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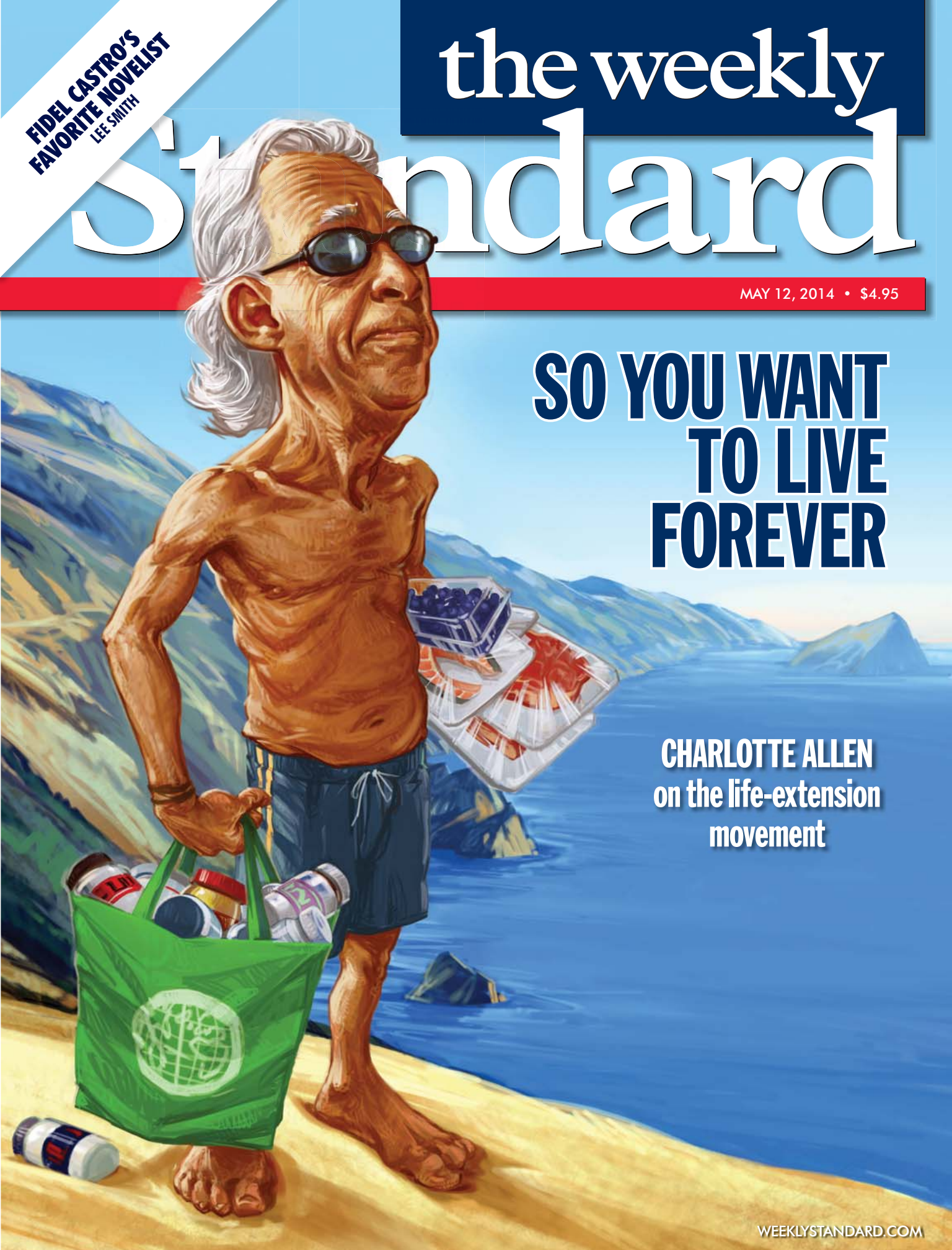

SO YOU WANT TO LIVE FOREVER

CHARLOTTE ALLEN
on the life-extension movement

WEEKLYSTANDARD.COM

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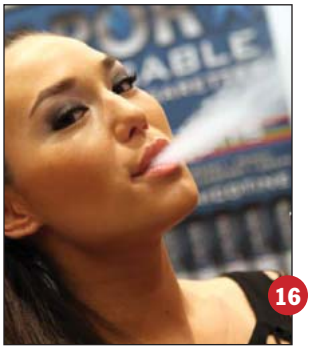
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COVER BY DAVE MALAN

Werner Dannhauser, 1929-2014

We're sorry to report the death last week of Werner Dannhauser, whom we had the honor of occasionally publishing in these pages. He was a serious thinker and a graceful writer, dealing with a wide variety of topics with an unusual combination of elegance and directness, and of power and irony. As generations of students at Cornell, Michigan State, and elsewhere can attest, he was also a superb teacher of the great works and fundamental questions of political philosophy. Author of a fine study of Nietzsche's view of Socrates, translator of Gershom Scholem, student and interpreter of Leo Strauss, Dannhauser lived at the stimulating crossroads of Athens and Jerusalem—and also America, the country he came to at age 9 and whose freedoms, decency, and strength he cherished.

Dannhauser was a man of uncommon wisdom and wit—and also humanity. As Michigan State professor Arthur Melzer put it in his eulogy for his teacher, colleague, and friend,

> What kind of man was Werner? With admirable powers of mind and character, he surely fit in the category of impressive and imposing men. But he was that somewhat in spite of himself. For he was also and more fundamentally a dear and lovable man. . . . He was a most wonderful friend. He somehow combined the instinctive warmth and loyalty of a St. Bernard with the emotional delicacy and tact of a poet. And if you needed advice or consolation, there was no surer refuge than the wisdom and sympathy of his great heart. And of course, Werner was also fiercely loyal to his family—to the whole clan and especially to his daughters, Fanya and Anna, of whom he was so proud, and who, together with their spouses and children, gave him not only great joy but great strength unto his last breath.
>
> But as much as Werner liked to immerse himself, as I have been emphasizing, in the felicities of ordinary life, this is all just half the story. For Werner was a man of opposites especially in this matter. He was a lover of small things, but he was also the consummate big idea man. In the midst of all his minute, daily preoccupations, he never took his eyes off the eternal issues, especially his big three: God, love, and death. Of all the people I have known, he seemed to connect with these things with the greatest directness and poetic concreteness. . . . He was Faust and he was Falstaff—joined at the hip.

Of Dannhauser's many wonderful essays and articles, one of The Scrapbook's favorites is his tribute to the martini, in the November 1981 *American Spectator*. Entitled "The Metaphysical Martini," it opened,

> I have never met a martini I did not like. Under no circumstances would I assert that any martini is as good as any other; my mind may be soaked, but not in rampant egalitarianism. I am willing to argue, however, that while the best martini demands to be called "perfect," the worst is nevertheless passable, and far better than no martini at all.

And it closed:

> I remember, finally, the solitary martini. I put away my work, the daily drudgeries. Relaxing, I prepare my drink with loving care. Then I sit back and think of once and future deeds and speeches, but mostly of the past. I summon up the living and the dead, rehearse old scenes of tenderness and wit. Then time melts slowly as betrayals lose their sting. My friends and I are young again, alive with hope. Grace smiles on me as Mr. Death assumes a modest stance, and all the while martinis make the music for my memories.

A fitting valedictory. ♦

Botched Execution

Last week's "botched execution" of Clayton Lockett in Oklahoma has rekindled the national debate about capital punishment. Not that the debate needed much rekindling. Since 1972, when the Supreme Court essentially suspended capital punishment, and 1977, when it ruled that state death penalty statutes were constitutional, the issue has divided Americans across the usual partisan lines. A substantial majority support capital punishment, but opposition has grown over time.

The Scrapbook confesses to ambivalence about the subject, and acknowledges that reasonable people come down on both sides. In the case of Clayton Lockett, however, there is a certain irony as well: His execution was supposed to have been carried out by lethal injection; but the procedure seems to have been mishandled, and, in fact, Lockett died of a coronary after three-quarters of an hour.

The irony is that lethal injection is the latest in a long line of mortuary techniques designed to make capital punishment humane in the modern world. In recent years, however, opponents have insisted that the traditional combination of drugs—intended to sedate and, eventually, stop vital functions—doesn't work very well, constituting cruel and unusual punishment. Even the White House weighed in last week, calling the Lockett execution "inhumane."

Perhaps so. But the fact is that the state of Oklahoma was responding to such criticism—and the refusal of certain pharmaceutical companies to allow the use of their products for such purposes—and had employed a different combination of drugs on Lockett. One might argue, in that sense, that Lockett's suffering was caused as much by opponents as proponents of capital punishment. One might also argue that if speed and comparatively painless efficiency are the hallmarks of humane execution, then some of the older historical methods—the guillotine, for example, or firing squad—might be appropriate.

