitably, for nearly a decade before anyone asked the most rudimentary questions.

So The Scrapbook wonders: If pretending to be an international man of mystery works for grifters at the EPA, how many more must there be fighting the Taliban at the Federal Home Loan Bank Board, or the Department of Housing and Urban Development? ♦

Academic Unfreedom

Members of the American Studies Association voted last week to boycott a country until it "ceases to violate human rights and international law." Which nation could it be? New York University's Scholars at Risk Network offers a number of options, citing 10 countries in which scholars are either imprisoned or facing charges that could lead to imprisonment: Bahrain, Belarus, China, Iran, Tunisia, Turkey, Russia, Saudi Arabia, United Arab Emirates, and Vietnam.

None of these places grabbed the ASA's attention, however. The association announced it would now refuse "to enter into formal collaborations with Israeli academic institutions, or with scholars who are expressly serving as representatives or ambassadors of those institutions (such as deans, rectors, presidents and others)."

Did The Scrapbook—and the Scholars at Risk Network—miss some major news? Has Israel suddenly decided to follow the lead of, say, China, where in October Peking University fired an economist for, as a government-run newspaper put it, being an "extreme liberal" who advocates "freedom and democracy"?

Of course not. Some of the crimes of the sole functioning democracy in the Middle East, according to the ASA: "Israeli academic institutions function as a central part of a system that has denied Palestinians their basic rights," and "Israeli universities have been a direct party to the annexation of Palestinian land. Armed soldiers patrol Israeli university campuses, and some have been trained at Israeli universities in techniques to suppress protesters."

Some American academics, it's clear, can't distinguish between a country's politicians and its professors. It's as if they had voted to boycott themselves for the many crimes they complained of during the George W. Bush years—or for the "illegal" war Barack Obama waged in Libya.

"This is what the ASA is about," University of Florida English professor Malini Johar Schueller told *Inside Higher Ed*. Fortunately—and perhaps surprisingly—it isn't what all of aca-

demia is about. The American Association of University Professors, the leading organization in the profession in America, published an open letter before the vote urging ASA members to reject the resolution. The letter noted that the AAUP "opposes academic boycotts as violations of academic freedom" and "especially oppose[s] selective academic boycotts that entail an ideological litmus test."

The ASA refused to post the missive on its website, but the AAUP's common-sense message of free inquiry is being heard. Already two institutions, Brandeis and Penn State Harrisburg, have left the ASA because of the boycott. ♦

Reality Overdose

We're long past the point in contemporary America at which the concept of tolerance has any traction. Our cultural conversations have devolved into shouting matches with a cabal of white urban liberal enforcers insisting the rest of us be outraged by something no one was much concerned with five minutes ago.

And so we find ourselves discussing *Duck Dynasty*, a "reality" show on the A&E television network featuring the Robertsons, a family of Louisiana rednecks with a successful business making duck calls. When the show's second season premiered this summer, nearly 12 million people tuned in, shattering cable ratings records. A huge part of the show's appeal is that it is expressly targeted toward a vast demographic that is almost completely ignored by entertainment executives: rural and Christian Americans. The show celebrates the ups and downs of family and never shies away from religion. One of the Robertson boys is a preacher, and they are often seen on the show praying or going to church. Each show concludes with a pithy observation about life that might as well be homily.

But Phil Robertson, the family patriarch, is now on indefinite suspension from A&E for an interview in which he vented on the subject of homosexuality. Frankly, Robertson was more than a bit crude in his remarks: "It seems like, to me, a vagina—as a man—would be more desirable than a man's anus. That's just me. I'm just thinking: There's more there! She's got more to offer. I mean, come on, dudes! You know what I'm saying? But hey, sin: It's not logical, my man."

Robertson went on to give his gloss on Corinthians, saying that "neither the adulterers, the idolaters, the male prostitutes, the homosexual offenders, the greedy, the drunkards, the slanderers, the swindlers—they won't inherit the kingdom of God. Don't deceive yourself." Robertson also said, "We never, ever judge someone on who's going to heaven, hell. That's the Almighty's job," etc. etc.

Of course, anyone who's remotely familiar with *Duck Dynasty*, let alone who knows any of the millions of Americans that share Robertson's opinions, shouldn't be surprised he thinks this. Others have observed that Robertson's crude wording somehow makes what he said especially appalling to those who disagree. There may be something to that, and his remarks certainly could have been expressed more decorously. But isn't the point of "reality" TV to expose us to the unscripted remarks of "real" Americans? These shows aren't The Scrapbook's cuppa, but it seems to us that with reality entertainment, the

motto should be, in for a dime, in for a dollar.

What's really going on here is that *Duck Dynasty* has become a cultural force. It's probably no coincidence that the interview that got Phil Robertson in trouble was published by *GQ*, a magazine that has clung to a culturally and politically narrow viewpoint even as its circulation has cratered. Robertson seems to have tremendous public support and may well weather the storm. Even a great many liberals are having a hard time ginning up outrage over a redneck saying something you'd expect a redneck to say. But if the goal is simply to poison the well so that other expressions of *Duck Dynasty*'s in-your-face Christianity don't continue to get a foothold on television, we fear Robertson's inquisitors may have already succeeded. ♦

O'Rourke Goes Boom

The novelist Christopher Buckley says that *The Baby Boom*, the just-published memoir/history by P.J. O'Rourke, is O'Rourke's best book. The Scrapbook is reluctant to disagree with any judgment from so authoritative a source. Plus, we've read *The Baby Boom*, and between chortles, snorts, guffaws, and several spells of stunned admiration at the sheer inventiveness of the prose, we have come to conclude that Buckley is right on the evidence. Fans of O'Rourke—our indispensable contributing editor as well as author of *Parliament of Whores*, *Eat the Rich*, *Holidays in Hell*, and several other books that have taken their place as classics of American satire and social commentary—will recognize what a large claim this is. The baby boom's most gifted humorist has taken on his richest subject, the boomers themselves. We don't want to spoil the suspense, but the boomers don't come off too well. Your chances of making this new year a happy one will greatly increase if you tee it up by buying, and reading, P.J.'s best book (so far!). ♦

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Omnivorous Christmas

The trouble with Christmas is that it would consume the whole world if it could—or *subsume*, maybe, like an amoeba. Left to its own devices, Christmas would wrap itself around the universe and digest it whole.

In other words, Christmas doesn't want to come pussyfooting around toward the middle of December, in the diffident, slightly apologetic way of modern religion—waving its pseudopods as though to say, "Well, yes, it is rather old-fashioned, but the elderly parishioners like it, and it does have a kind of modern meaning, if one stops to think about it." Christmas wants to stomp in and take over the calendar, and if everything as far back as Halloween gets shoved into a corner as a result, well, that's just fine with Christmas. It's the bigfoot at the party. Any party it can find.

BIG STOCK PHOTO

Thanksgiving, the Fourth of July: Most holidays are a kind of reaching back, calling up the past just so we can catch a whiff of it—like those peculiar watermelon-rind pickles and candied crab apples my grandmother used to put out for winter celebrations, the faint scent of summer come again in the cold. Not that any of us ever actually eats them, but then their esculence is not the point. They serve a symbolic function and, having served, wend their way toward the garbage disposal. Happily, I always like to think, although I admit I could be wrong.

Anyway, Christmas isn't like that. It's not a *tame* holiday (as C.S. Lewis would have said). It may be domestic, but it sure ain't domesticated. Christmas roars like a wildfire, or a Dickens character, as it sweeps through the stores, leaving in its ashy wake those aisles of snowflake sweaters and Nutcracker nutcrackers and gimcrack ornaments and plastic trees. Christmas took over my dining-room table the day after Thanksgiving, with Advent candles and boxes of cards and logjams of wrapping-paper rolls and stacked spindles of ribbon. Someday we'll be able to eat there again, but not, I suspect, till it's actually, you know, *Christmas*.

Christmas wants my living room, as well, and what Christmas wants, Christmas gets: the tree, the presents, the crèches with their trains of animals grown now so elaborate they resemble nothing so much as the day Noah decided it was time to unload the ark. Christmas wants the front lawn and the front porch, too. Christmas wants the streets and the storefronts, and it will even take the lampposts if you let it. Christmas will act all sophisticated—demure and tastefully understated—if that's the only way an aesthete or a snob will let it get a foothold. But Christmas doesn't mind a little earthiness, either.

In fact, Christmas probably prefers the earthiness. The Magi came to that manger and knelt before it—masters of high intellectual pursuits, bringing expensive gifts. And more power to them. But the first to arrive at the cattle shed were the poor shepherds, and it was to those shepherds that the angels sang. The more wild our celebrations are, the more strange, the more tinselly and greened with plastic garlands, the more incarnadined with holly berries and frosted with snowmen—the more authentic it is. Christmas is at its truest the more it is *more*. Always and ever *more*.

It's not just snobs who sneer at the vulgar wildness of the season. The deeply religious, too, issue their annual complaints about the commercializing of Christmas and the secular pseudo-religiosity to which our peculiar church-state jurisprudence in this country has forced us. And through it all, those sincere and serious Christians bemoan what they perceive as the disappearance of Christ, the reason for the holiday, from the holiday that bears his name. Like Flannery O'Connor's sad and hilarious "Church of Christ Without Christ" in her novel *Wise Blood*, we're trying to live within the orbit of Christianity without the center that gives it meaning.

I know what they mean, and I sympathize with their impulse. But those serious Christian commentators are wrong in their way—as wrong, really, as the aesthetes and snobs. From its early days, absorbing pagan winter festivals, Christmas has always been a hungry thing, devouring the world around it. Yes, our seasonal practices are odd these days: commercialized and secularized and vulgar and plastic. And yet, like a medieval festival, our practices still reflect the event from which they sprang. Theology drives psychology: The way we feel the season comes from the way it began.

And the way it continues. I don't want less of that feeling. I want more. And fortunately, Christmas is happy to oblige.

Joseph Bottum

the weekly Standard

‘But What Is the Reality of It?’

If you have a taste for *Schadenfreude* (and who doesn’t, especially in this holiday season?), you’ll enjoy Anemona Hartocollis’s article in the *New York Times* of December 14. Here’s the opening paragraph:

> Many in New York’s professional and cultural elite have long supported President Obama’s health care plan. But now, to their surprise, thousands of writers, opera singers, music teachers, photographers, doctors, lawyers and others are learning that their health insurance plans are being canceled and they may have to pay more to get comparable coverage, if they can find it.

The article goes on to detail the Obamacare-induced travails of members of New York’s “creative classes” (a phrase the *Times* fails to put in quotation marks) and concludes:

> “We are the Obama people,” said Camille Sweeney, a New York writer and member of the Authors Guild. Her insurance is being canceled, and she is dismayed that neither her pediatrician nor her general practitioner appears to be on the exchange plans. What to do has become a hot topic on Facebook and at dinner parties frequented by her fellow writers and artists.
>
> “I’m for it,” she said. “But what is the reality of it?”

NEWSCOM

Ms. Sweeney’s statement-and-question says it all. It’s the voice of liberalism in the age of Obama. She’s for Obamacare, but didn’t know what it was. Now, Ms. Sweeney realizes (sort of) that she’s been mugged by reality. But she’s not quite ready to come to grips with reality. She’s not quite ready to press charges against Obama, or against liberalism.

But at least she’s asking a reality-based question.

In 2014, it’s the job of conservatism, and of the Republican party, to answer Ms. Sweeney’s question. It’s the job of conservatives and Republicans to explain the reality of Obamacare—that it’s bad for health care, bad for jobs, and bad for freedom. It’s the job of conservatives and Republicans to offer escapes from Obamacare, to the extent possible (see the piece by Jeffrey H. Anderson and Spencer Cowan in this issue). It’s the job of conservatives and Republicans to set forth workable alternatives to Obamacare for the future, as Paul Ryan and others intend to do early in the new year.

And it’s the job of conservatives and Republicans to press charges. It’s their job to make the case against Obamacare on the broadest possible terms, as an example—as *the* example—of unintended-consequences-producing, rule-of-law-undermining, freedom-denying, big-government, liberal social-engineering. Obamacare embodies liberalism’s fatal conceit. It’s the job of conservatives and Republicans to make it liberalism’s fatal overreach.

So, to answer Ms. Sweeney’s question: The reality of it is that Obamacare is a disaster. And it’s a disaster because, as Margaret Thatcher put it, “The facts of life are conservative.”

If conservatives and Republicans can explain the facts of life in a language intelligible to contemporary Americans, the year 2014 could be an inflection point in the saga of modern American liberalism, modern American conservatism, and modern American politics. It could be a moment of genuine hope and positive change. Perhaps, to adapt a rhetorical flourish, generations from now, we will be able to look back and tell our children that this was the moment when the rise of the nanny state began to slow and our nation began to heal. It could be the moment when we regain our footing and find our way back to the always difficult but ultimately rewarding path of individual liberty, honorable self-government, and national greatness.

—William Kristol

Government Man

President Obama is more perceptive about the shortcomings of government than we thought. "We have these big agencies, some of which are outdated, some of which are not designed properly," he told MSNBC's Chris Matthews. Wow!

And pity the poor businessman who doesn't know which federal agency to turn to for help. "If you're a small business person getting started, you may think you need to go to the Small Business Administration on one thing [and] you have got to go to Commerce on another," he said. "We have got, for example, 16 different agencies . . . to help businesses, large and small, in all kinds of ways, whether it's helping to finance them, helping them to export."

That's not all he knows. The way the government—his government—purchases technology is "cumbersome, complicated, and outdated," according to the president. He's also discovered, he revealed at a press conference, that "insurance is complicated to buy." And he's aware that renewing a driver's license takes "a long time." Why, he asked in the Matthews interview, "do you have to do a written driving test if you already have your license?"

Good question. Indeed, it comes at a critical moment. Gallup, the polling people, found in December that nearly three-quarters of Americans feel big government is a larger threat to our country in the future than big business or big labor. On this, a majority of Republicans, Democrats, and independents agree. So Obama is in good company.

But there's a rub, a contradiction, a colossal disconnect. The president is largely correct in his critique of government, its inefficiencies, and its multiplicity of agencies assigned to the same task. Yet his approach to every issue is exactly what he recognizes as a problem: more and more government. Based on his policies, he's a government man through and through.

Consider the proposals he offered recently to curb income inequality. He would raise the minimum wage yet again, though it reduces the number of jobs and keeps young workers from climbing onto the job ladder. He's for tax reform that closes tax loopholes. Then he'd spend the savings on infrastructure, education, and research, all government programs. He would cancel the sequester cuts in the budget. And guess what? He'd spend the money on more government. He'd rush to the aid of the unemployed by extending their jobless benefits, which in all likelihood would ensure they remain unemployed.

Or consider his recipe for bolstering manufacturing. One of Obama's favorite schemes is to create 15 government-run "manufacturing innovation institutes." Doesn't he know government is the last place to look for advice on innovation? He's for "ensuring U.S. leadership in clean energy and advanced vehicle manufacturing," a White House paper says. How would he achieve that? By "investing" government funds in those projects. The president is also keen on partnerships between business and government. For instance, he favors an "Investing in Manufacturing Communities Partnership." In this case, he'd spend $113 million in "targeted financial assistance" to five communities. And the list goes on.

When Obama delivers a State of the Union address, nongovernment proposals are hard to find, if they exist at all. Last January, he called for a vast program of preschool for 4-year-olds in low- or moderate-income families, funded by government. He asked for more government control of guns. His plan for addressing global warming would have government arbitrarily impose a national limit on greenhouse gas emissions.

The president often cites his wish to streamline government and get rid of outdated or harmful regulations. But nothing happens on the regulatory front except that the pile of new regulations grows. He's for cutting the corporate tax rate to 28 percent (and 25 percent for manufacturers) from 35 percent, but he hasn't lifted a finger to enact it. And his idea for solving the problem of too many government departments doing the same thing: He'd consolidate the pack of them.

What explains Obama's toleration of government-run everything when he knows the downside so well? One reason is his need for control. Liberal ideologues are leery of incentivizing the private sector and wealthy individuals to invest, innovate, and create jobs. While such a policy has a history of having worked, the cost—yielding power over the economy—is too high for Obama.

A second reason is the Democratic base. It consists of liberal interest groups that dislike free market capitalism. Obama is wary of bucking them. So he knuckles under to environmentalists who oppose the Keystone pipeline. He suffers unions gladly since they lavishly fund Democratic campaigns, including his own. The same for trial lawyers.