In any case, throughout this episode, The Scrapbook was struck by the habitual use of the term "botched execution" in the press, and the near-total lack of interest in why Clayton Lockett found himself on the executioner's gurney in the first place.

For the record, he had been convicted of the murder of a 19-year-old girl, a recent high school graduate, named Stephanie Neiman. One evening, in the late spring of 1999, Miss Neiman happened to drop off a friend named Summer Bradshaw at a house where Lockett and two accomplices were beating and robbing the occupant, a young man named Bobby Lee Bornt. Lockett and his comrades bound Neiman and Bradshaw, covered their mouths with duct tape, and raped and beat them. Then they kidnapped Bornt and his infant son, along with Neiman and her friend, and drove all four to a remote area outside Ponca City, Oklahoma.

While one of his accomplices dug a makeshift grave, Lockett demanded to know whether Neiman planned to tell police what had happened. She declined to say that she wouldn't. So with Neiman poised over the hole in the ground, Lockett shot her, twice, with a sawed-off 12-gauge shotgun. It is not entirely clear whether Stephanie Neiman was alive or dead when she fell into the grave and was buried.

So in The Scrapbook's estimation, the death of Clayton Lockett was regrettably mishandled, but it was the death of Stephanie Neiman that was the "botched execution." ♦

Three Cheers

The Scrapbook heartily congratulates Weekly Standard friend and sometime contributor Terry Teachout, who was just announced as the recipient of a 2014 Bradley Prize. The Lynde and Harry Bradley Foundation annually presents up to four awards to "individuals of extraordinary talent and dedication" who share the late brothers' commitment to "preserving and defending the tradition of free representative government and private enterprise that has enabled the American nation and, in a larger sense, the entire Western world to flourish intellectually and economically."

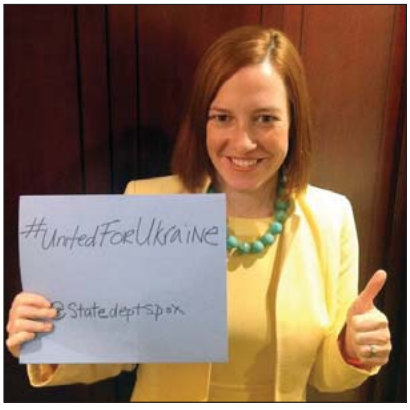
Previous recipients include Nobel Prize-winning economist Gary Becker, international reformer Hernando de Soto, and Weekly Standard contributing editor Charles Krauthammer (not to mention our boss, Bill Kristol). Teachout, an astonishingly productive polymath, is well deserving of the honor—and the $250,000 purse it includes. The *Wall Street Journal*'s drama critic and *Commentary*'s critic-at-large has published masterful biographies of H.L. Mencken, George Balanchine, Louis Armstrong, and, most recently, Duke Ellington. The former jazz bassist's first play, *Satchmo at the Waldorf*, is currently running to acclaim off-Broadway; he's also written three opera libretti. How he finds time to do all that and maintain his popular blog, *About Last Night*, is a secret The Scrapbook has yet to uncover.

With the middlebrow culture Americans once shared long gone—Teachout has movingly mourned it in his work—we need critics like him more than ever. He tells The Scrapbook, "It's especially meaningful to me that I'm the first person to receive a Bradley who specializes in the fine arts. I think that's at least as important a calling as politics or economics—and one that more people on my side of the fence should embrace."

Teachout—and the other, yet-to-

be-named winners in the prize's tenth year—will be honored in a ceremony at the Kennedy Center on June 18. ♦

The Dept. of Tweet



The State Dept. spokesman

There was a lot to lament on Twitter last week, as always, but perhaps nothing more appalling than the spectacle of our diplomats beclowning themselves, as they unleashed their vaunted soft power on Russia's Vladimir Putin.

As part of the Obama administration's sanctions against Russia for its annexation of Crimea, State launched a new hashtag, #UnitedForUkraine.

And State didn't just launch a hashtag. They did it with pictures. There was Jen Psaki (@statedeptspox) in a bright yellow suit, holding a piece of construction paper in one hand with "#UnitedForUkraine" written on it. Her other hand gives the camera a thumbs-up.

As the *Washington Free Beacon* noted drolly, the Russians quickly picked up State's hashtag and embarked on a bit of trolling. The Official Twitter Account of Russia's Ministry of Foreign Affairs (@mfa_russia) tweeted, "Our US counterparts must compel the acting officials in Kiev to bear responsibility for the current situation #UnitedForUkraine."

Which was funny enough, except that it prompted what we suspect was an automated response from another State employee, Macon Phillips: "Welcome to the #UnitedForUkraine hashtag @mfa_russia!"

Sure, it's embarrassing for us to have a foreign policy establishment this pathetic. But imagine how it must make the Russians feel! Because once they stop laughing in the Kremlin, Vladimir Putin and his cronies will eventually have to look in the mirror and ask themselves some hard questions, starting with, How did we ever lose to these guys? ♦

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BPA WORLDWIDE

Uncommon Grounds

The affair ended as suddenly as it began.

Twelve years ago I purchased a mid-grade espresso machine. It wasn't the sort of thing they sell at Macy's, but neither was it one of the beautiful, artisanal devices that start north of $1,000. It was, I told myself at the time, firmly in the range of acceptable indulgence. In the ensuing years, it was put to use—at roughly 6:30 A.M. and 3:30 P.M.—pretty much every day. And what espresso it made.

I used only Illy grounds. Illy is a fancy Italian coffee, and while you can find the beans in most supermarkets today, it was different when I first started using it. When Illy came into my life—this was back in 2001—it was packaged in beautiful, silver canisters, and you could only get them by striking up a relationship with someone who imported Italian food and could special order the stuff. My friend Scott introduced me to Illy. He, in turn, had been brought to it by his wife, an elegant woman who spent a good chunk of her twenties in Italy and spoke the language fluently.

Illy and I were happy together. It accompanied me through bachelorhood and into marriage, when it served as a delicate elixir on quiet mornings, and then past the arrival of children, when it became something more like a legal and medically necessary drug.

One day last year, while strolling down the coffee aisle at the market, I stopped to pick up another can of Illy—at my house we go through them at a frightful rate. Next to the familiar, gleaming cylinders was an ugly, squat black can of Lavazza. I had seen it before a thousand times, but never really noticed it. For no good reason, I picked it up and took it home. And discovered that I liked it. Preferred it even. To Illy.

Scott was not amused. When I told him of the switch a few weeks later, he compared me to Tiger Woods. "It's like you're married to this beautiful Swedish model," he said. "She's given you her best years, and then one day you decide it might be fun to step out with some waitress you met at Perkins."

JORI BOLTON

He wasn't wrong, exactly. The Illy was expensive and sophisticated. The Lavazza was cheap. But it was different. And exciting. "Do you know what 'Lavazza' means?" Scott asked. "It's Italian for 'Maxwell House.'"

A little less than a year later, Lavazza and I were through. I went crawling back to Illy and—here's the good news—she took me back. Taste will out.

The chief problem with acquiring good taste is that it can become expensive. Over the years I've tried consciously to keep my tastes at a proletarian level. In some realms I've succeeded. I drink little enough that I find it difficult to tell the difference between a $7 bottle of wine and a $35 bottle. When it comes to liquor, I couldn't distinguish between an 18-year-old, single-malt scotch and something brewed in a bathtub. And never having owned a car worth more than $20,000, I have a vague appreciation for fine automobiles but no real interest in them.

It's easy enough to avoid getting acclimated to a Ferrari. Cigars have been harder. There are few pleasures in life more sublime than smoking a cigar on the beach during that magic hour just before the sun sets, and I indulge every so often. But I've had to be careful to avoid the good stuff, because once you've developed a taste for high-end cigars, middling smokes become abhorrent. Or so I've heard.

Aside from the money, I've always had the vague suspicion that there's something morally questionable about cultivating taste. The hippies disparage it as soulless consumerism; Christians view it as giving this passing, fallen world an undue hold over our hearts. And even if you're not a hippie, or a Christian, or a Christian-hippie, everyone hates a snob.

Except the French. In France, a certain degree of *snobisme* is to be respected—a mark of the discriminating mind and something to aspire to. *Un snob* is a person who, rather than clodishly giving the world power over him, has taken the time to cultivate an appreciation for the finest. Squint hard enough and you might even call it your Christian duty to embrace *le snobisme*.

Which is why I've made my peace with Illy. For now, anyway. I've got my eye on a home roasting machine and have begun talks with a Hawaiian coffee farmer to buy raw Kona beans direct. Maybe I can get away with trying a little home-roasted Kona on the side.

Jonathan V. Last

the weekly Standard

Calm, Cool, Collected?

It's mature to be calm. Republicans are nothing if not mature. It's chic to be cool. Republicans yearn to be chic. It's a sign of gravitas to be collected. Republicans have gravitas. And so Republicans, from candidates to consultants to commentators, cultivate a calm, cool, and collected affect. Keep calm and carry on, they say soberly and sagely to each other.

Which is fine if you're in the midst of the struggle, and your forces are already fully committed to the fight. But if you're rallying your troops, and trying to persuade others that they need to join the fight, it's not so great to be calm, cool, and collected. You need energy more than sobriety. You need blood, sweat, and tears. You need a punching bag more than a yoga mat.

Republicans are on the eve of the fight of a lifetime. Winning control of the Senate in November is necessary to mitigate the damage the Obama administration can do in its final two years. And winning the presidency in 2016 is everything. Because it's really not clear that limited and constitutional self-government at home, and American world leadership, can survive a third Democratic term in the White House.

That is an alarming prospect. So it should be permissible for Republicans to sound alarmed. It won't even make them unrespectable. Paul Revere was a well-established and well-regarded businessman. He wasn't embarrassed to sound the alarm that awakened his fellow citizens to impending danger, and it didn't hurt his subsequent reputation.

Bill Buckley was an elegant writer and a gentleman. But in 1955 he founded *National Review*, announcing that it would stand athwart History, yelling Stop. Not whispering Stop. Not recommending Stop. Not making the case for Stop. Yelling Stop.

Ronald Reagan was the most successful Republican and the most successful conservative politician of recent decades. He was friendly and avuncular. But that didn't make him a shrinking violet. Here he is, accepting the Republican presidential nomination in 1980:

> Never before in our history have Americans been called upon to face three grave threats to our very existence, any one of which could destroy us. We face a disintegrating economy, a weakened defense, and an energy policy based on the sharing of scarcity.
>
> The major issue of this campaign is the direct political, personal, and moral responsibility of Democratic party leadership—in the White House and in Congress—for this unprecedented calamity which has befallen us. They tell us they have done the most that humanly could be done. They say that the United States has had its day in the sun; that our nation has passed its zenith. They expect you to tell your children that the American people no longer have the will to cope with their problems; that the future will be one of sacrifice and few opportunities.
>
> My fellow citizens, I utterly reject that view. The American people, the most generous on earth, who created the highest standard of living, are not going to accept the notion that we can only make a better world for others by moving backwards ourselves. Those who believe we can have no business leading the nation.
>
> I will not stand by and watch this great country destroy itself under mediocre leadership that drifts from one crisis to the next, eroding our national will and purpose. We have come together here because the American people deserve better from those to whom they entrust our nation's highest offices, and we stand united in our resolve to do something about it.

That's a call to arms. Some might even call it a bit alarmist. Reagan won the election—and America won the Cold War.

—William Kristol

Benghazi Lies

In response to a Freedom of Information Act request filed last summer by Judicial Watch, the Obama administration last week released 41 documents related to the attacks on U.S. facilities in Benghazi, Libya, on September 11, 2012. An email from the deputy national security adviser, Ben Rhodes, has received most of the attention. In it, Rhodes laid out four goals for Susan Rice, the U.S. ambassador to the United Nations, who would be appearing on five Sunday talk shows 36 hours later. "To convey that the United States is doing everything that we can to protect our people and

AP PHOTO / LEDERHANDLER

facilities abroad; To underscore that these protests are rooted in an Internet video, and not a broader failure of policy; To show that we will be resolute in bringing people who harm Americans to justice, and standing steadfast through these protests; To reinforce the President and Administration's strength and steadiness in dealing with difficult challenges."

The Judicial Watch documents also included White House talking points for Rice, with possible questions and answers she might provide to meet the goals set out by Rhodes. These new White House talking points included a broad discussion of the Arab Spring and its challenges, as well as several specific references to the attacks in Benghazi—a mention of Ambassador Chris Stevens, a question on Benghazi intelligence, and a separate section under the header "Benghazi."

The Rhodes email and new talking points went to many top Obama administration communications and political officials, including press secretary Jay Carney, communications director Dan Pfeiffer, and Obama's 2008 campaign manager, David Plouffe.

At his press briefing April 30, Carney took a question about the new documents from ABC News White House correspondent Jonathan Karl. "Jay, I guess you're aware that Judicial Watch obtained an email from Ben Rhodes to staff members about the Benghazi attack." Carney disputed Karl's characterization—"That's incorrect"—and followed with a jaw-dropping claim. "The email and the talking points were not about Benghazi. They were about the general situation in the Muslim world where you saw, as you may recall, protests."

The email and the talking points—produced in response to a FOIA request for Benghazi-related documents and with multiple references to the attacks in Benghazi three days earlier—were not about Benghazi? This was too much even for a White House press corps that long ago dismissed Benghazi as a legitimate news story. Reporters who cover the White House might not know the details of the intelligence on alleged attacker Ali Harzi. And they might not understand the ties between Al Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb and Ansar al Sharia Libya. But they know when they're being misled.

In the weeks after the Benghazi attacks, Carney and other top administration officials went to great lengths to suggest that the Obama administration's public response to the attacks was strictly based on assessments provided by the intelligence community. This was not true.

In testimony last month, Michael Morell, the former deputy director of the CIA, distanced his agency from Rice's video-focused narrative on Benghazi. He acknowledged that the CIA had, incorrectly, provided an assessment that included a discussion of protests outside the diplomatic post in Benghazi. But, when it came to the video, he made clear that Rice was on her own. "When she talked about the video, my reaction was, that's not something the analysts have attributed this attack to." The comments were notable not only because Morell has been a reliable water-carrier for the Obama administration on Benghazi, but because they further illuminated a split between the White House and the CIA that has been evident for some time.

It is now clear that there were, in effect, two sets of Benghazi talking points. The first were initially produced by the CIA's Office of Terrorism Analysis and, after heavy input from top Obama administration officials, provided to Capitol Hill and to Susan Rice. These are the talking points that have gotten so much attention over the past 18 months—the ones that started out with bold and declarative statements about the "al Qaeda" role in the "attacks" on the Benghazi compound and were watered down after input from the White House and the State Department. Last May, after the contents of email traffic related to that first set of talking points were described in this magazine and on ABC News, the White House released some of the emails. There were just two passing references to the video in those 100 pages of email traffic.

The newly released documents reveal a second set of talking points. These talking points are broader, as the White House claims, and they emphasize the video in connection to the Benghazi attacks. As the Rhodes email put it, Rice's Sunday-show appearances were meant "to underscore that these protests are rooted in an Internet video, and not a broader failure of policy; to show that we will be resolute in bringing people who harm Americans to justice."

At the same time the White House was putting the video at the center of the Benghazi story, intelligence professionals and U.S. officials on the ground in Libya were describing a precise attack carried out by al Qaeda-affiliated terrorists. The Weekly Standard has learned that an analysis from the Defense Intelligence Agency produced a day before Rhodes sent his email assigned blame for the attacks to Al Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb and Ansar al Sharia Libya. The DIA analysis did not mention a video. It adds to the still-growing body of memos and warnings from top U.S. officials. The top U.S. intelligence official on the ground in Libya repeatedly told officials in Washington that the Benghazi attacks were part of a planned assault by al Qaeda-affiliated terrorists. The top diplomat in the country said the same thing. Last week, a top intelligence official for AFRICOM told Congress that he shared that view.

We are left with this reality: Top diplomats and intelligence officers in Libya offered assessments of the Benghazi attacks that were true when they made them and remain true today. But top Obama administration officials ignored those assessments. Six weeks before the 2012 presidential election, those officials—at the direction of White House communications and political strategists desperate to maintain the fiction that al Qaeda was "on the run"—lied to the public about how four Americans were killed in a sophisticated attack carried out, on the anniversary of 9/11, by terrorists affiliated with al Qaeda.

—Stephen F. Hayes

Getting Ready for a Bad Deal

Israel's security establishment steps up.

BY ELLIOTT ABRAMS

The world's attention was largely turned to Ukraine last week. To the extent that the Middle East was on the front pages, the focus was the new agreement between the PLO and Hamas, its implications for the "peace process," and John Kerry's comment about Israel as an "apartheid state."

But in Israel a different subject was getting a lot of attention: Iran's nuclear program. April 28 was Holocaust Remembrance Day, and that was the context in which Prime Minister Netanyahu spoke about Iran at the Yad Vashem Holocaust Memorial.