It's reasonable to assume the president really does know better about government. And as he approaches his final three years in the White House, he should trust what his instincts and his experience are telling him. What an impact he could have if he attacked the excesses of government with the same vigor with which he attacks political opponents. And what a legacy he would leave.

—Fred Barnes

Escape from Obamacare

How to get health insurance while avoiding the exchanges.

BY JEFFREY H. ANDERSON & SPENCER COWAN

DAVE MALAN

At least they have their health. When it comes to purchasing insurance through the Obamacare exchanges, young adults don't have much else going for them.

Under Obamacare, young adults can buy a government-approved plan—with its mandated coverage of pediatric dental care, sterilization, and maternity care—and pay vastly inflated premiums relative to pre-Obamacare rates. Or they can simply go without insurance and pay the fine for violating Obamacare's individual mandate—its unprecedented requirement that American citizens buy a product of the federal government's choosing. If they pick the latter (more affordable) course, they'll know they can always sign up for insurance during Obamacare's next open enrollment period, no matter how sick or injured they might have gotten in the interim. Each of these choices is less appealing than the pre-Obamacare status quo.

But it turns out there's a third choice. Policy experts Sean Parnell and Timothy Jost have noted a loophole in the law that could attract millions of young adults—and others as well—who seek inexpensive insurance. Indeed, this third way—short-term health insurance—could provide an affordable, low-risk escape route from Obamacare. In the vast majority of states, Americans can secure health insurance for a term of up to 11 months (and usually up to 364 days), which is more than enough time to get from one Obamacare open-enrollment period to the next.

Short-term insurance wasn't generally a very attractive option pre-Obamacare. That's because it provided coverage only during a finite term. If you contracted a serious illness, any treatment for that condition would be covered only until the policy term ended.

In their zeal to remake American medicine, however, the architects of Obamacare ignored the law of unintended consequences. One such consequence is that Obamacare has now transformed short-term insurance, a niche product that was never of much use to most people, into an attractive product—and into a very attractive way to circumvent Obamacare. The central planners have made the product's key weakness—its failure to provide long-term protection—essentially irrelevant. Now the sick and injured can always purchase a policy covering preexisting conditions when a new Obamacare open-enrollment period rolls around, every 10 months.

As Jost (an Obamacare supporter) notes, Obamacare remakes the individual insurance market by amending the Public Health Service Act, a federal law from 1944 that defines different forms of health insurance coverage. Individual insurance coverage, that act states, is "health insurance coverage offered to individuals in the individual market, but *does not include short-term limited duration insurance*" (emphasis added).

In other words, short-term health insurance falls outside of the regulatory purview of Obamacare. While Obamacare prevents insurers from factoring a person's health status or sex into the price of a policy—and severely limits their ability to account for a person's age—short-term insurers remain free to set the prices of their policies according to

Jeffrey H. Anderson is executive director of the newly formed 2017 Project, which is working to advance a conservative reform agenda. Spencer Cowan is a research associate at the 2017 Project.

actuarial tables. This greatly benefits the young, the particular victims of Obamacare's price-hikes. And unlike Obamacare-compliant plans, short-term plans need not offer free contraceptives, abortifacients, or any of the other "essential health benefits" that Obamacare requires. In choosing a short-term plan, consumers need not purchase "benefits" they will never use.

Short-term plans generally operate on a fee-for-service model and therefore offer wide access to doctors and hospitals, in stark contrast with the narrow networks of Obamacare exchange plans. In addition, short-term plans are easy to apply for and require comparatively little paperwork. Best of all, prospective policyholders can compare and purchase short-term plans on user-friendly websites like eHealthInsurance.com, avoiding HealthCare.gov and its notorious flaws.

Free from the "community rating" and "essential health benefits" requirements that balloon the cost of Obamacare-compliant plans for young adults, short-term plans offer significant savings. Take, for example, a healthy 26-year-old man earning $35,000 in Milwaukee. According to a recent study of Obamacare's premiums and subsidies completed by the 2017 Project, he could purchase the cheapest bronze-level Obamacare plan—which has a $6,300 deductible—for $2,343 a year. (He wouldn't receive a taxpayer-funded subsidy.) Or he could select a 364-day short-term plan—with a $5,000 deductible—for just $759 annually. Even after paying his $253 fine for violating Obamacare's individual mandate (short-term insurance isn't Obamacare-approved), he'd be paying only $1,012, a savings of $1,331 versus Obamacare's cheapest bronze plan.

Or take a healthy 31-year-old woman making $35,000 in Philadelphia. Again, according to the 2017 Project study, she could buy the cheapest bronze-level Obamacare plan for $2,586. (She too would get no subsidy.) Or she could buy a 364-day short-term plan—with wide-open doctor and hospital access and a $5,000 deductible—for just $1,070 annually. Adding in her Obamacare fine, she'd have to pay only $1,323—a savings of $1,263 versus Obamacare's cheapest bronze plan.

By buying 364-day short-term plans extending from January 2 through December 31, the consumers in these examples would have coverage well into Obamacare's next open-enrollment period—which runs from November 15, 2014 through January 15, 2015. If they remain healthy until that time, they could renew their short-term plans for the following year—or pick new ones. Or, if they've gotten sick or injured, they could jump ship to an expensive Obamacare plan, effective January 1, 2015. Even if they were to get sick or injured between December 15 and December 31 (in which case that new illness or injury wouldn't be covered by a subsequent short-term plan), they could still enroll in a new Obamacare plan effective February 1, meaning their maximum coverage gap would be just one month.

This general approach would work in 33 states and the District of Columbia. In 13 other states, insurers don't offer short-term plans spanning more than six months—whether by choice or because of state prohibitions. But they may start doing so soon, given such plans' newfound attractiveness, and some states might help them. In Michigan, for example, the Republican-controlled statehouse might consider lifting the state's existing six-month cap on such plans. Other states likely won't prove so accommodating, including the four strongly left-leaning states (New Jersey, New York, Massachusetts, and Vermont) that have banned short-term plans outright.

For people living outside of such states, however, short-term plans offer an escape from Obamacare, courtesy of Obamacare.

Some on the left might be surprised that their favorite legislators failed to close such a loophole. Then again, sometimes you have to pass a law to find out what's in it. ♦

Putin's Move on Ukraine

Showdown in Kiev.

BY JONATHAN SPYER

Kiev

For the demonstrators in Kiev's Independence Square, the protest is no longer about the EU Association agreement that President Viktor Yanukovych refused to sign on November 21. The precise benefits to be derived from greater economic ties with Brussels are not what is keeping several thousand Ukrainians encamped in the now renamed "Euro Square" in the dead cold of a Kiev December. Rather, the issue has become a more basic one—where is Ukraine headed?

Nikolai Vorobov, a journalist and anticorruption activist involved with the protests, told me that "people here haven't read the Association agreement. It's over 100 pages long and it's almost certain that also Yanukovych himself hasn't read it. The issue for the protesters is simple—they want to move closer towards Europe, towards civilization, and away from Russia."

The problem for the Euro Square protesters is that the Yanukovych government and its supporters also understand the matter in these stark terms. And so does Moscow. For Russian president Vladimir Putin, the question is one of geopolitics and strategy. Ukraine possesses vast mineral resources and a population of 46 million. Geographically, it constitutes a buffer zone between Russia and EU countries like Poland, Hungary, Romania, and Slovakia, all of whom are also NATO members.

Putin sees Ukraine as a vital component of the Eurasian Union that the Russian president wants to build from the Pacific coast all the way to the edge of Central Europe. This projected alliance is intended to put Moscow at the center of a trade and strategic bloc that will rival the United States, China, and the EU, and thus herald the return of Russia to the global stage.

An earful of opposition in Kiev

Putin is willing to reach deep into his pockets to make his vision reality. On December 17, Moscow pledged to purchase $15 billion of Ukrainian government debt. The Russians also promise to slash the price that Ukraine pays for Russian gas by a third. In exchange, Putin requires political acquiescence.

In other words, Ukraine's two possible futures are in open confrontation on the frozen streets of Kiev. Behind the hastily assembled barricades at Euro Square is a coalition of mostly young civil society activists, anti-Russian nationalists, and ordinary citizens outraged by what they perceive as the brutal tactics of the government.

Yanukovych supporters rally on the other side of the police lines. Mostly bussed in from the president's heartland in the Donbass region in the east, Yanukovych's partisans, according to a rumor among Kievans, are paid about $50 a day for their presence. They are mostly tough young men, some of them coalminers from Donetsk. In the evenings, they congregate around the Arsenalna metro station by the park, smoking and drinking beer from the bottle, cheerfully impervious to the subzero temperatures.

The anti-Square, as Kievans call it, is presumably intended to remind Ukraine and the world that the president enjoys deep and real support in large sections of the country. It also illustrates what's at stake in these protests. On one side, there's the West—civil society and capitalist democracy, with all its inevitable imperfections, failures, and disappointments. On the other, there's Putin's revived Russia, a looming behemoth that even without communism manages to replicate a Soviet order where political technologists produce on demand a remote-controlled replica of civic protest, for a reasonable price.

These divisions, of course, predate the beginning of the protests in November. Indeed, they are written into the very nature of independent Ukraine, comprising the borderlands of two former empires, Russian and Austro-Hungarian. Just as Yanukovych can rely on his supporters from the Russian-speaking eastern regions, the protesters at Euro Square hail disproportionately from the Ukrainian-speaking west.

Nonetheless, Inna Korsun, an

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activist with the Democratic Alliance movement, said she rejects these geographic and cultural schematics. "There are easterners here with us at Euro Square. And there are pro-Euro Square groups also in the east, even in Donetsk." But Korsun is herself from Khmelnytskyi, a town in the western heartland. And Euro Square's liberal democratic impulses derive from the political culture of western Ukraine.

Of course, Euro Square isn't just a movement of idealistic civil society activists. The banners on display include the blue and yellow emblems of the far-right Svoboda party, whose chief, Oleh Tyahnybok, has emerged as one of the leaders of the protest. There are also the red and black flags of a number of paramilitary associations, linked to the radically anti-Russian and anti-Semitic fringe of Ukrainian nationalism. Stas, a butcher from the city of Rivne and a member of the Ukrainian National Assembly, proudly showed me the collection of clubs that he and his comrades had assembled in their tent on the square. "For defense against the Berkut [special police] units," he explained.

To delegitimize the Euro Square protest, the Yanukovych government seeks to portray it as fascist in its entirety. Rather, it is a gathering of all those forces in Ukraine who want to resist absorption into Putin's geostrategic bloc. This coalition encompasses democrats, but also nationalists, including radical ones. And yet for all their courage and commitment, it is hard to see how the Euro Square protesters can succeed, at least in the short term.

Yanukovych and his supporters, hired or not, are affiliated with a camp that has a recognized leader, Putin, who has a clear vision and an ambitious project. In contrast, the Euro Square protesters have put their faith in the West at a moment when neither Europe nor the United States seem capable of grasping the nature of geopolitical threats, let alone responding to them effectively. Such are the battle lines in icy Kiev. ♦

Unhappy Allies

Obama annoys Europe.

BY TOD LINDBERG

Apparently relations between the United States and Europe are actually maturing. How else to account for the singular absence of transatlantic crisis-mongering over the many, many ways in which the Obama administration has annoyed our allies in Europe?

Obama sycophancy, you say? The stenographic response to the official administration line among what Matthew Continetti has dubbed a "secretarial" (as opposed to adversarial) press corps? Well, maybe that too. Say George W. Bush were president. How big a deal would revelation of widespread National Security Agency data mining operations directed at our European allies be? How about the NSA listening in on the cell phone of an allied leader (one to whom Bush had unsuccessfully attempted to give a back rub, no less)? Such developments would be worthy of rhetoric about the biggest crisis in transatlantic relations since 2003. Yet Obama's NSA scandal seems destined to pass from the scene without any such consequence.

Ich bin ein irritant.

Our German allies did indeed get worked up over the NSA story, not least for the reason that the German press corps in this instance chose to throw down a challenge to the press corps of the United Kingdom, the traditional cup-holder for sensationalized and ultimately erroneous reportage in support of scandal-mongering. If Germans thought that the NSA was reading all their email and routinely listening in on their cell phone calls, they could be forgiven, because such were the outraged early reports on the leaked documents renegade NSA contractor Edward Snowden disseminated.

Of course the actual NSA program was focused on metadata collection—not the content of calls and emails, but which numbers and IP addresses connect with each other and when. And of course nobody really cares what kind of consenting-adult pornography good German burghers choose or how often they whisper "mein Schatz" to their mistresses on their cell phones. But these were details that emerged only when the burden of sustaining the inaccuracy became unbearable for the German press.

As for listening in on Angela Merkel's cell phone, well, we did that. And we shouldn't have. True, her predecessor Gerhard Schröder did have a tendency to push initiatives favored by Moscow and, after leaving office, found highly remunerative employment with Russian energy interests thanks to his friend Vladimir Putin. But there simply wouldn't be anything like that for the U.S. intelligence community to keep tabs on in the case of Merkel, whose actions have done nothing to call her integrity into question.

The United States has not been collecting data only in Germany. France and the United Kingdom were also among the surveilled, for example. Yet their official reactions were rather more muted, no doubt because of the extensive intelligence services they maintain and the activities those services undertake. So the Ger-

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man response was singularly intense.

Germany's greatest contribution to the principles of global order over the past two generations has been its insistence on an international politics grounded in law and that nations conduct themselves in accordance with law. This insistence has allowed Germany to develop a consistent critique of others (including the United States) for acting extralegally or illegally, at least in the judgment of Germany. The detention center at Guantánamo Bay was one such American failing, and so was the 2003 Iraq war. The NSA activity falls into the same category.

Yet the German position in support of Kantian precepts on a global scale also comes at the occasional price of a perception of German naïveté when states fail to act in accordance with the law—especially states (again including the United States) that should know better. In this version of *Casablanca*, Captain Renault—make it Captain Reinhart—really is shocked that there is gambling going on in the back room of Rick's Café Américain. It is the law, is it not, that gambling is illegal in Morocco?

There were rumblings in Germany and at the European Union about a need to punish the United States in some way for our lawlessness over intelligence collection. The problem, however, was that no one could really think of an effective means of doing so. Europe could cancel or delay negotiations on TTIP, the mega-deal for free trade between the United States and Europe. But that would be harmful to Europeans, indeed arguably more harmful to Europeans than to the United States, and most harmful to Germany, Europe's biggest economy. So that isn't a very good idea. Or Germany could withdraw from the SWIFT mechanism for tracking terrorist finances—except preventing terrorist activity is something Germany takes rather seriously at the level of senior government officials.

Now, it would be easy to dismiss this inability to find a consequential means of rebuking the United States as a symptom of a deeper German unwillingness to hold the United States (or anybody else) to account for much of anything. When the United States, France, and the United Kingdom all agreed, for one brief shining moment earlier this year, that Bashar al-Assad should be subject to military reprisal for his use of sarin gas against his own people, Germany was opposed—but without consequence. Opposition without consequence also characterized the German position on Iraq in 2003. When NATO agreed to conduct military operations in Libya in 2011 as Qaddafi's forces were on the verge of wiping out the rebel stronghold, Germany didn't participate, notwithstanding a U.N. Security Council resolution authorizing "all necessary measures" to protect civilians. But Germany also didn't block NATO action, which in principle it could have.

But it's not simply a lack of will. The real point is that the United States and Europe are so thoroughly enmeshed with each other by now that it is hard to think of any action any one party to the relationship might take to harm the other without inflicting significant or greater damage on itself. The economic relationship is vast and growing. Moreover, all the relevant governments and international institutions seem to see greater benefit to ever-increasing integration.

Security and intelligence cooperation is longstanding and interest-based, particularly at the classified level of counterterrorism policies. Although there is and will continue to be ample disagreement when it comes to concerted action outside the Euro-Atlantic area—including disagreements within Europe, as well as over a joint U.S.-European "foreign" policy—it's equally remarkable how much agreement is possible when top-level officials bother to make the effort.