Netanyahu discussed the world's blind refusal to see what was coming in the 1930s despite all the evident warnings: "How is it possible that so many people failed to understand reality? The bitter, tragic truth is this: It is not that they did not see. They did not want to see." He then asked, "Has the world learned [from] the mistakes of the past? Today we again face clear facts and a tangible threat. Iran calls for our destruction. It is developing nuclear weapons."

Netanyahu turned then to the current negotiations with Iran and drew the analogy:

> This time too, the truth is evident to all: Iran seeks an agreement that will lift the sanctions and leave it as a nuclear threshold state with the capability to manufacture nuclear weapons within several months at most. Iran wants a deal that will eliminate the sanctions and leave its capabilities intact. A deal which enables Iran to be a nuclear threshold state will bring the entire world to the threshold of an abyss. I hope that the lessons of the past have been learned, and that the desire to avoid confrontation at any cost will not lead to a deal that will exact a much heavier price in the future. I call on the leaders of the world powers to insist that Iran fully dismantle its capacity to manufacture nuclear weapons, and to persist until this goal is achieved.

He then repeated a pledge he has made in the past that Israel will not tolerate Iran as a nuclear threshold power: "The people of Israel stand strong. Faced with an existential threat, our situation today is entirely different than it was during the Holocaust. . . . Today, we have a sovereign Jewish state. Unlike the Holocaust, when the Jewish people were like a wind-tossed leaf and utterly defenseless, we now have great power to defend ourselves, and it is ready for any mission."

Of course, Netanyahu has been saying these things for years, and listeners may wonder whether this is just more of the same: rhetoric, or at best a kind of "psy-op" meant to toughen the American position at those talks with Iran. After all, though Netanyahu is said to have come close to ordering a strike at Iran in the summer of 2012, it didn't happen. In addition to feeling great American pressure against acting, Netanyahu clearly did not have a consensus in the Israeli security establishment for such a grave decision.

Those who consider Netanyahu's words just more rhetoric should consider, then, two additional statements made last week—by two key figures in the security establishment, both viewed as balanced and sensible voices.

NEWSCOM

Elliott Abrams is a senior fellow for Middle Eastern studies at the Council on Foreign Relations and author, most recently, of Tested by Zion: The Bush Administration and the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict.

On April 23, five days before Netanyahu spoke, retired general Amos Yadlin, the former head of Israeli Military Intelligence and now director of the Institute for National Security Studies, wrote a piece for the *Jerusalem Post*. Like Netanyahu, he objected to a deal with Iran that would allow it to preserve its nuclear weapons program—and said that appears to be where the West is headed. The Iranian "concessions" are not real, he wrote: "Iran is trying to portray itself as a country prepared to make fundamental concessions, but at the same time it is preserving the core abilities in both routes it is developing for a nuclear weapon."

Yadlin rejected the view that inspections alone could prevent Iran from cheating: Inspections are "insufficient. The international inspection systems are not perfect and have always been known to fail. They already failed in the past to discover on time the efforts made by Iraq, Libya, North Korea, Syria, and Iran to secretly develop a military nuclear program. These systems can cease to exist in case of a unilateral Iranian decision—like what happened with North Korea."

So what should a deal with Iran contain?

> The powers must demand that Iran will dissolve most of the centrifuges and leave a symbolic number of non-advanced centrifuges. They must demand that the uranium enrichment stockpile in Iran will be limited to a low level and symbolic amount (less than the amount required for one bomb). They must also demand the dismantlement of the enrichment site inside a mountain near Qom, which aims to guarantee a protected site immune to a quick breakthrough towards a bomb. They must demand that the Arak reactor will be altered so that it would not be used for military purposes and demand an answer to the open questions regarding the military dimensions of the Iranian nuclear program.

Yadlin said the mark of an acceptable deal with Iran is that "the time it takes Iran to develop a nuclear weapon, if it decides to do so, will be measured in years rather than in months."

General Yaakov Amidror, the former Israeli national security adviser and before that head of research for Israeli Military Intelligence, wrote a piece for the *Jerusalem Post* one day later. Like Yadlin, he brushed aside assurances that inspections and intelligence will spot any Iranian moves toward making a bomb: "There is no such thing as a monitoring system that cannot be sidestepped. There is no way to guarantee that the world will spot Iran's efforts to cheat. American intelligence officials have publicly admitted that they cannot guarantee identification in real time of an Iranian breakout move to produce a nuclear weapon."

And what if Iranian cheating is discovered? "Anyone who thinks that a U.S. administration would respond immediately to an Iranian agreement violation, without negotiations, is deluding himself. . . . Israel cannot accept the existential threat caused by this delusion." The determination of the P5+1 to stop Iran will erode in future years, he argues, just as it has eroded in the past few years as the demands being made of Iran have steadily been reduced. Requirements considered essential a few years ago have already been dropped, including the demand that Iran simply stop enriching uranium.

As Israeli general and security expert Yaakov Amidror puts it, 'With such a flimsy agreement, I wonder what will be left of Western commitment to preventing Iran from obtaining a nuclear weapon. And Israel will have to draw its own conclusions.'

Amidror also dismissed the idea that Iran won't cheat and try to build a bomb out of fear of the likely American reaction: "Does anyone believe that the use of force is a possible option for the United States? What are the chances that the United States would obtain the support of the Security Council for the use of force against Iran? What are the chances that Washington would act without U.N. support?" Amidror argued that optimistic assumptions about a deal with Iran cannot be sustained—"neither the assumption that a monitoring regime can guarantee identification, in real time, of Iranian violations; nor the assumption that the United States will act with alacrity if a breach is identified; nor the assumption that, in the real world, Iran will truly be deterred by U.S. threats."

Where does this argument lead? Amidror concluded: "With such a flimsy agreement, I wonder what will be left of Western commitment to preventing Iran from obtaining a nuclear weapon. And Israel will have to draw its own conclusions."

These three statements, from Israel's prime minister and two of its leading security figures, are of course meant to toughen the American position in the coming talks. Watching the P5+1 effort to conclude a deal with Iran by the July deadline, the three men are urging tougher terms than many in the West (not to mention Russia and China) seem willing to require. They are restating the point that a bad deal is, as American officials have agreed at least in principle, worse than no deal, because it would offer false assurances that we've stopped Iran while strengthening the Islamic Republic through the elimination of economic sanctions. And they are reminding us, yet again, that while the P5+1 may be willing to take a chance and let Iran progress a bit more slowly toward a bomb, Israel may make a different calculation and "draw its own conclusions."

It may be difficult to think of Israel acting alone in the face of a widely celebrated nuclear deal with Iran or even in the face of continuing negotiations that function as a cover for Iran's progress toward a usable weapon. But watching Israel's prime minister deliver his warning from Yad Vashem, on Holocaust Remembrance Day, is a reminder that Jewish history has taught Israel's leaders powerful lessons about the past—and the dangers the future holds. ◆

Shut Up, They Explained

The illiberal left.

BY FRED BARNES

Another open-minded liberal outside GOP state headquarters in Los Angeles, 2013

A favorite saying of liberals not long ago was: "Dissent is the highest form of patriotism." Hillary Clinton, then a senator, said it. It was on bumper stickers. John Kerry, also a senator, said in 2006, as violence engulfed Iraq, that dissent in wartime and support for a war are "two sides of the very same patriotic coin."

But that was in the era of George W. Bush. In the age of Barack Obama, liberals have changed their mind. Now, in case after case, dissent is to be suppressed, censored, or at the very least marginalized. Brendan Eich, the CEO of the Silicon Valley firm Mozilla, was forced out recently because he had supported a California referendum in 2008 barring gay marriage. Brandeis University rescinded an honorary degree for writer Ayaan Hirsi Ali, who criticizes Islam's treatment of women. Asuza Pacific University canceled a speech by Charles Murray of the conservative American Enterprise Institute.

That's not all. Many liberals condemn dissent over political issues. Global warming activists are seeking to silence "deniers," urging the media to ignore them and publications to reject their writings. Liberals, including Obama, claim Obamacare is a success, thus critics should shut up. Others say dissent from Obama's policies is illegitimate, motivated only by his being an African American.

Liberals, it turns out, aren't very liberal these days—and not just in their efforts to stifle dissent. They've become name-callers, casually using words like "racist" to delegitimize thoughts, ideas, and proposals they oppose without mounting any substantive argument against them. We saw this when Paul Ryan (R-Wis.) offered ideas aimed at uprooting the welfare culture.

Ryan had been visiting poor, urban communities all over the country for months, guided by Robert Woodson, the founder of the National Center for Neighborhood Enterprise. His ideas are serious and well intentioned. Dismissing them as "racist" without considering them was illiberal. It was the sort of know-nothing response liberals used to condemn.