So when the Obama administration is inattentive to Europe (a consistent European perception, especially in light of the "pivot" to Asia) or high-handed with Europe (as in demanding payment from allies for U.S. services in the Libya operation) or insensitive to European concerns (as in the abrupt cancellation of politically sensitive missile defense systems set for Poland and the Czech Republic, or the continued operation of Guantánamo) or on the sidelines in deference to European initiatives (as in the run-up to Ukraine's 11th-hour rejection of an Association Agreement with the EU), the preferred solution on the European side is inevitably more America, not less. The most salient response to the NSA's German problem has been a call for greater German inclusion in cooperative intelligence work. Some have even proposed that Germany join the longstanding "Five Eyes" intelligence cooperation program of the United States, the United Kingdom, Canada, Australia, and New Zealand.

Needless to say, a regime of greater intelligence cooperation with the United States is not exactly the outcome the German NSA scandal-mongers were promoting. There's also the very interesting question of how well Germany's publicly articulated Kantian scruples about a world of law would sit with a more forward-leaning German stance on intelligence capabilities and covert action. In fact, that's probably already a good question based on existing German capabilities and practice, albeit one many Germans would prefer not to explore. But if you had to wager on a five-years-later scenario for the NSA revelations, a bet that intelligence cooperation between the United States and Germany will increase in that period would be smarter than a bet on the proposition that snooping on Merkel's cell phone so damaged relations that the two sides decide to disengage.

So the crisis is canceled. Europeans these days are mainly disappointed in Obama, or in themselves for their unrealistic expectations about Obama. Meanwhile, U.S.-European relations are on a far more even keel than makes for good op-eds or conference panels. And the sense of noncrisis among American commentators with regard to the United States and Europe—notwithstanding Obama-era inattention, ham-handedness, insensitivity, and worse—is actually about right.

Not that this accidental good sense is likely to prevail in assessments of the next Republican administration. ♦

A Prayer Before Legislating

Where church meets state.

BY TERRY EASTLAND

Dr. Brian Lee is pastor of Christ Reformed Church, a small church in downtown Washington, D.C., which he founded six years ago. Lee knows something about a topic not ordinarily discussed at his church, that of "legislative prayer." As we'll see, he has his doubts about it.

In simplest terms, legislative prayer is prayer that opens meetings of legislative bodies; it solemnizes official occasions and seeks God's blessings and wisdom for elected representatives entrusted with making the laws. It is one of the more venerable traditions in America, having commenced in 1774 when the Continental Congress met. Since 1789, when the first Congress convened, the House of Representatives and Senate have had chaplains, their foremost duty being legislative prayer. Today, most states and many localities provide for legislative prayer. The arrangements vary, as most prayer-givers are clergy who volunteer.

In recent years, however, the constitutionality of legislative prayer has been challenged, with a number of cases brought against local practices. One has reached the Supreme Court: The justices are now reviewing whether a town council's practice of opening its meetings with a prayer violates the First Amendment's ban on establishing religion. The town is Greece, N.Y., which shares a border with Rochester, and the case, in which the Court heard oral arguments in November, is *Town of Greece* v. *Galloway*.

In this case, and others like it, those challenging legislative prayer take issue with the predominance of explicitly "sectarian" prayers, which invariably means Christian prayers, identifiable as such to their legal critics by references in the invocations to "Jesus Christ," "Jesus," "Your Son," and "the Holy Spirit."

Opening the first Continental Congress with prayer

Which brings us back to Pastor Lee, a graduate of Stanford and Westminster Theological Seminary who earned a doctorate in historical theology from Calvin Theological Seminary and is licensed as a minister in the United Reformed Church.

Last spring, the House chaplain's office asked Lee whether he might fill in as guest chaplain, opening a session with prayer. Lee agreed, on the understanding that he would offer "a Christian prayer." Lee wasn't trying to push on a contested legal point. Indeed, he told me, he was unaware of *Town of Greece*. Lee duly submitted his prayer to the chaplain's office and heard nothing back; evidently it did not run afoul of the pastel guidelines that limit prayers to 150 words and insist that they be given in English. On April 30—the appointed day—Lee prayed to open the House, offering what he was satisfied was a Christian prayer.

It wasn't easy for Lee, a theological conservative in the Reformed tradition, to decide that he could fill in as guest chaplain, and thus as a "legislative prayer-giver," to use one of the lumpier terms found in the relevant literature. Lee regarded legislative prayer warily as an exercise in, or at least a contributor to, civil religion. As defined by the *Dictionary of Christianity in America*, civil religion today is "an alliance between religion and politics which transcends separation of church and state and permeates every level of national life," its central beliefs being that there is a God, that his will can be known and fulfilled through democratic procedures, that America has been God's primary agent in modern times, and that the nation is the chief source of identity for Americans in both a political and religious sense. For Lee, wanting nothing to do with civil religion, viewing it as "the enemy of the particular God," there had to be a Christian—and not a civil religious—case for legislative prayer, if he were to give one.

The case Lee made, much of which he stated in a lengthy post at the *Daily Caller*, rests on an understanding of the church as a worshiping community that is united by creed and prays to a particular God. A pastor publicly praying in church uses the first-person plural pronoun because he is part of the community and is leading it in prayer. He thus may presume who the God is to whom "we" are praying and also what may be prayed for. That includes the members' "salvation" and "everything [needed] for body and soul," says Lee, there being no disagreement on these matters within the worshiping community. Nor about praying in Christ's name.

The church, however, is not Congress, an obvious but critical point in Lee's argument. Congress is not a worshiping community, and in fact there can be no religious test for office, no creed that members must confess. For that reason Christian prayer in which a pastor presumes to speak for all as he prays, using the first-person plural pronoun, has no place in Congress.

Still, while he could not pray in

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Congress as the pastor of a worshiping community, Lee decided he could pray in Congress as an individual. And as an individual he could pray for the blessings that God gives to all men in common, regardless of faith. Too, he could pray for those for whom the New Testament in fact instructs Christians to pray—civil authorities, that they might carry out God's purposes for them, "to protect the defenseless, praise those who do good, and punish those who do evil," as Lee said in his prayer.

For theological reasons, then, Lee altered the way he ordinarily prays as a pastor, while he also limited the scope of his prayer. He wound up praying in ways—such as forbearing from using "we" or "our"—that the legal critics of legislative prayer would have to credit.

But Lee was unable not to pray in Jesus' name: No ostensibly Christian prayer, he concluded, could truly be a Christian prayer without that. Lee closed his prayer by asking God "to hear this prayer for the sake of the merits of your only Son, the crucified and risen Lord, Jesus Christ." Not incidentally, legislative prayers containing language like that—manifoldly offensive to the critics—could not be offered if the Court were to decide in *Town of Greece* that the establishment clause forbids sectarian legislative prayer.

Media coverage of legislative prayer tends to focus on the political jurisdictions that sponsor the prayers (a town or city or state or Congress) and on those who challenge them, usually in lawsuits. Of less interest are those who give such prayers, and how they think about them. Few are as thoughtful and articulate about the practice as Lee.

Last week I spoke with him regarding his ambivalence about legislative prayer. "It's not necessarily a good idea for our legislatures to open with this sort of prayer," he said. "But given that they do, as a Christian, I think I can offer one," meaning one like the prayer he gave—providing, of course, such prayer is still allowed after *Town of Greece*. The Court's decision is expected by the end of June. ♦

The Suicide Juggernaut

Euthanasia activists are on a roll.

BY WESLEY J. SMITH

Euthanasia backers in Paris: 'I want the right to choose my death,' 'Death of a taboo?'

Advocates of assisted suicide tell two—no, three—lies that act as the honey to help the hemlock go down. The first is that assisted suicide/euthanasia is a strictly medical act. Second, they falsely assure us that medicalized killing is only for the terminally ill. Finally, they promise that strict guidelines will be rigorously enforced to protect against abuse.

Recent legislative proposals and developments in the field demonstrate the mendacity of these assurances. For example, a new bill tabled in the Scottish parliament would legalize assisted suicide for "terminal" or "progressive and either terminal or life-shortening" conditions—undefined terms that could easily include chronic ailments such as diabetes, asymptomatic HIV infection, and multiple sclerosis.

Such loose categories are ubiquitous in international assisted suicide advocacy. But the Scottish bill goes a radical step further by creating a new profession—the "licensed suicide facilitator," authorized by the state to help suicidal patients kill themselves once a doctor has issued a lethal prescription.

Licensed facilitators would be authorized to provide "practical assistance" in the suicide and "reassurance" when a substance "dispensed or otherwise supplied for the suicide of the person is taken." They would also be authorized to remove lethal drugs—presumably narcotics—from the home after their client died.

Such a heavy responsibility, one would think, should require extensive education in mental health disciplines and medicine. Nope. The legislation leaves it up to regulators to decide

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AP / JOHN VAN HASSELT / CORBIS

what experience and training licensed suicide facilitators will require.

But it's a good bet that possessing a suicide-friendly ideology will be an important component. For example, the bill specifies that *organizations* could be licensed—a boon to pro-euthanasia groups, many of which already surreptitiously "counsel" or assist suicides. Not only that, but individuals as young as 16—also the minimum age to receive assistance in committing suicide—would be eligible for licensure. This means that if the bill becomes law, one teenager could be legally authorized to help another teenager commit suicide.

As the Scots continue to wrestle with legalizing assisted suicide, experience in Belgium warns of the consequences of accepting killing as an answer to human suffering. Belgian law allows broad access to euthanasia and assisted suicide when "the patient is in a medically futile condition of constant unbearable physical or mental suffering" caused by an illness or injury, and which cannot be alleviated. That's a very liberal license. But since 2002, some Belgian doctors have implemented the law as if it permitted death on demand. Consider these well-documented examples:

- the euthanasia of a transsexual repelled by the results of a sex change operation;
- the euthanasia of a depressed anorexia patient who wanted to die after being sexually exploited by her psychiatrist;
- the joint euthanasia of deaf twins, who asked to be killed together when both began losing their eyesight;
- the joint euthanasia of elderly couples who preferred immediate death to eventual widowhood.

Belgian doctors also combine voluntary euthanasia with organ harvesting. One medical journal published an article describing the harvesting of a lung from a mentally ill patient who was identified as a self-harmer. Joint euthanasia/organ harvests have become so normalized that Belgian doctors created a PowerPoint presentation urging colleagues to be on the lookout for suicidal patients with neuromuscular diseases (such as MS) as potential donors, because unlike cancer patients, they have "high quality organs."

And now, the Belgian parliament seems likely to legalize child euthanasia: By an overwhelming 50-17, the senate just passed a bill allowing doctors to kill sick children. The justification? It's happening anyway. "We all know it," Dominique Biarent, head of intensive care at Queen Fabiola Children's University Hospital in Brussels told Belga news agency. "Doctors need a framework."

Let me translate: Belgium's euthanasia guidelines are a mere veneer that can be violated without consequence.

By an overwhelming vote of 50-17, the Belgian senate just passed a bill allowing doctors to kill sick children. The justification? It's happening anyway.

When violations finally come to public light, lawmakers simply amend the law to reflect actual practice.

That has certainly been the pattern for the last 40 years in the Netherlands, where the categories of killable people have expanded like a sinkhole. Now, psychiatrists want to get in on the killing. A 2012 article in a Dutch journal of psychiatry concluded that not only is euthanasia for mental illness legal in the Netherlands (absolutely true), but making euthanasia—the "midwife of death"—more available to those with mental illnesses would constitute "an emancipation of the psychiatric patient and psychiatry itself."

On this side of the pond, Quebec is close to legalizing euthanasia. All major political parties in the provincial parliament support the plan, which would—unlike any other proposal I have seen—forbid assisted suicide and *require doctors to kill* qualified patients as medical treatment. It would accomplish this bit of prestidigitation by renaming euthanasia "medical aid in dying" and mandating that doctors "administer such aid personally" when asked by a legally qualified patient.

As under most legal schemes outside the United States, eligibility would not be limited to the terminally ill. If of "full age" and "capable of giving consent," the suicidal patient would be able to have him or herself killed if suffering from "an incurable serious illness" in an "advanced state of irreversible decline" that causes "unbearable physical or psychological pain which cannot be relieved in a manner the person deems tolerable." As in the Scottish proposal and the Belgian and Dutch laws, the definition is broad enough to drive a hearse through.

What's more, all Quebec doctors would be legally required to euthanize qualified patients—or, if morally opposed, to refer patients to others willing to kill them. In other words, complicity in euthanasia may soon become a condition of practicing medicine in Quebec—Hippocratic Oath be damned.

The United States too has seen a lurch in assisted suicide policy. Americans still have qualms about the issue; voters in Massachusetts narrowly rejected a legalization referendum last year. Thus, as a political expedient, proposals here usually limit doctor-prescribed death to the terminally ill and include bureaucratic guidelines that supposedly will protect against abuse.

True to form, Vermont has a new assisted-suicide law that contained such provisions when lawmakers passed it in May. But the "safeguards" will sunset in 2016. After that, no state oversight of any kind is mandated. Instead, suicide-assisting doctors will make their own rules so long as the patient is "capable and does not have impaired judgment." The doctor informs the suicidal patient of "feasible end-of-life services" and discloses the "risks" of taking a lethal overdose.

To recap: Starting in 2016, doctors in Vermont will assist patient suicides under what amounts to an honor system, no questions asked. What could go wrong? ◆

Technology for Tyrants

Courtesy of the U.N.

BY CLAUDIA ROSETT

It's well over a year since the United Nations intellectual property agency got caught undermining the U.N.'s own sanctions—shipping U.S.-origin computers and related high-tech equipment to North Korea and Iran. In classic U.N. fashion, the World Intellectual Property Organization, known as WIPO, stiffed congressional inquiries and arranged its own narrow and "independent" investigation of itself. Thanks to U.N. privileges and immunities, WIPO was ultimately judged by the U.N. to have stayed within the letter, if not the spirit, of U.N. sanctions. WIPO's director general, Francis Gurry, maintained that WIPO had done nothing wrong, but decreed that to dispel any lingering doubt, WIPO would stop sending high-tech hardware to any of its 186 member states.

That has not, however, marked the end of WIPO's cozy ties to Iran and North Korea. Both these rogue states have learned to exploit this U.N. agency in ways that may not break U.N. rules, but do suggest the organization needs far better management. Based in Geneva, WIPO operates largely off the radar of the U.S. press, but it handles sensitive information and serves an important role as the global clearinghouse for international patent applications and other forms of intellectual property rights.

Gurry, an Australian, is now running for reelection as WIPO director general against three rival candidates—from Panama, Estonia, and Nigeria—with the vote due next spring. There are worries in Congress that his reelection would be a disaster. In September, five lawmakers wrote to Secretary of State John Kerry, noting that Gurry had refused to allow WIPO staffers to testify in a bipartisan investigation into the computer shipments to North Korea and Iran, an "activity that would have put any U.S. citizen behind bars." They accused Gurry of "erratic and secretive behavior and colossal lack of judgment." In November, 12 lawmakers sent another letter to Kerry, alleging that "the situation at WIPO has substantially deteriorated."

Francis Gurry, director general of WIPO

That may be a generous assessment, given that WIPO's problems extend to areas Congress may not even be tracking. For starters, while Iran may no longer be receiving free computers from WIPO, Iran has insinuated itself into the organization's budgeting and oversight process. Since at least 2011, Iran has held one of the 53 seats on WIPO's program and budget committee, a post to which it was unanimously reelected this October for another two-year term. Thanks to its seat on the budget committee, Iran was chosen last year to chair a special panel tasked with vetting candidates for three of the seven seats on WIPO's independent advisory oversight committee, the body of outside experts entrusted with helping member states oversee WIPO.

This Iran-chaired panel was set up in September 2012, while WIPO was both denying any wrongdoing in the tech for tyrants scandal and promising to behave better. Iran's chairmanship was the choice of WIPO member states, not of Gurry. But there is no sign that either Gurry or, for that matter, the State Department made any move to protest this development. The Iran-chaired panel went quietly to work, and WIPO General Assembly records show that this October Iran's ambassador, Abbas Bagherpour, was pleased to present a list of six candidates, culled under his leadership from a field of 160 applicants, for the job of ensuring WIPO's integrity.

As far as Gurry's direct responsibilities, there is also the curious and apparently unexplored matter of the Iranian and North Korean nationals working under him on WIPO's staff. The numbers look trivial, but some of the activities do not. Among a staff of more than 1,200, based mostly in Geneva, WIPO employs both an Iranian and a North Korean whose names turn up, respectively, in connection with the computer shipments to Iran and North Korea.