The same term was applied to Republican opposition to immigration reform. "I think race had something to do with them not bringing up the immigration bill," House Democratic leader Nancy Pelosi said. Rep. Steve Israel, chairman of the Democratic Congressional Campaign Committee, said the GOP base is "animated" by racism "to a significant extent." Israel and Pelosi offered no evidence for their accusation.

Another poisonous term once detested by liberals has become part of their political vocabulary: "un-American." Senate majority leader Harry Reid calls the Koch brothers, who aid Republican candidates, "un-American." *New York Times* columnist Paul Krugman says Republicans are "un-American." The lawyer for IRS official Lois Lerner says it would be "un-American" for the House to hold her in contempt.

Obama is more clever. He uses code words to imply the same thing. He's repeatedly insisted Republicans put "party over country" when they object to his policies. Liberals accuse Republicans of utilizing this "dog whistle" technique (only the faithful can hear it). I doubt if Republicans are deft enough to use this approach, but Obama is. To the Democratic masses, "party over country" is code for "un-American."

On policies, too, liberals have drifted away from traditional liberalism. Until Obama was elected, Democrats were champions of human rights. Getting the Soviet Union to release human rights activists was one of the few successes of Jimmy Carter's

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presidency. But when Hillary Clinton visited China as secretary of state early in the Obama administration, she downplayed human rights in talks with Chinese leaders.

Nor has Obama let concern for human rights interfere with other foreign policy concerns. He was silent when demonstrations for democracy erupted in Iran. He's made little effort to free political prisoners around the world, notably in Russia.

For decades after World War II, liberals were passionate defenders of democratic Israel. Today they aren't. They've acceded to Secretary of State Kerry's approach to negotiations between Israel and the Palestinians. To force concessions, he said Israel is in danger of becoming an "apartheid state" confronted by a growing anti-Israel BDS movement (boycott, divestment, sanctions). Obama's support for Israel is the minimum acceptable to most Americans.

Free trade has gradually slipped from the liberal agenda. The short explanation is unions oppose free trade, so now liberals oppose it. This affected Obama's strategy for winning approval of the Trans-Pacific Partnership. He was too meek to lobby Democrats for "fast track" authority, barring amendments to the TPP treaty. Once he failed to get it, the Japanese balked at signing a treaty that might be tattooed with amendments and never gain ratification in Congress.

And let's not forget tax reform. Liberals continue to say they are for it. Not quite. Liberals were leading voices for the tax reform in 1986 that eliminated preferences and loopholes, broadened the tax base, and cut rates. It passed the Senate 97-3. But that's no longer the liberal formula. Obama's version of tax reform is killing business tax breaks and spending the money rather than using it to reduce taxes.

Liberals have made one more change. They've become "progressives." I'm not sure what that means. But a name change was appropriate, because the folks formerly known as liberals certainly aren't very liberal anymore. ♦

The Slush Fund

How Obamacare pays off insurers.

BY JAY COST & JEFFREY H. ANDERSON

When the government provides medical care, it normally delegates the task. Under Medicare, Washington doesn't employ doctors, nurses, and hospitals to treat the elderly. It has to coax them to participate. Similarly, Obamacare functions only if big insurance companies are willing to play ball with big government. Those driven by the profit motive must be won over by those driven by the power motive.

Money, however, is no object, since the bill for securing this alliance is sent to taxpayers. According to the latest Congressional Budget Office (CBO) estimates, more than $1 trillion will be funneled over the next decade from everyday Americans, through the IRS, to insurance companies. Less than 2 percent of that sum—$17 billion—will be paid out in 2014. But by 2018, taxpayers' money will be flowing to health insurers at a rate of more than $100 billion a year and rising.

Nor is liberty an object. Once he became president, Barack Obama quickly discarded his campaign pledge not to impose an individual mandate, and the purchase of Obamacare-compliant insurance was required. For the first time in history, the federal government ordered citizens to buy a product from a private company as a condition of living in the United States.

Even though citizens were required to buy insurance starting in 2014, Obamacare's authors expected it to take a few years for their government-created "marketplace"—the "exchanges"—to mature. This was partly because the penalty for noncompliance was low the first year. Insurers would be at risk if relatively young and healthy enrollees held off buying insurance while older and sicker enrollees complied right away.

To mitigate potential losses and thus keep insurers on board, Obamacare's authors devised the "Three Rs"—risk adjustment, reinsurance, and risk corridors. These little-known provisions help entice insurers to sell Obamacare-compliant insurance by subsidizing and stabilizing the exchanges for the first few years.

Each of the Three Rs operates a bit differently. The risk-adjustment program redistributes money among insurers in the exchanges. Those with a relatively sick pool of enrollees receive money from those with a relatively healthy pool of enrollees. Risk adjustment is a permanent feature of the Obamacare apparatus.

Reinsurance amounts to a tax on most Americans' health insurance, including employer-provided insurance, in the amount of $63 a head this year, tapering off until it disappears in 2017. The money flows to those insurers who spend a substantial amount on sick exchange customers, thereby allowing them to lower their premiums. The CBO estimates that "reinsurance payments scheduled for insurance provided in 2014 are large enough to have reduced exchange premiums this year by approximately 10 percent." Most Americans don't know they are effectively subsidizing Obamacare exchange plans through taxes on their own insurance. This is yet another way that Obamacare creates "winners" and "losers" in society, with many of the losers being middle class.

Risk corridors are another temporary program designed to protect insurers and entice their participation. Any insurer that spends too much of its collected premiums on care or

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nonadministrative expenses receives money from the fund, while any that spends too little must pay in. The idea is that losses *and* gains are limited in the first three years of Obamacare.

Defenders of Obamacare rightly point out that Medicare Part D—created in 2003, mostly through Republican efforts—contained similar provisions. The purpose there, too, was to stabilize a new government-created market early on, inducing insurers to participate. But lately, the Obama administration has exploited the ambiguity inherent in the Three Rs to fund some of its extralegal revisions to the law, effectively buying off the insurance companies with taxpayer money.

Most of the administration's lawless revisions to Obamacare have strained the crucial government-insurer alliance. For instance, when Obama unilaterally extended the deadline from February 15 to April 15 for buying Obamacare-compliant insurance penalty-free, he created uncertainty for insurers. They have to file their rates for 2015 before they know how costly the late enrollees will be in 2014. More important, Obama's extralegal decision last fall to grandfather existing health plans meant that many healthy people would not be forced into the exchanges to pay the higher rates insurers counted on to subsidize coverage for the unhealthy people expected to buy policies.

Enter the Three Rs. This spring the administration finalized adjustments to two of the programs—reinsurance and risk corridors—to funnel more money to insurers. Put simply, the administration lowered the threshold at which insurers become eligible for reinsurance money, and it made more generous the formula by which insurers get paid under the risk corridors. Hans Leida, an actuary for the independent consulting firm Milliman, writes that the administration's

> transitional policy for canceled plans allowed certain individual and small group plans that did not comply with the ACA [Obamacare] to be renewed for one additional year. This change, announced long after health insurers filed their premium rates for 2014, could result in a less healthy population in the ACA-compliant market, since healthier individuals may be more likely to retain their noncompliant plans. If this occurs, there is an increased risk that the filed premium rates could be inadequate to cover the higher claim costs. To mitigate this concern, the government proposed changes to certain rules for 2014—namely, the federal reinsurance program, the risk corridor program, and the medical loss ratio (MLR) requirement.

Seth Chandler, a University of Houston law professor with a background in insurance law, writes, "It's an extremely sneaky way of sending money to the insurance industry, resting, as it does, on arcane manipulations of mathematical formulae. And I have serious doubts that the changes are authorized by Congress."

These changes are estimated to cost taxpayers a princely sum—$8 billion, according to the CBO. Whereas the risk corridors were once projected to generate $8 billion in revenue for the government, they are now projected to be budget-neutral. But money is fungible, and that revenue was being used to help offset the cost of Obamacare. This means that, effectively, the insurers have received an $8 billion tax break for which the general taxpayer will now be on the hook. For comparison, the Fortune 500 showed that, the year before Obama took office, the nation's 10 largest health insurers made $8 billion in combined profits.

Considering how vehemently the administration has attacked the "greed" of insurers, it is astonishing that it has made Uncle Sam responsible for their bottom lines. Moreover, these changes were made for purely political reasons. The people whose plans were grandfathered received only a temporary reprieve to avert a short-term public-relations nightmare for the administration. That is a poor use of $8 billion of the public's money.

What's more, that sum could rise. What happens if insurers try to collect more money than is available through the risk corridor fund? Last year, the CBO answered that the American taxpayer would be on the hook:

> In contrast to the risk adjustment and reinsurance programs, payments and collections under the risk corridor program will not necessarily equal one another: If insurers' costs exceed their expectations, on average, the risk corridor program will impose costs on the federal budget; if, however, insurers' costs fall below their expectations, on average, the risk corridor program will generate savings for the federal budget.