Apart from the most senior staff, WIPO's press office treats all details of individual staffers as secret, including their names, jobs, and nationalities. But information can be gleaned from WIPO's terse public notes on technical assistance missions and conferences, plus interviews, a confidential WIPO staff list seen by this reporter, and WIPO in-house correspondence published last year by Fox News executive editor George

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Russell, who in April 2012 broke the WIPO tech for tyrants story.

The Iranian staffer whose name is linked to tech transfers to Iran is Mohammad Moayedoddin. He was hired by WIPO in 1998, following more than 20 years working for Iran's Ministry of Foreign Affairs, during which WIPO was part of his brief. Since joining WIPO, Moayedoddin has worked out of Geneva for WIPO's regional bureau for Asia and the Pacific, which covers Iran and North Korea. WIPO records show Moayedoddin visiting both countries over the years, organizing or speaking at numerous seminars in Iran and speaking in North Korea at a 2003 WIPO seminar in Pyongyang on using patent information "to support technological development."

Since at least 2008, Moayedoddin has worked as deputy director of WIPO's Asia-Pacific bureau. In an internal WIPO memorandum dated 2009—a year after Gurry became director general—another WIPO staff member wrote that following a 2008 mission by Moayedoddin and another staffer to Iran, Iran requested "hardware equipment." That led to a WIPO shipment of computers to Iran in 2010. There is one other Iranian national on staff at WIPO since at least 2009, Azadeh Ahmadian, who holds the post of examiner—a job that can involve handling confidential information on intellectual property.

On the North Korean front, a WIPO activity report dated September 29, 2010, notes that in 2009 two staffers were "repeatedly approached" by a North Korean diplomat, "Mr. Sok," who requested WIPO's support for such projects as "searching patent information free databases, etc." This diplomat was Sok Jong Myong, an envoy of North Korea to the U.N. in Geneva, where his duties included denouncing Israel (in excellent English) at the Human Rights Council, as well as representing Pyongyang at WIPO.

Sok's repeated requests led to a WIPO mission to Pyongyang, out of which came the high-tech shipment to North Korea in early 2012. Meanwhile, sometime around 2010, WIPO hired Sok onto its staff, where he appears on a recently updated internal staff list as a senior program officer in WIPO's division for least-developed countries.

This year, WIPO has continued its missions to North Korea, sponsoring a seminar in March on industrial design protection (North Korea has filed only two applications for industrial designs, one for hairpins and another for a musical instrument) and dispatching a technical assistance mission in June. When I asked the aim of the technical mission, a WIPO spokeswoman emailed back that it was to check what North Korea was doing with goods provided by WIPO. According to the spokeswoman, "The mission confirmed that all of the supplied equipment was installed in the Invention Office" and "was being used for the intended purposes."

That's not necessarily reassuring. Despite all the computers and seminars and study trips WIPO has provided to North Korea over the past dozen years, North Korea under WIPO's benchmark Patent Cooperation Treaty System has produced only 32 patent filings. Iran has produced 28. So, even assuming the WIPO-supplied hardware is being used strictly to access WIPO services, what might these countries be doing with it?

WIPO's searchable database provides access to some 2.2 million international patent applications, including 32.5 million documents crammed with details of who is inventing what, and where. For U.N.-sanctioned regimes scouring backchannels for forbidden goods and services, this database could double as a high-tech global shopping directory. A seasoned North Korea expert, Chuck Downs, says that for Pyongyang it could serve as "an intelligence windfall." WIPO says that the database contains published information, and is freely searchable on the Internet. In that case, why such care by WIPO to provide the likes of Iran and North Korea with training seminars and follow-up missions that leave the equipment in place? ♦

A Raid on Iran?

Don't count out the Israeli military. It has a record of pulling off daring, surprise strikes.

By Uri Sadot

As world powers debate what a comprehensive nuclear deal with Iran should look like, Israeli prime minister Benjamin Netanyahu continues to maintain that Israel is not bound by the interim agreement that the P5+1 and Iran struck in Geneva on November 24. Israel, says Netanyahu, "has the right and the obligation to defend itself." One question then is whether Netanyahu actually intends to strike Iranian nuclear facilities. The other question, no less important, is whether Israel could really pull it off.

American analysts are divided on Israel's ability to take effective military action. However, history shows that Israel's military capabilities are typically underestimated. The Israel Defense Forces keep finding creative ways to deceive and cripple their targets by leveraging their qualitative advantages in manners that confound not only skeptical observers but also, and more important, Israel's enemies.

A destroyed Egyptian warplane, June 1967

Military triumphs like the Six-Day War of June 1967 and the 1976 raid on Entebbe that freed 101 hostages are popular Israeli lore for good reason—these "miraculous" victories were the result of assiduously planned, rehearsed, and well-executed military operations based on the elements of surprise, deception, and innovation, core tenets of Israeli military thinking. Inscribed on one of the walls of the IDF's officer training academy is the verse from Proverbs 24:6: "For by clever deception thou shalt wage war." And this has been the principle driving almost all of Israel's most successful campaigns, like the 1981 bombing of Iraq's nuclear reactor, the 1982 Beka'a Valley air battle, and the 2007 raid on Syria's plutonium reactor, all of which were thought improbable, if not impossible, until Israel made them reality.

And yet in spite of Israel's record, some American experts remain skeptical about Israel's ability to do anything about Iran's nuclear weapons facilities. Even the most optimistic assessments argue that Israel can only delay the inevitable. As a September 2012 report from the Center for Strategic and International Studies contends: "Israel does not have the capability to carry out preventive strikes that could do more than delay Iran's efforts for a year or two." An attack, it continued, "would be complex and high risk in the operational level and would lack any assurances of a high mission success rate." Equally cautious is the chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, General Martin Dempsey, who argued that while "Israel has the capability to strike Iran and to delay the production or the capability of Iran to achieve a nuclear weapons status," such a strike would only delay the program "for a couple of years." The most pessimistic American assessments contend that Israel is all but neutered. Former director of the CIA Michael Hayden, for instance, said that airstrikes capable of seriously setting back Iran's nuclear program are beyond Israel's capacity.

Part of the reason that Israeli and American assessments diverge is the difference in the two countries' recent military histories and political cultures. While the American debate often touches on the limits of military power and its ability to secure U.S. interests around the globe, the Israeli debate is narrower, befitting the role of a regional actor rather than a superpower, and focuses solely on Israel's ability to provide for the security of its citizens at home. That is to say, even if Israel and the United States saw Iran and its nuclear arms program in exactly the same light, there would still be

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a cultural gap. Accordingly, an accurate understanding of how Israelis see their own recent military history provides an important insight into how Israel's elected leaders and military officials view the IDF's abilities regarding Iran.

Any account of surprise and deception as key elements in Israeli military history has to start with the aerial attack that earned Israel total air supremacy over its adversaries in the June 1967 war. Facing the combined Arab armies, most prominently those of Egypt, Syria, and Jordan, Israel's Air Force was outnumbered by a ratio of 3 planes to 1. Nonetheless, at the very outset of the war, the IAF dispatched its jets at a time when Egyptian pilots were known to be having breakfast. Israeli pilots targeted the enemy's warplanes on their runways, and in two subsequent waves of sorties, destroyed the remainder of the Egyptian Air Force, as well as Jordan's and most of Syria's. Within six hours, over 400 Arab planes, virtually all of the enemy's aircraft, were in flames, with Israel losing only 19 planes.

Journalists tour the ruins of Iraq's Osirak reactor.

Israel's sweeping military victory over the next six days was due to its intimate familiarity with its enemy's operational routines—and to deception. For instance, just before the actual attack was launched, a squad of four Israeli training jets took off, with their radio signature mimicking the activity of multiple squadrons on a training run. Because all of Israel's 190 planes were committed to the operation, those four planes were used to make the Egyptians believe that the IAF was simply training as usual. The IAF's stunning success was the result not only of intelligence and piloting but also of initiative and creativity, ingredients that are nearly impossible to factor into standard predictive models.

The 1981 raid on Iraq's nuclear reactor at Osirak is another example of Israel's ability to pull off operations that others think it can't. The success caught experts by surprise because every assessment calculated that the target was out of the flight range of Israel's newly arrived F-16s. The former deputy chief of mission at the U.S. embassy in Israel Bill Brown recounted that on the day after the attack, "I went in with our defense attaché, Air Force Colonel Pete Hoag, to get a briefing from the chief of Israeli military intelligence. He laid out how they had accomplished this mission. . . . Hoag kept zeroing in on whether they had refueled the strike aircraft en route, because headquarters of the U.S. Air Force in Washington wanted to know, among other things, how in the world the Israelis had refueled these F-16s. The chief of Israeli military intelligence kept saying: 'We didn't refuel.' For several weeks headquarters USAF refused to believe that the Israelis could accomplish this mission without refueling."

Washington later learned that Israel's success came from simple and creative field improvisations. First, the pilots topped off their fuel tanks on the tarmac, with burners running, only moments before takeoff. Then, en route, they jettisoned their nondetachable fuel drop tanks to reduce air friction and optimize gas usage. Both these innovations involved some degree of risk, as they contravened safety protocols. However, they gave the Israeli jets the extra mileage needed to safely reach Baghdad and return, and also to gain the element of surprise by extending their reach beyond what the tables and charts that guided thinking in Washington and elsewhere had assumed possible.

Surprise won Israel a similar advantage one year later in the opening maneuvers of the 1982 invasion of Lebanon. For students of aerial warfare, the Beka'a Valley air battle is perhaps Israel's greatest military maneuver, even surpassing the June 1967 campaign. On June 9, Israel destroyed the entire Soviet-built Syrian aerial array in a matter of hours. Ninety Syrian MiGs were downed and 17 of 19 surface-to-air missile batteries were put out of commission, while the Israeli Air Force suffered no losses. The brutal—and for Israel, still controversial—nature of the Lebanon war of which this operation was part dimmed its shine in popular history, but the operation is still studied around the world. At the time it left analysts dumbfounded.

The 1982 air battle was the culmination of several years' worth of tension on Israel's northern border. Israel was concerned that Syria's deployment of advanced aerial defense systems in Lebanon's Beka'a Valley would limit its freedom to operate against PLO attacks from Lebanon. When Syria refused to pull back its defenses and U.S. mediation efforts failed, Israel planned for action. Although Israel was widely understood to enjoy a qualitative advantage, no one could have imagined the knockout blow it was about to deliver. Israel launched its aerial campaign on the third day of the offensive, commencing with a wave of unmanned proto-drones that served as decoys to trigger the Syrian radars. Rising to the bait, the aerial defense units launched rockets

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and thus exposed their locations to Israel's artillery batteries and air-to-ground missiles. In parallel, Israel used advanced electronic jammers to further incapacitate Syrian radars, which cleared the path for the IAF's fighter-bombers to attack the remaining missile launchers. When Syrian pilots scrambled for their planes, their communications had already been severed and their radars blinded. Israeli pilots later noted the "admirable bravery" of their Syrian counterparts, whom they downed at a ratio of 90 to 0.

A RAND report later concluded that Israel's success was due not to its technological advantage. "The Syrians were simply outflown and outfought by vastly superior Israeli opponents. . . . The outcome would most likely have been heavily weighted in Israel's favor even had the equipment available to each side been reversed. At bottom, the Syrians were . . . [defeated] by the IDF's constant retention of the operational initiative and its clear advantages in leadership, organization, tactical adroitness, and adaptability." In other words, Israel won because of its creative and skillful orchestration of a well-organized fighting force.

And then there is Israel's most recent high-profile conflict with Syria. When Israeli intelligence discovered that Bashar al-Assad's regime was building a plutonium reactor in the northeast Syrian Desert, Israeli and American leaders disagreed on the best course of action. Israel's then-prime minister Ehud Olmert argued for a military solution, while the Bush administration feared the risks, demurred, and Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice pushed to take the matter to the U.N. The Israelis, however, confident in their cyberwarfare capabilities, knew they could disable Syria's air defenses. Moreover, as careful students of Syrian decision-making, they believed they could destroy the reactor without triggering a costly reaction from Assad. And on September 6, 2007, Israel once again overturned the expert predictions and assessments of others and successfully destroyed the Syrian reactor at Al Kibar.

When Syrian pilots scrambled for their planes in 1982, their communications had already been severed and their radars blinded. Israeli pilots later noted the 'admirable bravery' of their Syrian counterparts, whom they downed at a ratio of 90 to 0.

With Iran, American and Israeli leaders once again disagree on what might be gained by a military strike. While the American debate is riddled with doubts about the efficacy of force, Israeli experts harbor far fewer doubts. As former chief of military intelligence Amos Yadlin asserts unequivocally: "It can be done." There are some Israeli strategists less optimistic, but the nature of their dissent is fundamentally different from that of American skeptics. U.S. policymakers and analysts question Israel's ability to strike, or how far even the most successful strike might set back Iran's nuclear program, but Israelis largely believe they can take effective military action. The question for Israeli strategists is at what cost? A 2012 IAF impact evaluation report predicted 300 civilian casualties in the event of an Iranian retaliatory missile attack. Former defense minister Ehud Barak offered a higher number, contending that open conflict with Iran would claim less than 500 Israeli casualties. Responding to Barak's relatively optimistic assessment, onetime Mossad director Meir Dagan argued instead that an attack on Iran would take a heavy toll in terms of loss of life and would paralyze life in Israel.

Regardless of the number of potential casualties, the frank discussion of what an attack on Iran might cost Israel in human lives is an essential part of preparing the country, and steeling it, for the possibility of war. Israel has also devoted material resources to the eventuality of a military campaign against the regime in Tehran. According to Ehud Olmert, Israel has spent over $10 billion on preparations for a potential showdown with Iran. "We've worked long and hard to prepare ourselves," former IDF chief of staff Gabi Ashkenazi said recently. Israel, he added, "will be able to deal with the consequences of a military attack on Iran."

The question of how exactly Israel might act to stop the Iranian nuclear program is an open one. In part, that's because it's hard to know how Israeli strategists see the problem or might reconfigure the working paradigm. The basic operational assumption is that Israel would attack from the air, but who knows? If the goal is to slow down Iran's nuclear program, there are other ways to do it, perhaps by targeting Iran's economy, its powergrid, its oil fields, or the regime itself. Or military action might not take the form of an aerial attack at all, but rather a commando heist of Iran's uranium. Recall the raid on Entebbe: With commandos operating 2,000 miles from Israel's borders disguised as a convoy carrying the Ugandan leader Idi Amin, that 1976 operation, like many of Israel's air triumphs, combined strategic surprise with tactical deception.

What is certain, however—what many historical precedents make clear—is that it would be an error of the first order to dismiss Israel's ability to take meaningful military action against Iran. Israel has left its enemies, as well as American policymakers and military experts, surprised in the past, and it may very well do so again. ♦

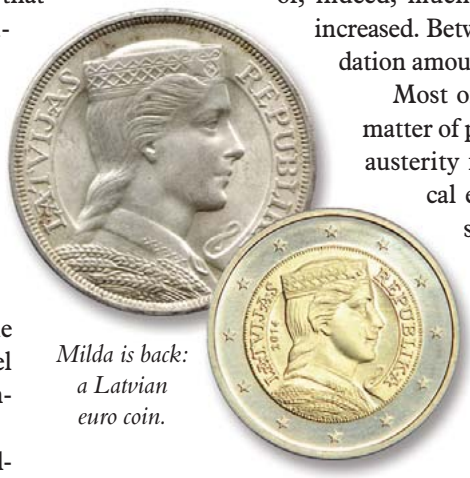
Willkommen, Bienvenue

Latvia joins the eurozone

By Andrew Stuttaford

Riga, Latvia

They take austerity seriously in Latvia. After each meeting with a government official he or she would turn off the lights as we walked out of the room. More than five years after the global financial crisis finally burst Latvia's fragile economic bubble, scrimping is second nature. Given the direction this small, resilient Baltic country took after Lehman fell, that's no surprise. The usual prescription for cleaning up the mess that overheating leaves behind, particularly in an export-oriented economy (exports amount to some 60 percent of Latvian GDP), centers around a sharp devaluation of the currency to restore international competitiveness. There were quite a few (including within the IMF) who suggested that Latvia should break the peg fixing its currency—the lats—to the euro, leaving the lats to sink to a level that more accurately reflected uncomfortable new market realities.



Milda is back: a Latvian euro coin.

That's not what Latvia did. The relatively low value added within Latvia to its exports, and the difficulty that it would have faced in satisfying domestic demand with domestic production, meant that a conventional devaluation would have struggled to work its naughty magic, even if the export markets had been there (by no means assured after the slump in the international economy). Tipping the scales further, local business and the nascent middle class—most of whose boom-bloated borrowing had been in euros—would have faced catastrophe had they had to repay those debts in suddenly depreciated lati. That would have threatened both social disaster and a dangerous breach with the Nordic banks responsible for a large portion of that lending—banks that would now have a vital role to play in maintaining financial liquidity in the country (the only sizable Latvian bank had foundered).

So Latvia stuck with the peg and opted for "internal devaluation," shorthand for an attempt to mimic the competitive benefits of a traditional devaluation, but by squeezing costs (primarily labor costs) and excess demand out of the local economy rather than by depreciating the currency. This won Latvia financial backing from a group comprising the World Bank, the IMF, the EU, and the Nordic countries, support that had to sugar some very bitter medicine. Government expenditures were slashed (large numbers of public sector employees were fired and many of those who hung on saw their salaries cut by 20 percent or, indeed, much more) and, to a lesser extent, taxes increased. Between 2008 and 2012 total fiscal consolidation amounted to some 17 percent of GDP.

Most of the pain was front-loaded, both as a matter of practical politics (better to strike before austerity fatigue set in) and a matter of practical economics: Latvian interest rates had soared to damaging heights and confidence had to be rebuilt.

Seen in that context, the 2009 declaration by Valdis Dombrovskis, the dourly impressive center-right prime minister, that Latvia would continue to seek membership in the eurozone (and, more specifically, get there by 2014) made sense. Whatever the mounting problems in the EU's gimcrack currency union, it appeared to offer a comparatively safe haven from the Baltic storm. For investors and lenders, the obvious seriousness of this commitment, together with the external support that the government had won, significantly reduced the exchange-rate risk associated with doing business in Latvia. It was no coincidence that with the "devaluation ghost" (as the central bank delightfully puts it) held at bay, lats-denominated interest rates started to tumble.

On top of that, targeting eurozone membership provided a benchmark against which the performance of the Latvian economy could be measured. The country would only be eligible to switch over to the euro if it met the currency union's "Maastricht criteria." Its budgetary position would have to be on a sound footing, its inflation subdued, and so on.

Perhaps most important, the march towards the single currency signaled to Latvians that their reconnection

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with Europe would not be derailed by the economic crisis. Austerity was a means to an end, not just an end in itself. Many Latvians had (and have) their doubts about the wisdom of adopting the single currency (over half are still—to a greater or lesser extent—opposed), but the broader aim of anchoring their state more firmly in the West helped them to stay the course through the brutally tough times that followed the financial collapse.

There are plenty of dismal statistics to choose from, but unemployment stood at over 20 percent in early 2010 (compared with an average of 6.5 percent in 2007), and GDP shriveled by 18 percent in 2009, after a 4.2 percent decline the previous year. Despite this, Dombrovskis was able to prevail in the October 2010 general election and then weather (albeit precariously) a snap election called in slightly murky circumstances the following September. The fragmented and incomplete development of political parties in Latvia means that general elections are not the best gauge of public opinion, but Dombrovskis's survival (he went on to become Latvia's longest-serving democratically elected prime minister) says something. He resigned only in late November, after the deadly collapse of the roof of a Riga supermarket, a tragedy for which he took "moral and political responsibility."

But by then the economy was well on the mend, bolstered by a revival in global demand partly stimulated, of course, by less austere policies elsewhere. Quite why Latvia was able to resume its pre-boom trajectory as quickly as it did remains the subject of lively academic debate, but a low level of public debt was one crucial advantage: Latvia could persist with its tough approach without falling into the debt-deflationary trap that is crippling recovery in Greece and other grisly corners of the eurozone's ER.

Latvia's GDP growth began to turn positive during 2010, coming in at a total nicely above 5 percent for both 2011 and 2012, and is on schedule to be comfortably over 4 percent in 2013, the fastest growth in the EU. The current account deficit is again at a manageable level, the unemployment rate has shrunk to a number marginally below 12 percent, inflation is running at less than 1 percent (as opposed to nearly 18 percent in May 2008), and the budget deficit has returned to respectability after coming close to 10 percent of GDP in 2009. In 2012 it was only a little above 1 percent, while government debt stood at around a modest 40 percent of GDP, easily below the Maastricht requirement of 60 percent.

It is no surprise that Latvia's formal application to join the euro in March was approved by the relevant EU authorities within a few months. Ordinary Latvians were not given an equivalent say. Calls for a referendum were rejected, not least on the grounds that the matter had long been decided. Any country joining the EU after the Maastricht Treaty came into force in 1993 (Latvia became a member in 2004 after—it is fair to note—a referendum) is obliged to sign up for the euro as soon as it meets the Maastricht tests, a proviso that the Swedes (joined 1995)—who wisely retain their krona—have ignored. Some seats at the EU's table are more equal than others.

In any event, Latvia will swap the lats for the euro on January 1 at the rate, to be precise about it, of 0.702804 lati per euro, although it will still be possible to pay for goods and services in lati for another two weeks thereafter. The conversion process within the public and private sector is well under way, as is an extensive program of public education (meetings, leaflets, advertising). Most visibly to the visitor, all prices now have to be given in both lati and euros, and from what I could see in Riga, that was happening everywhere. Even in the converted zeppelin hangars (history here is complicated) of the capital's picturesque (and somewhat law-unto-itself) central market, everything was properly priced: I had been issued a nifty lenticular currency conversion card and could check that that was so. Watchdogs are in place to stop the changeover being used to hike prices (a common, if exaggerated, fear that has accompanied the introduction of the euro in other countries). To reinforce this, dual pricing will be mandatory until the end of June.

After the changeover, lati will be convertible into euros (at the fixed rate) at rural post offices for three months, at commercial banks for six months, and at the central bank in perpetuity. This matters. Ask officials why there is still so much opposition to the switch, and—perhaps a little condescendingly—they cite folk-memories of the damage caused by previous currency conversions, especially the abrupt introduction of a "new ruble" in 1961 during the Soviet era.

But there is more to it than that. Geopolitical realities (yes, we are talking about Russia), the size—and open nature—of the Latvian economy, and inadequate domestic capital formation all make a decent, if downbeat, case for Latvia to enter the eurozone, despite that currency union's profound problems. Its flaws (to use a gentle word) have not escaped the attention of the man in the Latvian street. He also does not appreciate the fact that if there is another eurozone bailout (Greece, yet again?), frugal, hardscrabble, post-Soviet Latvia, one of the poorest countries in the EU, will have to chip in.

For a country to abandon its own money is to throw away an essential attribute of sovereignty. In a lovely but manipulative gesture, Latvian 1 and 2 euro coins will bear the image of Milda, the "Latvian maiden" who adorned prewar Latvia's gorgeous—and emotionally resonant—5 lati piece. This time she is

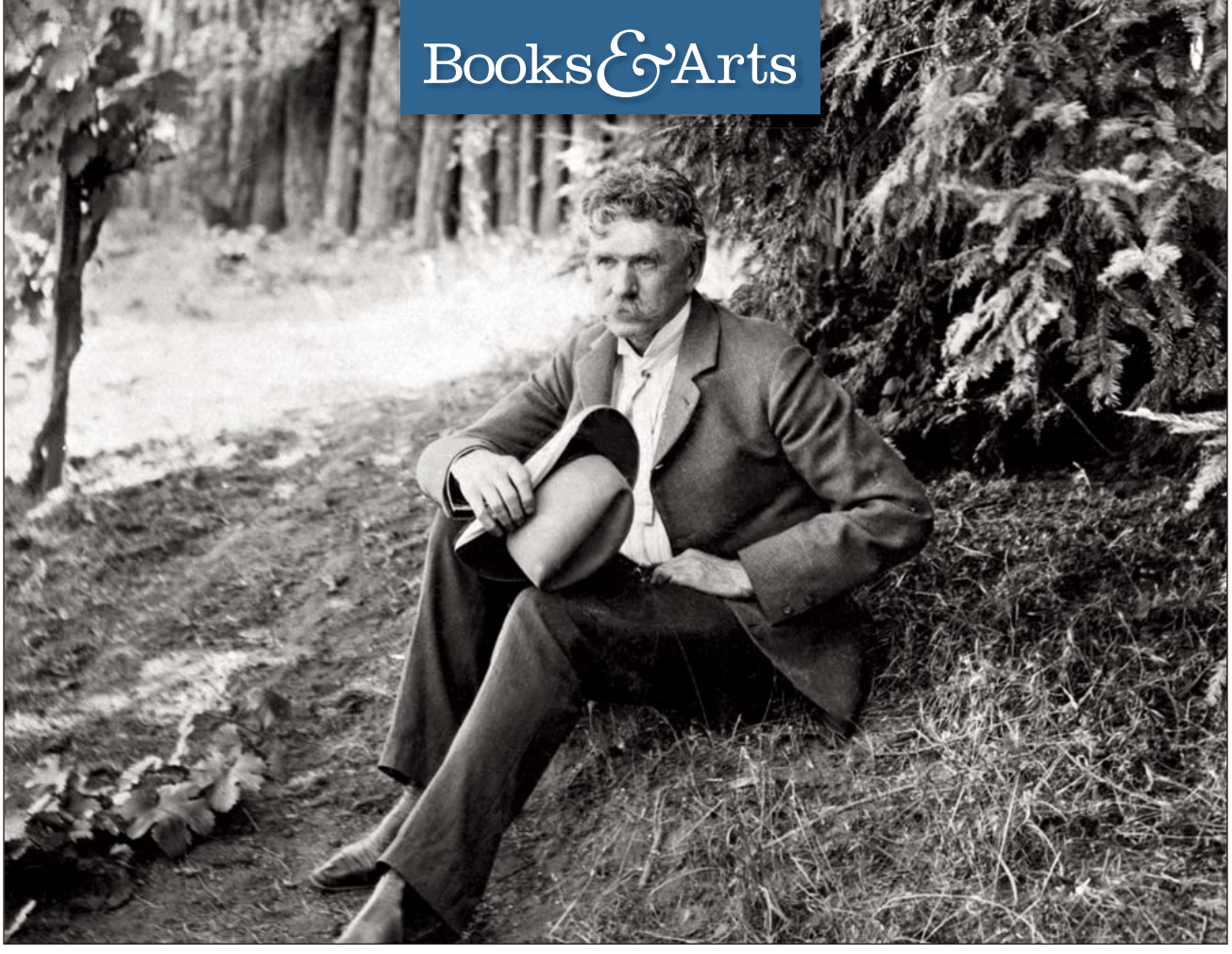
decorating a symbol not of hard-won independence but of a sadly withered autonomy.

And the eurozone's long agony may bring with it another twist of the knife. The convenient fiction that made it politically possible to establish the euro in the first place was that this was a shared currency that could work with a minimum of pooled sovereignty, a stretch at the best of times, an impossibility in the case of a monetary union that is very far from being an optimal currency area; Germany is not Greece, Finland is not Portugal. If the euro is to survive in its current form, the eurozone will require much deeper fiscal and budgetary integration. Quite what will be left of Latvia's low tax, fiscally responsible regime or, in any real sense, its self-determination, by the time this process is finished is anyone's guess.

And what is to remain of Latvia itself? It emerged from nearly half a century of cruel Soviet occupation with its identity savagely battered—not least by the presence of a large Russian settler population (even today ethnic Latvians account for only some 62 percent of the country's two million inhabitants)—but its heart intact. Membership in the EU has represented a kinder, subtler challenge. The opportunities it has brought to live in lusher lands to the west has led to a steady stream of emigration, a stream that became a torrent during the slump before dwindling again today. All told, the population has shrunk by over 10 percent since 2000. Exporting surplus labor helped Latvia manage the crisis, but at what longer-term cost?

I spent the evening of November 11 down by Riga Castle. It was Lacplesis Day, the anniversary of the victory in 1919 by freshly cobbled-together Latvian forces (helped by Royal Navy guns) over a Russo-German army (as I said, history is complicated here) in the battle that effectively secured the new state's independence after centuries of foreign rule. An ever-swelling crowd, talking quietly, proud to be there, had gathered, lighting row upon row of candles that flickered against the old castle walls, a tribute to the men who had fought so courageously for their country's right to be. Bonfires did their best against the cold, clear northern night; once-banned flags—carmine and white like the ribbons everyone seemed to be wearing—waved in the chill breeze. A group of children sang folk songs of simple, crystalline beauty.

Behind us a series of tiny vessels had been launched into the River Daugava. Each bore a candle and some a miniature flag, too. They formed a brave, bright, glowing flotilla that sailed off into the dark, its destination unknown. ♦



Ambrose Bierce (ca. 1900)

Cynic's Progress

The brave life and mysterious death of Ambrose Bierce.

BY ANDREW FERGUSON

One golden autumn morning 100 years ago, a few blocks from where I'm writing these words in northwest Washington, D.C., Ambrose Bierce said goodbye to his secretary, turned the key in the door to his apartment on Logan Circle, and went off to God knows where.

I'm not speaking figuratively: God and nobody else knows where Ambrose Bierce ended up—or when, how, or why. He had taken September and early October to settle his personal affairs, as people used to say. His literary affairs had been settled with the publication of his collected works, more than a million words packed into 12 volumes and assembled over a period of five years, which signaled his official exit from the writing life. His two sons were dead, his estranged wife was dead, and his daughter Helen, though not quite estranged, had built a life for herself a safe distance from him, in the Midwest.

Bierce sent Helen a letter before he left Washington. He told her he wanted to walk the battlefields where he had fought 50 years before as a first lieutenant in the 9th Indiana Infantry. He wanted to look a last time at Kennesaw Mountain, Chickamauga, Franklin, Nashville, Missionary Ridge, and Murfreesboro. Then, he said, he would turn further south, into Mexico, to see firsthand the Mexican civil war and its most romantic figure, the revolutionary Pancho Villa, who had struck his interest. From there, he'd move on to South America.

Over the next few weeks Helen, his secretary Carrie Christiansen, and a handful of friends received notes postmarked along his winding route from West Virginia through Tennessee into Alabama and Georgia. In early November a newspaper reporter

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caught up with him in New Orleans: "Ambrose Bierce, famed writer and noted critic, has arrived," the young man wrote, in a breathless scoop. Bierce sat for an interview. He was off to Mexico, he said, because "I like the game. I like the fighting." Then, the reporter observed, his "straightforward blue eyes" took on a "faraway look" as the old man mused about the journey ahead. "There are so many things that might happen . . ."

He was a 71-year-old asthmatic who spoke not a word of Spanish traveling to a Mexican war zone with $1,800 folded into a bulging money belt. So yes, there were many, many things that might happen. On December 26, he sent Carrie Christiansen a letter from Chihuahua, 200 miles south of the border, telling her he hoped to hook up with Villa's forces the next day, and disappeared.

"We have produced but one genuine wit," H.L. Mencken wrote, in a survey of American letters: "Ambrose Bierce. And save to a small circle he is unknown today." Mencken was writing decades after Bierce had gone off to Mexico, by which time his life was best remembered for the way he had left it. And the circle of those who read him is even smaller now, needless to say. When the Library of America finally got around to issuing a canonical selection of his writing, in 2011, the single volume (Philip Roth got nine!) was relatively slender; it was the 219th in the library's series of great American writers.

His fame was not general, even at its most robust. Those who admired him, mostly his fellow writers, admired him extravagantly. He was a "writer's writer," in the deadly phrase. The tributes from William Gladstone, Arnold Bennett, Bret Harte, and many other popular and learned literary men shared a common thread: Why, they all asked, wasn't Bierce better known? Bierce himself ached for fame as awfully as any writer, but was, in time, amused by the strange status he had achieved: He was famous for not being famous. He wrote to a friend toward the end of his life:

> How many times, and during a period of how many years must one's unexplainable obscurity be pointed out to constitute fame? Not knowing, I am almost disposed to consider myself the most famous of authors. I have pretty nearly ceased to be "discovered," but my notoriety as an obscurian may be said to be worldwide and everlasting.

The problem with "writers' writers"—as many readers have discovered—is that they are seldom "readers' writers." It depends on the readers as much as the writers, of course, and today's readers might find they have caught up to Bierce's jaded view of war, politics, romantic love, religion, family life, and nearly everything else. When he is remembered these days it is usually for the short story "An Occurrence at Owl Creek Bridge," which, until recently, was one of a handful of short stories—along with "The Lottery," "The Most Dangerous Game," "To Build a Fire," and a few others—that no student could escape an American high school without having pretended to read.