The relevant authorities seem to agree that Obamacare contains no statutory requirement that the risk corridor program be budget-neutral. In a Federal Register entry dated March 11, 2013, the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) stated, "The risk corridors program is not statutorily required to be budget neutral." In a letter to HHS in mid-April, Barbara W. Klever of the American Academy of Actuaries wrote: "Although the parameters of the risk corridor design are symmetrical, the design does not guarantee budget neutrality."

But there is disagreement about whether the administration has the legal authority to pay extra money to insurers (or even to pay insurers at all under the program) in the absence of a congressional appropriation. In a memorandum dated January 23, 2014, the nonpartisan Congressional Research Service (CRS) wrote that federal agencies are prohibited "from making payments in the absence of a valid appropriation," and it wrote that the risk corridor language in Obamacare "would not appear to constitute an appropriation." The CRS added that federal agencies "may not create a revolving fund absent specific authorizing legislation," and "there does not appear to be sufficient statutory language to create a revolving fund."

HHS asserts otherwise: "Regardless of the balance of payments and receipts, HHS will remit payments as required under . . . the Affordable Care Act"—with or without Congress.

In its most recent rule, the administration sidestepped this thorny issue. It promised to ensure that the program will be budget-neutral but

did not say how this will be achieved. Instead, HHS now plans to prorate risk corridor payments for 2014 and 2015 if the money coming in turns out to be less than what is supposed to go out. It further promises that, as the program generates extra revenue in 2015 or 2016, insurers will be paid back anything they lost under proration. But what happens if the program is still in the red in 2016? HHS promises to "establish in future guidance or rulemaking how we will calculate risk corridors payments." That is, they'll figure it out when they have to, and taxpayers better hold tight to their wallets.

Again, the objection here is not so much to the Three Rs in theory. The objection is to what they have become in practice—a slush fund for the administration. The president has made a series of legally dubious changes to the law for political reasons. He has adjusted the Three Rs to pacify and protect his insurance allies, at a projected cost of $8 billion to taxpayers. What's to prevent him from making more changes to the law and using the open-ended nature of the risk corridor program to funnel even more money to insurers? The only thing that will stop him is his own calculation about what he can get away with politically.

In response to these concerns, Senator Marco Rubio (R-Fla.) has introduced in the Senate and Rep. Leonard Lance (R-N.J.) has introduced in the House short, simple bills requiring Obamacare's risk corridor program to be budget-neutral, drying up the slush fund. Every Democrat—let alone every Republican—should be willing to codify a promise the administration has already made.

All this is disconcerting. Obamacare, as passed by Congress and signed by the president, was not only horribly constructed from a policy perspective; it was badly constructed politically. Yet, smart or dumb, it is the law.

Now the president has unilaterally rewritten parts of the law, circumventing Congress. All of his extralegal alterations have followed a pattern: They have either (a) made it easier for Obamacare's "winners" to sign up, or (b) delayed the point at which Obamacare's "losers" will realize they've been hurt. And when his insurance allies stood to lose through his lawless actions, the president shuffled an estimated $8 billion their way to ensure their loyalty. The Three Rs made that possible.

The American separation of powers was devised to prevent such shenanigans. King George III had ignored the colonies' legislatures and done what he pleased. So the Constitution tethered the president to the laws that Congress has passed and a president has signed. In his efforts to make Obamacare more salable, President Obama has undermined that document's sacred division of power. His estimated $8 billion payoff to insurance companies is one sordid chapter in a longer and troubling story. ♦

Rumors of Instability

Is Bouteflika losing control in Algeria?

BY OLIVIER GUITTA

Algerian youths clash with security forces in Kabylia, April 2014

Plus ça change. . . . Algeria, ever obedient to the wishes of the army and Security Services, reelected its ailing and elderly president in a landslide on April 17. Abdelaziz Bouteflika, known as Boutef for short, garnered 82 percent of the vote in a virtually uncontested race. Ali Benflis, who came second with 12 percent, decried massive fraud—possibly including an official turnout of 52 percent, high considering the numerous calls for a boycott.

It remains to be seen whether continuity will mean stability for Algeria. There are reasons to fear the opposite may be true—notably, rising inter-tribal violence, smoldering discontent among the young, and the terrorist threat.

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Late last year, violence broke out in the northern Sahara city of Ghardaia (400,000 pop.). It pitted Arabs against Berbers and has already left at least 10 dead and more than 400 injured. At least 700 shops and houses have been torched, and additional police have been called in to restore calm.

The trouble began when the mausoleum of a Berber patriarch was destroyed at the end of December, sparking riots in Ghardaia, three-quarters of whose inhabitants are Mozabite Berbers. The situation remains tense, despite the two communities' 11-century history of living together in peace. The Mozabites have always been autonomous, going about their business without involvement from Algiers. The fear at this point is that the violence could spread to the strategic region near the big oil fields and not far from Algeria's borders with its Sahel neighbors.

Making matters worse, in a separate incident, the central government responded crudely to peaceful demonstrations in Tizi Ouzou, in Kabylia, near the Mediterranean coast, to commemorate the "Berber Spring" of 1980. For the first time, the police banned the annual demonstrations, and violence ensued. Pictures of policemen beating demonstrators have sparked outrage and are antagonizing the Berber community.

It looks like Bouteflika is losing control of Algeria's various communities, and if the situation deteriorates, it could potentially sink him.

So could pent-up anger among Algerian youth, whose poor prospects stir a sense of humiliation and cynicism about the country's fossilized system. The statistics are dreary: Half a million young people leave school without a diploma every year. One-third of the population is below 30; half of these young people are unemployed, and the other half make an average of $235 a month.

Many young people respond by emigrating to Europe in search of opportunity. Some commit suicide. Yet the regime ignores the youth issue; no young person moves in political leadership circles. There is anger, moreover, among all classes about how the country is being run. So measures to dampen the discontent of different groups by doling out government benefits have been put in place: housing subsidies; increases in pensions, teachers' wages, unemployment benefits, and farmers' benefits; subsidies for grain, water, milk, electricity, and gas.

Another, more unusual set of measures has also been adopted: bonuses ranging from $125 to $440 for policemen whose children pass the baccalaureate exam, for instance, and $1,850 bonuses for newlywed couples. These outlays have cost over $600 billion since Bouteflika came to power in 1999. Try though the authorities might to buy off discontent, it seems likely the powder keg will explode sooner or later. And the country's leaders must know it. Algeria's foreign currency reserves are rapidly dwindling. Fear of repression by the army

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may not keep the streets quiet forever.

Indeed, the antiregime propaganda coming from Al Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM) does not fall on deaf ears. In an hour-long video clip, AQIM denounces the corrupt Bouteflika administration and underlines the country's political, social, and economic problems. The video stresses the collusion of the regime with its Western allies, especially France, which it says is killing Muslims in Mali. Some discontented youths are buying this narrative and falling easy prey to AQIM recruiters. Also, thanks to its very successful "business model," AQIM is wealthy: Reuters estimates that it has garnered at least $150 million through kidnapping for ransom in the past 10 years, and it profits handsomely from smuggling and trafficking in drugs, arms, and human beings.

Because of Algeria's porous borders with Mali, Tunisia, and Libya, AQIM and its affiliates transit easily and pull off attacks around the region. Making matters even easier for terrorists, Algiers refuses to cooperate with its neighbors and accepts no external involvement in its management of terrorism. Also, the fact that the Algerian military maintains thousands of troops on the border with Morocco, with which it is waging a longstanding undercover war, limits its effectiveness in other areas.

Even so, the Algerian Army remains by far the best in the region, well equipped and well trained; its budget is higher, for instance, than that of more populous nations like Pakistan and Iran.

What remains most troublesome is AQIM's ability to attack strategic targets like the gas facility at In Amenas, which it struck in January 2013, killing 39 foreigners and an Algerian security guard. It seems likely that lessons were not learned and a repeat could occur anytime. Just a few days after Bouteflika's reelection, AQIM proved how formidable an adversary it is by killing 11 soldiers in Tizi Ouzou. Even though the Algerian Army has killed 37 terrorists so far this year, there is no reason to believe that the threat from AQIM is going away anytime soon.

As for the United States, the visit of Secretary of State John Kerry just a few weeks before the Algerian election demonstrated that what counts for the West is stability. While Algeria is not generally big on international cooperation, its special forces, according to *Le Figaro*, have joined recently with U.S. Special Forces to fight AQIM elements in southern Libya.

Algeria has so far avoided an Arab Spring, but the Soviet-style presidential election of April 17 could be the last straw for many. Though the civilian opposition is disorganized, any spontaneous outbreak of disorder, coming on top of the Berber issue and the depredations of AQIM, might be too much for the 77-year-old Bouteflika—or anyone else, for that matter—to handle. Algeria, which endured a brutal civil war from 1991 to 2002 and a bloody war for independence in the 1950s and early '60s, has known chaos before. ♦

Diminishing Returns

The campaign against (if you can believe it) thirdhand smoke. BY ELI LEHRER

Still fresh from victories over both cigarettes and the secondhand smoke they emit, many public health advocates have turned their attention to new supposed hazards: e-cigarette "vapor" and "thirdhand" smoke. While the previous campaigns to prevent smoking have had positive results, the latest ones smack of hubris and overreach. In fact, the new focus on what you might call public health "micro-aggressions" does at least as much harm as good.

There's no scientific doubt that cigarettes and the smoke they emit present a real public health hazard. The surgeon general's most recent report on smoking links it to over 20 million deaths since the mid-1960s and maladies ranging from lung cancer to sexual dysfunction. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention report that cigarette smoke contains over 7,000 chemicals, 70 of them strongly linked to cancer. The Institute of Medicine concludes that persistent secondhand smoke exposure increases the risk of heart disease by 25 to 30 percent.

While it may well clash with many concepts of personal autonomy and private property rights, the public health rationale for both discouraging smoking and banning it in public places is strong. As a result of tobacco control efforts, the percentage of adults who smoke has declined from over 40 percent when the first stern public health warnings were issued in the mid-1960s to a bit under 20 percent today (the decline seems to have stopped in recent years, however). In addition, the near-universal ban on smoking in workplaces and indoor public gathering spots has largely ended involuntary exposure to secondhand smoke.

If thirdhand smoke or e-cig vapor caused the same ills, another campaign might be warranted. But they probably don't.

A 'vaper' and her vapor

Thirdhand smoke refers to the contamination that may linger in a place after people smoke there. Determining its actual risks, however, presents a research challenge. If a home, car, or public space gets saturated with cigarette smoke, anyone who enters it regularly is going to be exposed to secondhand smoke. If there's a huge amount of thirdhand smoke in a place it's highly likely to be because at least one regular occupant is a smoker. Studies about thirdhand smoke show that there are some harmful contaminants that linger (although in minute quantities). Still, it's hardly clear that there's enough to be harmful. One report in the journal *Tobacco Control*, for example, found that the difference in environmental nicotine in smokers' and nonsmokers' homes wasn't statistically significant. Other research has a clear political agenda. As Boston University public health researcher Michael Siegel has pointed out, one recent report on the dangers of thirdhand smoke done by a team at the University of California, Riverside announced its conclusions before the research began—hardly a model of scientific impartiality. That report, in turn, got covered in the media with headlines like "Study: Third-hand Smoke Exposure as Deadly as Smoking."

And that's a problem. Whatever the harms of thirdhand smoke—and nobody has proven that they're *zero*—their harm to *public* health overall is tiny in a country that already bans almost all indoor smoking in public places. Any effort to protect people from the dangers of thirdhand smoke will almost by definition mean going into quintessentially private spaces and regulating private behaviors.

If efforts against thirdhand smoke are intrusive and have a questionable basis in research, efforts to demonize e-cigarette vapor may prove downright harmful. Unlike the campaign against thirdhand smoke, which is mostly an academic one for now, the anti-e-cigarette effort has shown legislative success. New York, Los Angeles, Chicago, and Philadelphia have already passed municipal bans on "vaping" in public that treat the products as if they were cigarettes. But the rationale for conflating e-cigarettes and tobacco cigarettes is weak. The main ingredient in e-cigarette aerosol (other than water vapor) is propylene glycol, which is also a common propellant in asthma inhalers, and its toxicological category is "generally recognized as safe," according to the FDA. An October 2012 study published in the journal *Inhalation Toxicology* found that, for all byproducts measured, e-cigarettes produced very small exposures relative to tobacco cigarettes. Common sense, as well as the great bulk of existing research, suggests

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that e-cigarettes and their vapor present essentially no risk to bystanders.

This isn't to suggest that e-cigarettes are safe. They contain nicotine, a very addictive stimulant that, like all stimulants, has the potential to cause heart problems. The fact that they're quite addictive and may have long-term risks nobody has discovered (they've been on the market for less than a decade) is good reason to keep them away from children and out of schools, daycare centers, and medical facilities. Although not perfect, newly issued FDA regulations, which would ban sales to minors nationally, take a much more sensible approach to e-cig regulation than most localities have to date. But, whatever their dangers, e-cigarettes aren't the same as cigarettes. People who use them instead of tobacco cigarettes can expect at least some of the same health benefits as those who quit smoking. And nothing suggests that their vapor is anything like secondhand smoke. Indeed, almost all research indicates the opposite.

The preponderance of the evidence indicates that both thirdhand smoke and e-cigarette vapor are the chemical equivalent of dirty looks. They may well be unpleasant or offensive to some people. But the public health case against them appears weak to nonexistent. Public policy would do well simply to leave them alone. ♦

Russia as a Regional Power

Has Obama given up on Putin? Let's hope so.

BY TOD LINDBERG

It's hard to look on the bright side of the dismemberment of a sovereign state by force of arms. But because of Russia's annexation of Crimea and the ongoing threat Vladimir Putin intends to pose to eastern Ukraine, the Obama administration must now face international reality free of one of its more cherished illusions: that Russia is a partner in the pursuit of commonly desired outcomes.

Obama scoffed mightily in his reelection debate with Mitt Romney when the GOP candidate described Russia as America's biggest strategic challenge. Called out on the remark in light of Russia's move on Crimea, Obama was once again dismissive of the Romney perspective. He referred to Russia as merely "a regional power," implicitly rebuking his defeated opponent even in light of current circumstances for overstating the danger Russia poses. The president's point dovetailed into broader Democratic criticism of hawkish Republicans for the supposed desire of the latter to revive a Cold War mentality in dealing with Russia.

It's certainly true that Putin's Russia isn't Brezhnev's Soviet Union. In a way, that's Putin's point: In its hour of dire weakness, the Soviet Union and then Russia lost an empire. There is no likelihood of a global resurgence of Russian influence and proxy contests between Moscow and Washington ranging from Central Asia to Africa to Latin America. The United States has no need to return to a Cold War footing.

Nevertheless, Obama's "regional power" remark is telling. For what exactly *is* a regional power? Well, if the term means anything, it's a state that wields considerable influence over its neighbors—and not influence of the "soft power" sort. A regional power *gets its way* with less powerful states in its region whether the other states like it or not. A regional power practices coercive diplomacy based on the preponderance of its power. It makes demands in the name of its "national interest" that impinge directly on the perceived national interests that neighboring states have—demands to which the others accede.

Russia's regional power includes not just its manifestly revivified military capability but also its economic power, in the form of the reliance of its neighbors on Russia for energy resources. Moscow can turn out the lights and turn off the heat, and although this capability as such would mean little in the hands of a state just interested in enriching those lucky enough to be participants in its oil and gas sector, in the case of a state seeking to reassert its regional influence, the ability to exercise economic coercion is a serious asset as well.

True, its economic power is a double-edged sword: The Russian economy depends heavily on a market for its energy resources. But would anybody today rule out as unworthy of consideration the possibility that come winter 2014, Russia might credibly threaten to curtail exports in the absence of concessions?

Nor is the energy sector the totality of Russia's economic power. Russia has considerable trade flows with Europe, and to the extent anyone in Europe has considered decisions about policy toward Russia in light of business interests, that too indicates the reality of Russian economic power. Such trade flows don't amount to an element of power when the trading partners don't see themselves as having serious conflicts over national interests. There's no point in wasting analytical resources on consideration of the economic power of the United States over Canada. But Putin's Russia, qua "regional power," now demands exactly such analysis.

Moreover, it seems clear from Obama's characterization that the American president understands

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and accepts that Russia is a regional power—with all the perks that regional power entails. The palpable disappointment in the White House and in Secretary of State John Kerry's office over Russia's decision to take a "19th-century" approach to international politics rather than embrace a cooperative "21st-century" perspective also entails acknowledgment that there is nothing the United States can do to prevent Russia asserting itself in this fashion. That's what being a regional power does for you: It ensures that a much bigger but far-away power isn't in a position to stop your exercise in self-assertion in your neighborhood.