His witticisms, which were of a very high order, reappear sometimes, too. His best aphorisms in *The Devil's Dictionary* are easily a match for La Rochefoucauld, maybe even Voltaire. His most reprinted book review consists of a single sentence: "The covers of this book are too far apart." When a young mother pestered him for advice on bringing up children, he finally replied: "Study Herod, madam. Study Herod." Democracy he defined as "four wolves and a lamb voting on what to have for lunch." At the death of a local politician, Bierce volunteered the epitaph: "Here lies Frank Pixley, as usual." Disdainful of philosophical pretension, he rewrote Descartes's axiom as "*Cogito cogito ergo cogito sum*": "I think I think, therefore I think I am."

But he earned the right to be read and remembered for more than his cleverness, sharp as it was—especially now, on the 100th anniversary of his curious exit and in the middle of the 150th anniversary of the Civil War. He served in the war with great distinction, and, in the decades that followed, he came closer than any other American to turning the great national cataclysm into art.

Bierce was a journalist all his life. Like so many journalists, he daydreamed of a higher calling that might win him a place at the grownups' table, to preen with the poets and essayists and dramatists. But he never pretended to being more than a scribbler. "I concluded one day that I was not a poet," he wrote a friend. "It was the bitterest moment of my life."

He was born in 1842 and grew up on the lake-scattered glacial plain of northern Indiana. Both his parents traced their roots back to the *Mayflower*, but what the next century would call the "American Dream" failed to work its magic for them, and the family barely managed to scrape out a living on their hardscrabble farm. Ambrose was one of 13 children, each of whom his parents insisted on tagging with a name beginning with "A" (Aurelius, Almeda, Augustus . . .). Schooling was intermittent. As the youngest child, he detached himself from his brothers and sisters, spending most of his time alone, wandering the woods and burying himself in books. For reasons Ambrose could never discern, his father, an otherwise unimaginative man, kept a bookshelf full of classics, from Addison to Cervantes.

"All that I have I owe to his books," he said.

At 15, Ambrose left his family to work as a printer's helper at an abolitionist newspaper in a nearby town. A year later he joined the timeless Hoosier Diaspora of young men and women whose chief relation to their home state is an irresistible urge to leave it—a group whose ever-swelling ranks have come to include both Abraham Lincoln and Michael Jackson. He escaped Indiana for glamorous Akron, Ohio, to live with an uncle, another devoted abolitionist, who a few years before had generously provided John Brown with the broadswords he used to hack his way through bleeding Kansas. Political connections enabled the uncle to win Ambrose a coveted slot at the Kentucky Military Institute. There, the boy acquired the military skills, chiefly in mapmaking

and ordnance, that would come in handy when war broke out, which it did at the end of his freshman year.

Bierce returned to Indiana to answer Lincoln's call for troops in April 1861. When his three-month stint was up, he signed on for two years more. Rising steadily in rank and cited often for valor, he remained in uniform for the rest of the Civil War. Little of the experience of war escaped him: shameless retreats, hopeless charges, courage, stupidity, confusion, terror, camaraderie, and endless slaughter. He was wounded at least twice before the battle of Kennesaw Mountain, when a bullet to the left temple lodged behind his ear, cracking his head open "like a walnut," he wrote later, in a phrase that captures his peculiar blend of detachment and precision. Eventually he was forced to return to Indiana for convalescence. He left again as soon as he could.

'An Occurrence at Owl Creek Bridge' on The Twilight Zone *(1964)*

By then the war was effectively over, though of course he could never quite get over it. His rise from enlisted man to officer gave Bierce a vertical view of how men made decisions of life and death under the most miserable conditions. What he saw year after year only confirmed his native cynicism. Stupidity made a deeper impression on him than physical courage, perhaps because he himself had so much more of the latter than the former. The blundering of generals fed his distrust of authority.

Shiloh, for instance, shocked him less for the appalling carnage than for General Grant's "astonishing fatuity," which had caused it. Later, the siege of Corinth, a rebel-held town in central Tennessee, offered him a more amusing, and less bloody, example of war's grim inversions and ironies. At Corinth, the fatuity belonged to Henry Halleck, who lobbed cannon fire and men into the siege on the belief that the town was a rebel stronghold. In fact, the rebel force had already retreated, and when Federal troops, including Bierce's Hoosiers, finally overran the town after a long and hurried march, they found (as his biographer Roy Morris Jr. tells us) nothing but straw men leaned up against dummy artillery. The enemy had painted the straw men with grotesque, taunting grins. Bierce took it as eloquent commentary. And Halleck, for his part, informed his superiors in Washington that the nonaction at Corinth had been a "victory as brilliant and important as any recorded in history."

After the war, Bierce accepted a commission as a cartographer with a cavalry division headed to the far West. Several biographers report that he could have made a career in the military, having built a sterling reputation; but when the expedition reached San Francisco he refused a promotion, left the Army, and took a job as a watchman in the federal mint—a position he shared with Bret Harte—in a building where another itinerant from the Midwest, Mark Twain, also worked. At the mint, Bierce would read through the night every night and write in the off-hours. He was soon published, and in less than a year he was offered the editorship of a local paper. It was a perfect match of time, place, job, and man.

A journalist in San Francisco after the Civil War found himself in a position rather like a newspaperman in competition with the Internet today. The town was small, insular, and remote enough that readers often knew the local news before it could be printed. The hacks, therefore, had to devise other attractions to bring in customers. Pith and outrage, often artificial, were prized above mere information. Scandals had to be exposed or, if necessary, invented; and personages, especially other newspapermen, had to be traduced.

"I mean to refine the styles of such journalists as I can," Bierce announced, "and assassinate the rest." He was joking, though it's true that violence among journalists and readers was common. (Here, unfortunately, the likeness between journalism then and now breaks down.) Bierce took to wearing a sidearm after a newsroom confrontation with an irate reader whose wife had been on the unflattering end of a jape. When the well of libel and slander ran dry, Bierce and his colleagues filled their columns with short stories, poetry, hoaxes, one-act plays, jokes, tall tales, fables, faked memoirs, and epigrams. Bierce, writing constantly, proved himself skilled at every form, performing best at high heat.

Read today, most of this stuff gets tiresome pretty quickly—there's a reason we call our product "fishwrap"—but the bottomless maw of column inches forced Bierce to acquire a technical command that made possible his much more enduring work. Except for a four-year stint in London, thanks to a pretty young heiress he married in 1871, Bierce stayed in California for nearly 30 years, where he was known as "Bitter Bierce" or, lamely, "The Wickedest Man in San Francisco." He broadened his scope to include national affairs, especially after he was hired by

JANUS FILMS / CBS

the young William Randolph Hearst, and his columns gained an audience far beyond the Bay.

The best-known adventure from his newspapering was also the least typical. He and Hearst had nothing in common politically except a vague revulsion for the crony capitalism of the Gilded Age and a more pointed hatred for the cronies themselves. The fattest target among the Railrogues, as Bierce called them, was Collis P. Huntington, chairman of the Southern and Central Pacific railroads, and the richest man in California. A useful percentage of Huntington's fortune fell into the pockets of congressmen and senators in Washington, and when Congress floated a bill relieving him and his railroad of a $75 million debt to the federal government (a loan on which Huntington's riches had been built), it was assumed that it would pass easily.

Hearst's newspapers exploded. The publisher sent Bierce to Washington to front a relentless campaign to kill Huntington's bill. Bierce directed a team of reporters and wrote every day himself, sometimes twice a day, always in high spirits: "Mr. Huntington is not altogether bad," went a throwaway line in a typical column. "He says ugly things of the enemy, but he has the tenderness to be careful that they are mostly lies."

Incredibly, after months of daily coverage, Bierce and Hearst succeeded—an early sign that the Gilded Age had run its course. The bill was withdrawn, though not before Huntington confronted Bierce on the steps of the Capitol among a scrum of reporters.

"Name your price," Huntington demanded, insisting that Bierce call off his campaign. "Every man has a price."

"My price," Bierce responded cinematically, "is $75 million, handed over to the Treasury of the United States."

His words flew instantly around the country, thanks to his colleagues and the transcontinental telegraph, and for years thereafter the episode led people to think Bierce was a reformer—perhaps even a progressive. A generation later, many muckrakers claimed him as their inspiration. But they got him wrong. Bierce had no positive program of his own; he just hated Collis P. Huntington, and his method was satire and ridicule. He rarely fell into the muckraker's oppressive tone of humorless dudgeon. Imagine Upton Sinclair cracking wise.

It helped, too, that Bierce's own politics were flexible. His one abiding principle was a horror of socialism. Capitalism alone could accommodate human striving and ambition—the Darwinian means for improving our lot. To a young socialist friend, he wrote: "Do away with the desire to excel and you may set up your Socialism at once. But what kind of a race of sloths and slugs will you have?"

The reformers and progressives of his day missed the genius of the country. Even in the America of the corporate trust, Bierce wrote, "the number of actual and possible sources of profit and methods of distinction is infinite. Not all the trusts in the world combined in one trust of trusts could appreciably reduce it—could condemn to permanent failure one man with the talent and the will to succeed."

As a journalist, Bierce was most comfortable in opposition, and he swung his cutlass along a wide arc. The Library of America neglected his writing on current affairs, but it's remarkable how fresh and pleasing—how contemporary—so much of it is. Consider his view of William Jennings Bryan, a cavernous blowhard untouched by any genuine accomplishment who managed to rise to the top of American politics on the basis of a single speech to a national political convention. Any resemblance to any contemporary politician is—well, it's uncanny is what it is.

> A week before the convention of 1896 William J. Bryan had never heard of himself; upon his natural obscurity was superposed the opacity of a Congressional service that effaced him from the memory of even his faithful dog, and made him immune to dunning. Today he is pinnacled upon the summit of the tallest political distinction, gasping in the thin atmosphere of his unfamiliar environment and fitly astonished at the mischance. To the dizzy elevation of his candidacy he was hoisted out of the shadow by his own tongue, the longest and liveliest in Christendom. Had he held it—which he could not have done with both hands—there had been no Bryan. His creation was the unstudied act of his own larynx; it said, "Let there be Bryan," and there was Bryan.

You hear strains of Ambrose Bierce in the best of the political writers who came after him, from Mencken to Murray Kempton. But it was his memory of the past, of the Civil War, that drove him to his highest achievements as a writer. He had the field to himself. As the best of his biographers, Roy Morris Jr., has pointed out, he was the only American writer of any consequence to fight in the war. The future men of letters of his generation managed somehow to be elsewhere when the bodies began piling up. William Dean Howells spent the 1860s in Venice. Twain, after a fortnight with the Confederate Army, went as far west as he could get. And the two Henrys, James and Adams, watched the carnage from afar, Adams from London, and James from the killing fields of Harvard Yard.

Anyone hoping for an artist's firsthand view of the Civil War, then, is left with Bierce, and he's enough. His memoir-essays carry titles such as "What Occurred at Franklin," "A Little of Chickamauga," "What I Saw at Shiloh." The flatness of the titles is misleading, and so is the affectless voice with which the narrator relates unspeakable horror—until, most often, he quits on a tone of resignation, or bitterness, or dark humor. His memoir of Shiloh describes the aftermath of another platoon's absurd charge full-on into enemy fire. Bierce leads his own troops through the bodies, lingering over one in particular,

> a Federal sergeant, variously hurt, who had been a fine giant in his time. He lay face upward, taking in his breath in convulsive, rattling snorts, and blowing it out in sputters of froth which crawled creamily down his cheeks, piling itself alongside his neck and ears. . . . [T]he brain protruded in bosses, dropping off in flakes and strings. I had not previously known one could get on, even in this unsatisfactory fashion, with so little brain. One of my men, whom I knew for a womanish fellow, asked if he should put his bayonet through him. Inexpressibly shocked by the cold-blooded proposal, I told

him I thought not; it was unusual, and too many were looking.

This last line is not just an ironic nod toward nicety; it's a comment about the hypocrisy of etiquette itself: You might consider putting the sergeant out of his misery, but *not in public*. Bierce leaves us with layer upon hopeless layer of human folly. Later, he describes a band of deserters who, having fled the enemy in terror, now face a firing squad of their own comrades with perfect poise. Only in battle could such an unthinkable inversion occur: "An army's bravest men are its cowards." He closes with the wish that he had been among the dead at Shiloh, spared "the ugliness of the longer and tamer life."

It's been a century now since Bierce's kind of cynicism—since Wilfred Owen and Erich Maria Remarque and other veterans of the First World War—took hold as the prevailing theme of the literature of combat. From *All Quiet on the Western Front* to *The Naked and the Dead* to *Dispatches*, this view has become commonplace, even compulsory, for anyone who hopes to be praised for writing about war. But we can only imagine how perverse Bierce's work seemed to a public still celebrating the Grand Army of the Republic, mourning the martyred Lincoln, and tearing up whenever "Just Before the Battle, Mother" oozed from the player piano. It's a wonder that Mencken and Bennett ever questioned why Bierce failed to win a large audience. For better and worse, he was suited much more to our day than to his own.

Even so, in Bierce's recollections you sense a frustration, or a holding back, as though he hasn't quite conveyed to you the absurdity of what he saw across three years of war. For this he turned to fiction. Bierce's hundreds of short stories, unsurprisingly, make an uneven corpus. Outside of his newspapering, he was a genre writer. He wrote ghost stories, horror stories, science fiction, tales of the supernatural—fiction that gets its locomotion from mechanical tricks rather than from plausible incident or depth of character. This may have been a necessity, since, as a writer of stories, Bierce seemed incapable of penetrating the human heart, which he often admitted was not his own most sensitive organ. His most developed character, said Clifton Fadiman, was Death.

Bierce was able to make these limitations work for him, as a master of craft. Edmund Wilson, his most discerning admirer, said that in Bierce's best stories, through his command of pacing and physical description, he could goad the reader into experiencing, as if firsthand, the very events he was describing—a perfect example of the axiom that a storyteller must show and not tell.

"An Occurrence at Owl Creek Bridge" follows a condemned man called Peyton who escapes from the gallows when the hangman's noose breaks—or so Peyton and the reader think. He makes for home through lush countryside, lushly described, as he daydreams of his waiting wife—until nightfall, when Bierce's lyricism darkens. Peyton hears voices murmuring in unknown tongues. He sees the stars above wheeling "in some order which had a secret and malign significance." From resignation to relief to joy to alarm to—the inevitable appearance of Bierce's most developed character. The sudden shock that Peyton feels at story's end is only a bit greater than the reader's, though more terminal.

Fadiman was right about Death. But the rival character in Bierce's war fiction is Bierce himself—the hovering presence who only makes himself felt by indirection. Bierce's greatest story, "Chickamauga," is his most unsettling, if so mild a word can be used for a story that places a 6-year-old boy in the smoking landscape of a just-finished battle. The boy has wandered off from home with his little wooden sword, playing war through the countryside against imaginary foes, and, after a while, he falls asleep. When he wakes, he sees dozens of men in tatters, moving through the denuded forest on their hands and knees, crawling toward water: "He moved among them freely . . . peering into their faces with childish curiosity." Their faces are streaked in red: "Something in this—something too, perhaps, in their grotesque attitudes and movements—reminded him of the painted clown whom he had seen last summer in the circus, and he laughed as he watched them." Playfully, he tries to mount one of the dying men as a horse, as he does with field hands back at the farm. "To him it was a merry spectacle."

At last the boy decides to lead the shattered men as though they were his army, raising his make-believe sword and marching gaily at their front, toward a glowing light at the forest's edge, where even worse awaits.

Reading "Chickamauga," feeling almost pummeled by the horror, you begin to suspect that Bierce isn't horrified at all. Our author, not merely the reporter of this scene but its creator, is simply observing it. He has placed himself in relation to the reader just as he supposes God has placed himself in relation to the men Bierce watched die in the war and, finally, to all of us: passionless and detached, clinically interested but personally indifferent, and, above all, *amused*. The effect of the story, when it builds and breaks, is almost unbearable, bordering on sadism—undeniably the result of a heightened artistry that few writers on war and warfare have been permitted to achieve.

Spring arrived in Washington before Bierce's secretary accepted the obvious and wrote the American consulate in Chihuahua. The consul replied that he had no record of Ambrose Bierce visiting the city. American reporters returning from the Mexican civil war were no help, either. A few had seen Bierce near the border around Christmastime, but no one had seen him later, or further south. It was late summer before Carrie Christiansen allowed a friendly reporter to break the news that Bierce had gone missing, and the story was picked up around the world.

By the time Helen had her father declared legally dead, in 1921, his disappearance had long since been swallowed up in legend and romance. For a generation, the fate of Ambrose Bierce was a hardy perennial of American newspapers and magazines. Every few years some editor would drain the newsroom travel budget to send a star reporter southward to find him. They always came up with something—everything but their prey.

The border region and precincts even further south produced many willing witnesses who had seen Bierce alive, though never in the same place and at the same time. Others had witnessed his execution, or sat by his deathbed, or stood with him as he tried vainly to fight his way through a gang of bloodthirsty banditos. Or they had watched helplessly as he took his own life before some fatal disease could do it for him. Still more people, not having seen Bierce themselves, knew someone—the friend of a brother's friend, the aunt of a next-door neighbor—who had.

The theories grew exotic. One psychic, noting the disappearance in Mexico of another notable American named Ambrose, published a book explaining that Bierce had been sucked into a supernatural vortex that specifically targeted men named Ambrose. During World War I a British newspaper reported that he was alive and well and advising Lord Kitchener on military matters. Sightings of an ambulatory Ambrose were reported long past the point of his natural lifespan: As recently as the 1940s he was identified as a patient in an insane asylum in Northern California. The publisher who had brought out Bierce's collected works said that the Mexican disappearance was a hoax: He theorized that Bierce had run off to commit suicide in a remote corner of the Grand Canyon, where he could rot in peace.

He was far more famous in death than he had been in life, and all his biographers say he would have enjoyed the fact hugely. Maybe, or maybe not. In time, collections were made of his letters, and readers soon noticed how many of his last messages mentioned his own death. He seemed particularly taken with the idea of running afoul of the Mexican revolutionaries—"set up against a wall and shot to rags"—but we'll never know whether he got his wish.

One of his last letters was to a friend, a young woman. "May you live as long as you want to," he wrote, with the implication: and not a moment longer. In any event, he hoped she would go as he hoped to, passing "smilingly into the darkness, the good, good darkness." Home at last. ♦

MORANDI BRUNO / ZUMAPRESS / NEWSCOM

B&A

The Gateway City

Why the tip of Morocco is a magnet for writers.

BY THOMAS SWICK

Oh, the writers! They came to Tangier in boatloads, getting—many of them—their first taste of Africa and Islam. Though over time, the great allure of Tangier for writers became other writers.

Most people are familiar with 20th-century duo Paul Bowles and William S. Burroughs, who attracted Allen Ginsberg, Jack Kerouac, Gore Vidal, et al.—but, as Josh Shoemake points out here, Tangier has ancient associations with scribes. The great 14th-century traveler Ibn Battuta was a Tangerine and left his hometown while in his early 20s to travel to Mecca. He returned to dictate his memoirs, presaging the day when Paul Bowles would tape-record the stories of Mohamed Mrabet and Larbi Layachi. From life on the road to life on the streets.

When Joe Orton arrived in 1965, he was following in the footsteps, though not the behaviors, of Samuel Pepys. The great diarist and naval administrator came to the city in 1683 as treasurer of the Tangier Committee; nearly two centuries later, Alexandre Dumas would swing by, followed shortly by Hans Christian Andersen and Mark Twain, who, in *The Innocents Abroad*, wrote of the marketplace: "The scene is lively, is picturesque, and smells like a police court." This quote appears at the end of a long passage reprinted here in chapter five: "The Medina." Shoemake paints his portrait of the city and the writers it inspired geographically rather than chronologically. As he explains in the previous chapter on Tangier Plage—moving effortlessly from Orton to Mrabet to Kerouac to Twain to Dumas to Walter Harris (of the London *Times*)—"Time is constantly skipping around in multilayered Tangier."

Its longtime appeal is obvious: It is a port city a short boat ride from Europe with international influences and tolerant attitudes that serve as an entry point into Africa, the Mediterranean, and the Arab world. In addition, its features—both natural and man-made—are like those of a fictionalized city, with all the requisite elements: port, beach, medina, kasbah, caves. Even the names of streets and institutions—Boulevard Pasteur, the Grand Socco, Hotel Minzah, St. Andrew's Anglican Church, Pension Fuentes, Mohamed V Mosque—seem to carry a novelist's touch. A postcard home would be evocative simply

Thomas Swick is the author of A Way to See the World: From Texas to Transylvania with a Maverick Traveler.

Tangier
A Literary Guide for Travellers
by Josh Shoemake
I.B. Tauris, 288 pp., $25

through nomenclature: *Last night, after drinks at the Café Central, we caught a movie at Cinema Mauretania*. Tangier appears to have been a city not simply inhabited by writers but invented by them—and in a way, it was.

If they didn't write about Tangier (though, as this book shows, most of them did), they still sometimes managed to use it in works set elsewhere. Shoemake notes that the Petit Socco inspired the stage directions for Tennessee Williams's *Camino Real* (1953). Williams had met Paul and Jane Bowles in Mexico, and they had invited him—as they did numerous writers—to visit them in Tangier. In Shoemake's chapter on the Gran Café de Paris (what did I say about novelistic names?), he finds Williams drinking Fernet Branca and Coke, a drink "which could hardly be recommended even if the café still sold alcohol." Those last six words tell you all you need to know about the sad devolution of the city.

In the café, Williams chats with Mohamed Choukri, "Tangier's most famous native writer, whose life story surpassed anything a writer of fiction could imagine," while "another morning Alec Waugh comes up the pavement clutching an egg cup. He insists on a soft-boiled egg for breakfast, and the café refuses to purchase a cup for the use of a single client, even if he's a Waugh. And then there's Joe Orton sitting at a pavement table with some friends on 25 May 1967, although you might want to pretend you've never met the man."

The book takes the form of a Barnes & Noble café mural, in which the great writers across the decades all sit together sipping coffee. It's a bit disconcerting at first, but in the end it works, giving the impression that Tangier was one ongoing literary salon and party—a lot more than coffee was being ingested, and sex was in the air and everywhere else—with a few permanent hosts (Bowles made it his home for half a century) and a steady flow of colorful guests.

Barbara Hutton, the Woolworth heiress, looked for love in Tangier (of all the wrong places) and wrote poetry that she self-published. Aaron Copland accompanied Paul Bowles on his first trip to the city, which had been recommended to them by Gertrude Stein and Alice B. Toklas. The two music men (we're reminded here that Bowles was also a composer) stayed at the best hotel, the Villa de France, from whose Room 35 Matisse had repeatedly painted the view. Drinking at a bar in town, Noël Coward told an inebriated young woman, who explained that she was simply being herself, "That's a thing you should never be."

Tallulah Bankhead, Claudette Colbert, and Richard Wright frequented Dean's Bar for the "booze and steaks," while Truman Capote spent, as he wrote in *Answered Prayers*, "several unsober months . . . as an habitué of Jay Haselwood's Le Parade."

Years later, Malcolm Forbes would buy the old Palais du Mendoub and hold his 70th birthday party there, a much-publicized affair featuring belly dancers, Berber horsemen, and Elizabeth Taylor. Guest of honor Paul Bowles later wrote in his diary: "By midnight, I'd had enough."

"Tangier doesn't make a man disintegrate," said Bowles, "but it does attract people who are going to disintegrate anyway." His attachment to the city extended to its native writers—Choukri, Mrabet, Layachi—whom he mentored, recorded, and translated. His wife Jane thought he was wasting his time with them (though many people thought he was wasting his time with Jane). They were street kids, "roaming the beach and looking for opportunities." Of the three youngsters, only Choukri was literate. They came out of poverty and, drawing upon "superhuman reserves of determination and charm," became writers, telling tales of Tangier that were startling even to the expats who lived there.

You finish *Tangier* with a list of books to feed your growing fascination with this vanished, dissolute city. ♦

B&A

A Good Fight

The political journey of David Horowitz.

BY VLADIMIR TISMANEANU

David Horowitz is a political thinker and cultural critic who enjoys challenging leftist shibboleths. His main contribution to contemporary political discourse is a passionate commitment to an outspoken, unabashed, myth-breaking version of conservatism. If communism was the triumph of mendaciousness, he argues in this poignant collection of writings, conservatism cannot accept the proliferation of self-serving legends and half-truths.

Vladimir Tismaneanu, professor of politics at the University of Maryland, is the author, most recently, of The Devil in History: Communism, Fascism, and Some Lessons of the Twentieth Century.

The Black Book of the American Left
The Collected Conservative Writings of David Horowitz
by David Horowitz
Encounter, 416 pp., $27.99

This makes his public interventions refreshingly unpredictable, iconoclastic, and engaging. He is a former insider, and his views have the veracity of the firsthand witness. Horowitz knows better than anybody else the hypocrisies of the left, the unacknowledged skeletons in its closet, and its fear to come to terms with past ignominies. He is an apostate who sees no reason to mince his words to please the religion of political and historical correct-

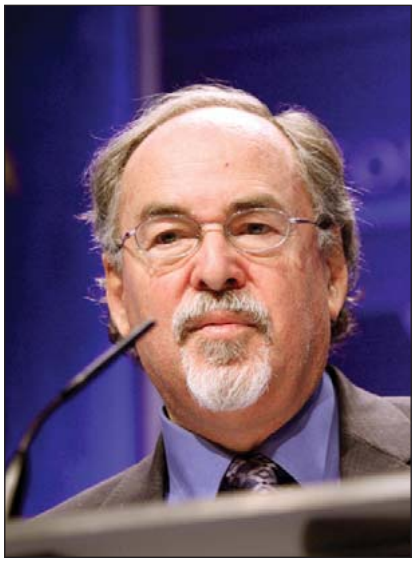
ness. His masters are other critics of totalitarian delusions, from George Orwell to Leszek Kolakowski; in fact, Horowitz's awakening from his leftist dreams was decisively catalyzed by the illuminating effect of Kolakowski's devastating critique of socialist ideas. Unlike his former comrades, however, Horowitz believes in the healing value of second thoughts.

Vilified by enemies as a right-wing crusader, Horowitz is, in fact, a lucid thinker for whom ideas matter and words have consequences. His break with the left in the late 1970s was a response to what he perceived to be its rampant sense of self-righteousness, combined with its readiness to endorse obsolete and pernicious utopian ideals. Born to a Communist family in Queens, Horowitz flirted with the Leninist creed as a teenager but found out early that the Communist sect was insufferably obtuse and irretrievably sclerotic. He attended Columbia, where he discovered Western Marxism and other non-Bolshevik revolutionary doctrines. From the very beginning, he had an appetite for heresy.

He joined the emerging New Left and went to England, where he became a disciple and close associate of the socialist historian Isaac Deutscher, author of once-celebrated biographies of Stalin and Trotsky. Thanks to Deutscher, Horowitz met other British leftists, including the sociologist Ralph Miliband (father of the current leader of the Labour party). Consumed by revolutionary pathos, he wrote books, pamphlets, and manifestoes, denounced Western imperialism, and condemned the Vietnam war.

Once back in the United States, he became the editor, with Peter Collier, of *Ramparts*, the New Left's most influential publication. In later books, Horowitz engages in soul-searching analyses of his attraction to the extreme radicalism of the Black Panthers and other far-left groups. Under tragic circumstances—a friend of his was murdered by the Panthers—he discovered that these celebrated antiestablishment fighters were fundamentally sociopaths. What followed was an itinerary of self-scrutiny, self-understanding, and moral epiphany. He reinvented himself as an anti-Marxist, antitotalitarian, antiutopian thinker.

Obviously, David Horowitz is not the first to have deplored the spellbinding effects of what Raymond Aron called the opium of the intellectuals. Before him, social and cultural critics (Irving Kristol, Norman Podhoretz, Nathan Glazer, to name only the most famous ones) took the same path; Bertolt Brecht's Marxist mentor, Karl Korsch, broke with his revolutionary past in the 1950s. Even Max Horkheimer, one of the Frankfurt School's luminaries, ended as a conservative thinker. As Ignazio Silone, himself a former Leninist, put it: The ultimate struggle would be between Communists and ex-Communists.



David Horowitz (2011)

GAGE SKIDMORE

In Horowitz's case, however, it is a struggle waged by an ex-leftist ideologue against political mythologies that have made whole generations run amok. Like Kolakowski and Václav Havel, Horowitz identifies ideological blindness as the source of radical zealotry. He knows that ideologies are coercive structures with immense enthralling effects—indeed, what Kenneth Minogue called "alien powers." Putting together his fervid writings is, for him, a duty of conscience. He does not claim to be nonpartisan and proudly recognizes his attachment to a conservative vision of politics. But he is a pluralist: He refuses the idea of infallible ideological revelation, admits that human beings can err, and invites his readers to exercise their critical faculties. He does not pontificate.

Judith Shklar once wrote about a liberalism of fear, a philosophy rooted in the awareness that the onslaught against liberal values in totalitarian experiments inevitably results in catastrophe. Horowitz's conservatism is inspired by the conviction that utopian hubris is always conducive to moral, social, and political disaster. It is not an optimistic conservatism, but a tragic one. Horowitz confesses that he is an agnostic, yet he realizes that liberty, as a nonnegotiable human value, has a transcendent legitimation in religion. In the absence of a moral ground, individuals are suspended in a moral no-man's land: Rebels become revolutionaries and exert their logical fallacies to eliminate deviation from a sacralized ideology.

For Horowitz, the main battle is now related to cultural hegemony. He understands that political rivalries are directly linked to clashes of values. Refusing to be pigeonholed into a formula, he combines themes belonging to classical liberalism, Burkean conservatism, and neoconservatism. His social criticism is a response to what he perceives to be the collapse of the center in American politics and the takeover of the liberal mainstream by proponents of refurbished leftist fallacies. He regards anticapitalism, anti-Americanism, and anti-Zionism as ideological mantras meant to camouflage a deep contempt for human rights.

The Black Book of the American Left is an illuminating contribution to our understanding of what Hannah Arendt once called the ideological storms of the 20th century. It shows how American radicals partook of the same romantic passions and redemptive fantasies as their European peers. The philosophical languages were different, of course, but the electrifying desire to negate the existing order, no matter the human costs, was the same. ♦

B&A

Morbid Visionary

Poe's tortured soul is exposed at the Morgan Library. BY DANIEL GOODMAN

Edgar Allan Poe (1809-1849) defined the genre of the American macabre, and his name has become synonymous with literary horror. He has had many imitators but few genuine literary successors—only Jorge Luis Borges and H.P. Lovecraft have come close. Cities across the Eastern seaboard, from Boston to Baltimore, claim him as their own. And, given his interlude in Richmond and a (very brief) stopover in Charleston, Southern devotees assert that Poe's true literary and geographic home lies in the South.

Joe Queenan recently lodged a complaint in these pages against the overuse of the word "iconic," and I second his objection. But if there is a figure in American letters to whom this description accurately applies, it is Edgar Allan Poe. His face has become a Kafkaesque symbol of the tormented writer, whose stories transport us to the Styxian realms of existential abyss. Few literary visages—perhaps only Kafka's, Shakespeare's, and Twain's—are more ubiquitous. Even his literary creations have garnered iconic status: Who today can ponder a raven without thinking of "The Raven"?

For all of his cultural ubiquity, the actual Poe remains elusive. Who was this man, and what drove him to both the peak of the literary sublime and the depths of despair? This edifying exhibition at New York's Morgan Library attempts to penetrate the mystery of the man himself.

Edgar Allan Poe
Terror of the Soul
The Morgan Library and Museum
Through January 26

The exhibit's impressive collection of original Poe manuscripts, photographs, and letters is organized thematically, not chronologically. The disparate sections—Poe the poet, Poe the short-story writer, Poe the critic, Poe the literary influencer—cohere to reveal a man who was not unlike many of us. Nothing came easily for Poe: His life was plagued by financial struggles (antebellum America's inadequate copyright laws hardly provided the "first American author to live entirely by his pen" with an adequate living) and romantic disappointments, professional shortcomings, depression, and vituperative epistolary wars with writers like Henry Wadsworth Longfellow and James Russell Lowell.

He thought of himself, first and foremost, as a poet, and sought to pattern himself after Byron and Coleridge. But because poetry was not a highly remunerative occupation, he was compelled to work as a critic and editor. He excelled in both tasks, especially in his perspicacious literary criticism; indeed, George Bernard Shaw considered Poe to be "the greatest journalistic critic of his time." With the exception of "The Raven" and several other poems, Poe's reputation as an accomplished writer of fiction and verse would not be sealed until after his death.

Poe labored intensely over his creations, and was not even satisfied with the finished form of his first poetic masterpiece. He requested (and received) permission to make revisions after "The Raven" had already gone to print. It is this second edition that we have today; like the first Tablets, the first edition of "The Raven" has been lost, perhaps forever. He remained persistent amidst his creative struggles, stating that he never allowed "a day to pass without writing from a page to three pages."

The exhibit is replete with findings that will be new for nonspecialists. We learn that the famous (yes, "iconic") image of Poe was produced from a daguerreotype taken in Providence, four days after Poe attempted suicide. Contrary to popular belief, the portrait was not the work of Mathew Brady, but of a relatively unknown Rhode Island photographer. Perhaps something of Poe's melancholic spirit lingered in the Providence atmosphere, to be later imbibed by Poe's epigone (and Providence native) H.P. Lovecraft? Such is the speculation one entertains in the midst of an exhibit about a writer of supernatural fiction whose central motifs include doppelgängers, spirits, and metempsychosis.

Several panels discuss the development of his oft-imitated, never duplicated literary style. Poe appropriated the basic tropes of Gothic literature—solitude, madness, terror, and the grotesque—and reconstructed a distinctive genre of fiction clearly distinguishable from its simpler forebear in its psychological complexity, technical sophistication, irony, self-awareness, and profundity. With the creation of this new form of fiction, Poe emphatically demonstrated that the horror story would no longer remain the province of Europe alone. "Terror is not of Germany," he wrote, "but of the soul."

The panoply of literary figures Poe influenced is astounding: Jorge Luis Borges, Oscar Wilde, Robert Louis Stevenson, Arthur Conan Doyle, Henry James, Herman Melville, Allen Ginsberg, Raymond Chandler, even Vladimir Nabokov. Wilde considered Poe to be a greater poet than Longfellow, Emerson, and Whitman. Whitman himself at first regarded Poe as a superb technician, but grew to admire

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him so much that he was the only major literary figure in attendance at Poe's 1875 reburial in Baltimore.

Borges, who was perhaps Poe's true heir—excepting Kafka, no other short stories approach Poe's sublime existential allegories—echoed Whitman and fellow admirer Alfred, Lord Tennyson by characterizing Poe's oeuvre as a "work of genius." Borges credited Poe with inventing the detective procedural and acknowledged Poe as a significant influence on his own fiction. For those who seek to understand American poetry and the modern psychological short story, Borges and Ginsberg both agreed that all roads lead to Poe.

Even T. S. Eliot, who otherwise was not an ardent admirer of Poe's work, could not deny his status as the predominant influence behind French Symbolism. Indeed, the Symbolist poet Stéphane Mallarmé was so taken with "The Raven" that he translated it into French. The Morgan's image of the raven is taken from Édouard Manet's dust-jacket illustration for the Mallarmé translation.

Literary scholars have already identified traces of Poe's influence in the work of Nabokov, Borges, Wilde, and many others; but the significance of "Terror of the Soul" inheres in its three-dimensional demonstration of this influence, with tangible evidence. Letters and manuscripts—including Nabokov's screenplay for Stanley Kubrick's 1962 film adaptation of *Lolita*—detail the extent of Poe's influence on that writer. Nabokov originally downplayed his affinity for Poe, claiming that he had outgrown his adolescent fixation on the American. But in a revelation sure to provide literary bona fides to Poe lovers everywhere, Nabokov ultimately confessed to an abiding affection. Allusions to Poe abound in Nabokov's work. He not only borrowed Poe's doppelgänger motif, but also fashioned Humbert Humbert's intimate, confessional narrative style in *Lolita* after Poe's narrator in "William Wilson." Considering the number of authors who have been influenced by the narrative style of *Lolita*, it is striking to learn that the original source of these authors' influence is Edgar Allan Poe.

The Morgan exhibit's décor is perfectly suited to its subject. The blood-red walls evoke "The Masque of the Red Death," and the enlarged reproduction of Poe's signature in bold black ink, along with the wood-panel floors and dim lighting, establish an appropriately morose, nightmarish—and yet nongarish—ambience in which to contemplate Poe's morbid themes. Strategically positioned in the upper section of one wall is the black-and-white image of Poe, peering down at us just as the raven gazed down on its visitor.

While the exhibition provides a wealth of information (we even see fragments of his original coffin), it is largely disengaged from the long-running debate regarding the literary quality of Poe's writing. Harold Bloom famously characterized the diction in "William Wilson" as "awful," described Poe's verse as "dreadful," and deemed Poe (as well as Lovecraft) to be "subliterary." And the dim lighting, though appropriate to the mood, makes it difficult to read some of the printed materials.

Moreover, greater attention might have been paid to exploring the provenance and reception of Poe's short stories. What prompted him to write such probing, profound, psychologically complex macabre fiction? Considering how instrumental he was in the development of the short story in three different genres, and considering as well the contemporary revival of the short story, Poe's stories deserve more discussion. Likewise, a special section could have been devoted to a province of the arts in which Poe's influence reigns supreme: film. In cinematic horror, Poe's influence is virtually inescapable, and a single movie poster does not do it justice. ♦

B&A

Our Fatha

Rediscovering the piano artistry of Earl Hines.

BY COLIN FLEMING

Art Tatum had more outward flash, and Jelly Roll Morton certainly possessed more carny flair. But Earl Hines stood alone as the absolute champion of rhythm in jazz's triumvirate of most important pianists. Never within the idiom has the instrument sounded quite as percussive as when Fatha was cutting loose, accenting off-beats, pitting silence against a sonorous, thunderous attack, and turning what was often an upright piano into a rhythm machine that could get a room full of people dancing, sans backing band.

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Classic Earl Hines Sessions, 1928-1945
Mosaic Records, $129.99

The Hines discography, though, has been something of a mess for a while now. The classic sides with Louis Armstrong—modern jazz's birthing moment, you might say—have always been easy to come by, ditto the material with Duke Ellington. But Earl Hines's is a discography that has long been overheavy with albums from the final portion of his career. Having entered into semi-retirement in the early 1960s, after four-plus decades of vanguard music-making, Hines was "rediscovered,"

much in the fashion of some of the great Delta bluesmen later in the decade. This, though, was odd in that Hines had never really gone away, or he had certainly not gone away for long. But the gist of this rediscovery was more like a repositing: Hines the working band pianist could now become Hines the concert pianist, so it was out with juke joints and speakeasies and in with White House galas and concert halls.

The net result, starting in 1964, was some 80 albums; at times, more than a dozen were cut per year. The 1960s rediscovery bug and new listeners who had never heard prime Hines were enough to assure critical and, so far as jazz goes, popular acclaim. With a few notable exceptions (the wonderful *Plays Duke Ellington*, for instance), though, the solo Hines LPs tended to get somewhat overrated. All the more so if you were familiar with the body of work he had created during the golden days of Babe Ruth through the middle of World War II.

Mosaic's *Classic Earl Hines Sessions 1928-1945*—a whopping seven discs of invention on perpetual display—might as well be regarded as a godsend, righting as it does the aforementioned disproportionate emphasis in Hines's discography while also giving us what may well be jazz piano's signature set. You want alto sax, you go for a package of Charlie Parker's Savoy and Dial Sides; for trumpet, a box of Armstrong's Hot Fives and Sevens will sort you out. For piano, you come here. Pronto.

Mostly, Hines fronts his orchestra—which is to say he drives on one of swing's finest big bands, his piano often playing the role of conductor, insisting on new directions, teasing out others, and then, when enough of a sonic narrative has been established, launching into bubbling, leaping, chops-demanding solos that defy one expectation after another. Sometimes it feels as if, no matter how many times you listen to something like "Bubbling Over," it is impossible to guess Hines's next move. A course is suggested, one expects an accent to fall or a chord to resolve, but what follows in something like "Bubbling Over" is a torrent of notes that seem untethered to the music, even as those notes bolster the rhythmic drive of the entire band.

Earl Hines and his former manager, Pfc. Charles Carpenter, at the end of World War II

Hines had a knack for making some of his grandest statements in the interstices of sound where you would expect a tune to run along an agreed-upon course to the next bridge, or to the next player's chorus. It's as though the piano has become something extra-musical, a device for making music that challenges our conceptions of musicality itself. But lest anything get too heady, never let it be said that this isn't just flat-out good fun, with "Bubbling Over" being Hines's genial riposte to Jelly Roll Morton and his difficult "Finger Breaker." And you can dance to it.

Hines viewed himself as an entirely workmanlike creature, however, stating at one point that he had no idea that the music he made with Louis Armstrong, for instance, was anything special. And there is very much a meat-and-potatoes groove to cuts like "Pianology" and "On the Sunny Side of the Street." The latter, from 1941, features a neat allusion to ragtime before spinning off a stride lick or two and Hines concluding his extemporizations with snatches of bebop. (Indeed, "Child of a Disordered Brain," present in two takes from 1940, has a little rhythmic filigree that is a dead ringer for the antiphonal lick of "Salt Peanuts.")

Hines never dominates the proceedings, but there is never any doubt as to who is the singular player in these lineups. What always impresses is just how flat-out loud—punchy—Hines's piano is, as if he had found a way to gussy-up his decibel level without coming across as abrasive or ostentatious. Hines may have ended his career as a rococo soloist, perched uncomfortably between notions of himself as a concert pianist and a rhythm-dispensing jazzman. But Count Basie and Sviatoslav Richter both could hunker down with some of the showstoppers spread throughout this box set and find common ground.

"Flang Doodle Swing," "Father Steps In," "Comin' In Home," "The Father Jumps," and "The Earl" are the kinds of performances you cue up for any jazz piano neophyte and say, "Have a listen to this"—with an instant convert shortly to be staring back at you, mouth agape. But just as important, in terms of how we think of Hines, is the new thematic strain that emerges throughout the set: the notion of him as a percussive bluesman. Fast runs were always something of a Hines specialty, but a performance like "Windy City Jive," from 1941, reveals a player perfectly at his ease in bluesier climes. One begins to hear an element of the blues in even the most volcanic solos, as if Hines hit a fast-forward button and turned one subset of jazz into another. ♦

B&A

Folksinger's Blues

The Coens find their voice in early 1960s Greenwich Village. **BY JOHN PODHORETZ**

Earlier this year, Cathleen Schine published a novel called *Fin & Lady*, a deliriously nostalgic look at an orphaned boy who comes to live with his wealthy sister in a half-renovated Greenwich Village townhouse. The time is the 1960s, and the whole cast of characters is present: the wise intellectual, the working-class bohemian, the musician, and the kinds of young and hip New Yorkers who are always up for a party. Schine paints a golden burnish on every page. Reading it, you regret not having been there. You really want to live in the novel.

Inside Llewyn Davis, the new movie by the writing-directing team of Joel and Ethan Coen, is also set in Greenwich Village, in this case among the denizens and hangers-on of the burgeoning folk-music scene in 1961. But the Coen brothers make sure you do not want to live *Inside Llewyn Davis*. That is the point, the glory, and the wonder of this film, perhaps the most stunningly unsentimental portrait-of-the-artist-as-a-young-man ever made.

Inside Llewyn Davis is set in the dead of winter, during a week when the sunless light casts a dull pall. Famously magical Village settings, like Washington Square Park and MacDougal Street, look denatured and bleak. As in every Coen brothers picture, enormous care is taken to get the details exactly right. The look and feel of the re-creation of an older New York, executed on present-day streets and in present-day settings, is beyond praise—even more so because the Coens are not using the painstakingly crafted shots to generate the kind of dreamy and delicious mood Schine does in *Fin & Lady*. They are after something tougher.

Inside Llewyn Davis
Directed by Joel and Ethan Coen

The Coen brothers reproduce some of the seminal images of the time, like a shot of the title character emerging from the Sheridan Square subway station with the iconic Village Cigars sign behind him. But when Llewyn Davis hits the street at the top of the staircase, he is coatless and shivering, he's toting a cat he does not want, he's going nowhere fast, and he has a world of worries besetting him. The Village is no idyllic youthful playground for him. It's just the place where he works and where he usually crashes, in dumpy apartment after dumpy apartment.

This is not the Greenwich Village of fable, the red-hot center of antibourgeois life, where soon-to-be-legendary painters and soon-to-be-dead-in-the-gutter poets argue in bars and have sex with each other's wives. This is the Greenwich Village where ambitious people struggle, and most aren't going to make it. The folk-music world this film evokes so meticulously has been so romanticized over the years that one forgets that there were plenty of performers who weren't Bob Dylan. Llewyn Davis is all of them rolled into one.

A working-class boy from Queens, Llewyn followed in his father's footsteps and shipped out with the Merchant Marine as a kid. He returned to New York and formed a folk duo. But as the movie begins, his partner is nowhere to be seen. Llewyn has just recorded an album as a solo act and is trying to get his near-comatose manager to promote it in some way, or to just get him enough money to buy a winter coat.

The Coens have created a character awash in talent but utterly hapless in life. And his soulful singing and songwriting do not let him off the hook for his questionable behavior—either with the other characters he disappoints or with his own creators. Faced with various moral challenges, he fails every one. He bungles various business opportunities and isn't so good with friendships, either. And yet you can't help but like him a little: He's unpretentious, he's had a hard life, and when he sings, he breaks your heart.

Yet again, the year 2013 has produced an indelible lead male performance. The actor's name is Oscar Isaac, and the Coens clearly knew they had caught lightning in a bottle when they cast him as their extraordinary combination of artist and schnook. Isaac is called upon to be a heel and a bumbler, a heartthrob and a joke, a one-in-a-million and a face in the crowd, often in the same minute. In any other year, he would win an Oscar going away. This year he will be forced to tussle with seven or eight other men who also would have won in a landslide under different circumstances. Where this all comes out, I have no idea.

Something wonderful has happened to the Coens as they've reached middle age. They've calmed down. The weakness of their earlier movies was how frenetic and labored they could become, even given their unparalleled intelligence, gorgeous visuals, and splendid dialogue. The brothers' more recent work has become far more controlled and focused, as their interests have grown larger. They are no longer the foremost smarty-pantses in American cinema. They have, instead, become the wise men. And the masterful *Inside Llewyn Davis* is, above all, a very wise piece of work. ♦

CBS FILMS

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Season's Greetings from the Spurlongs!

Once again, to our cherished Jewish friends: *Happy Chanukah!* To our dear Muslim sisters and brothers: *Joyous Eid!* To our valued African-American families: *Blessed Kwanzaa!* And to the rest of you out there: The Dark Ages of the Giuliani-Bloomberg years are almost over, and the Renaissance of our beloved New York—featuring Dante and the de Blasios!—is about to begin!

In reflecting on the past 12 months, Brad makes the point that 2013 really has been the year when the promise of the Obama presidency has been fulfilled. The sight of our president reaching out to his Cuban counterpart relieved a little of the sadness we feel at Nelson Mandela's passing. The end of 34 years of official U.S. belligerence toward the Islamic Republic of Iran gives us real hope for Peace on Earth. And while we're both sorry that our own health insurance plans—mine at Croupe, Wainscott LLC and Brad's at his venture capital group—don't make us eligible for public coverage, we're pretty impressed by what we've seen of the Affordable Care Act. (Brad has been bowled over by Secretary Sebelius when they've met at fundraisers here in Manhattan, and as he says, "Rome wasn't built in a day!")

Our dear Caleb, now 33, has been keeping us in suspense about his life plans longer than Ted Cruz held up the Senate! But his work with Occupy Wall Street put him in touch with some Groton classmates, and believe it or not, three of them are now classmates again at Brad's old stomping ground, Harvard Business School, where (as Caleb says) he's studying to be the Edward Snowden of the business world!

Our darling Ariel, meanwhile, has been putting her Brown semiotics degree to good work in Venezuela, where, she says, her biggest challenge has been teaching people that most Americans are NOT Republicans! We bid an affectionate farewell this past year to Ariel's longtime friend Todd—who has now been succeeded in her heart by Gillian, whose carpentry skills and knowledge of electricity have been a real help in Caracas. Ariel and Gillian are talking about marriage (can ya believe it?), but, of course, that is not yet possible in Venezuela!

Where did we spend our anniversary? In Tuscany, of course, where