Hence the initial reaction of the Obama administration to Putin's incursion into Ukraine: to try to persuade Putin that the practice of 19th-century-style power politics, including conquest and the annexation of territory, is antithetical to Russia's own long-term interests. In short, the United States tried to talk him out of it—and to make sure he had an "off-ramp" available should he come to his 21st-century senses. The United States also promised "consequences," starting with economic sanctions, for Putin's failure to adhere once more to 21st-century norms of international conduct.

When you are trying to talk somebody out of a course of action by purporting to explain to that individual where his true interests lie—which is to say, in aligning his behavior with your own interests, values, and preferences—you are mainly engaged in an indirect effort to restate your own commitment to your interests, values, and preferences. Our policy in light of Russia's annexation of Crimea and its threat to eastern Ukraine has had very little to do with either Russia or Ukraine and a great deal to do with the reassertion of our preference for 21st-century international norms.

So we have accepted Russia as a regional power that can have its way in its neighborhood. We will collect those who agree with our norms and stand together in opposition to Russian action. Maybe the sanctions will exact a toll. But their purpose is to enforce a shared sense of how a state like Russia *ought* to behave. There is no policy challenging Russia's assertion of itself as a regional power, nor (yet) a policy to contest the growth of Russia's regional power.

I don't think it's wrong to see Russia as a regional power—far from it. Russia's decision to send military forces into Georgia in 2008 demonstrated this power. It's interesting that those seeking to deny that any perception of Obamian weakness contributed to Putin's boldness frequently point to this incursion on George W. Bush's watch: Does that mean Bush was weak, too?

Regional power at work: Ukrainian troops held captive by pro-Russian militia

In fact, yes, Bush was weak in August 2008. He was a lame-duck president whose Iraq war, in its sixth year, had barely emerged from its "debacle" phase and whose Afghanistan war, in its eighth, was perceived as failing. More directly to the point for Russia as a newly assertive regional power, earlier that year, Bush had thrown the weight of the United States behind inviting Georgia to begin the process of becoming a member of NATO. Germany and other allies rebuffed the effort at a NATO summit in April 2008, signaling deep division in the transatlantic security space over how far that space extends.

And yet the compromise language of the NATO communiqué envisioned Georgia and Ukraine both as eventual NATO members. Amid the conflicting signals, Georgian president Mikheil Saakashvili took the bait of Russian provocations in breakaway regions of Georgia by responding militarily, thus providing a pretext for the Russian intervention. The communiqué language may well also have suggested to Putin that there was no time like the present for a move on Georgia. So, yes, if it makes President Obama's supporters feel better about their man's weakness, Russia's first serious reassertion of itself as a regional power occurred during Bush's weakest period.

The real question is whether we are going to have a Russia policy worthy of Russia's regional power. An effort to *diminish* Russian regional power is not a serious policy option. It would most likely overpromise and underdeliver—a dangerous combination, per the example of Georgia in 2008. A policy worthy of the challenge would be one that seeks to contain Russian regional power and to prevent it from growing. Such a policy would have to be organized not as a response to specific Russian actions—by which time it's too late, as the now-uncontested annexation of Crimea indicates—but to raise in advance the cost to Russia of asserting its power over its neighbors.

It's possible that the Obama administration will be able to find its way to such a policy. The most encouraging recent sign came in an apparently well-sourced *New York Times* article by Peter Baker describing Obama as having given up on Putin: "Mr. Obama has concluded that even if there is a resolution to the current standoff over Crimea and eastern Ukraine, he will never have a constructive relationship with Mr. Putin, aides said."

And that, in turn, may be the bright side. For this administration, a serious response to Russia as a regional power really must begin with disillusionment. ♦

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So You Want to Live Forever

Immortality through advanced technology and primitive diet

By Charlotte Allen

Mountain View, Calif.

Aubrey de Grey, 51, is the man who insists that within a few decades technology will enable us human beings to beat death and live forever. Actually, he's not the only one to make these assertions—that death is a problem to be solved, not a fate to be endured—but he is the only one I know of to give eternal life an exciting, just-around-the-corner timeline. "Someone is alive right now who is going to live to be 1,000 years old," he told me when I interviewed him last fall at the SENS (for "Strategically Engineered Negligible Senescence") Research Foundation headquarters, a well-worn 3,000-square-foot cement building in the Silicon Valley flatlands where de Grey holds the title of chief science officer. He has made this prophecy to a number of reporters—and this is what makes de Grey the most famous of a growing number of people who have staked their lifestyles and futures on the prospect of never dying. He is constantly interviewed by the press, has written a 2007 book, *Ending Aging*, and has given at least two of the TED talks that are a genius-certification ritual for public intellectuals these days.

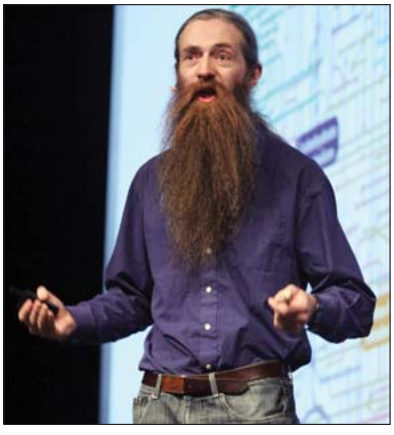
The British-born de Grey, with a doctorate in biology from Cambridge, is also the single most colorful figure in the living-forever movement, where colorful figures generously abound. "I look as though I'm in my 30s," he informed me after we settled, first into a cluttered conference room dominated by an enormous scribbled-over whiteboard, and then into a low-ceilinged lounge whose mélange of hard-bounce chairs and sofas looks as though it was scrounged from sidewalk discards. And maybe he does look that young, but it's hard to tell, because his waist-length, waterfall-style beard—a de Grey trademark—gives him the look of an extremely spry Methuselah, who, according to the Bible, made it only to 969 years. De Grey is actually of the phenotype Ageless British Eccentric: English Rose cheeks, piercing blue eyes, and someone-please-make-him-a-sandwich slenderness; his tomato-red shirt and gray slacks hang from angular shoulders and legs. Bony frames that verge on gauntness are a hallmark of the living-forever movement, most of whose members hew to severe dietary restrictions in order to prolong their lives while they wait for science to catch up with death. De Grey, by contrast, claims to eat whatever he likes and also to drink massive quantities of carb-loaded English ale, working it all off by punting on the River Cam in the four months a year he spends doing research back at Cambridge. (During the rest of the year he lives in Los Gatos, a picturesque Victorian town in the Santa Cruz Mountains 14 miles southeast of Mountain View.)

De Grey subscribes to the reigning theory of the live-forever movement: that aging, the process by which living things ultimately wear themselves out and die, isn't an inevitable part of the human condition. Instead, aging is just another disease, not really different in kind from any of the other serious ailments, such as heart failure or cancer, that kill us. And as with other diseases, de Grey believes that aging has a cure or series of cures that scientists will eventually discover. "Aging is a side effect of being alive," he said during our interview. "The human body is exactly the same as a car or an airplane. It's a machine, and any machine, if you run it, will effect changes on itself that require repairs. Living systems have a great deal of capacity for self-repair, but over time some of those changes only accumulate very slowly, so we don't notice them until we are very old."

De Grey believes that the current approach of geriatric medicine to the systemic breakdowns that aging entails is "pitiful." "Cardiovascular disease is the number-one killer in the West today, and we know that it's caused by fatty deposits in the major arteries. So we try stents or manipulating cholesterol levels with Lipitor. But we know now that the problem isn't so much cholesterol as oxidized cholesterol [small, dense, chemically-modified particles that the aging human body isn't able to deal with via its own natural enzymes]. Oxidized cholesterol isn't properly processed, that is, carried away by the enzymes, so it poisons the arteries."

Charlotte Allen, a frequent contributor to The Weekly Standard, *last wrote on the "Jesus' wife" papyrus.*

He maintains that his SENS-sponsored research, some of it conducted on the foundation's premises and some in university laboratories, has pointed to a better way to clear that "bad" cholesterol out of clogged arteries: "We've been able to identify genes and enzymes in bacteria that we should be able to inject into our own human cells to bring about this cleansing process," de Grey explained. "In 2006-2007 we succeeded in identifying some of them, and we've been able to have that research published. We put extra enzymes that kill bad cells into a human cell culture, and they worked. They're the kind of microphage bacteria that we need to fix problems in the human body. Then we can work on arteriosclerosis in mice, and then we'll have clinical trials in humans.



Aubrey de Grey spreading the word, 2012

"The problem right now is that people think of aging as a universal phenomenon, but diseases such as heart disease are thought of as separate phenomena. But they're universal! Ninety-nine percent of the money spent on age-related research is spent on attempts to cure those diseases. But you can't cure people of side effects; you have to be able to cure aging itself. So what we want to see is preventative medicine, periodically cleaning up certain areas. Let's take Alzheimer's. We know that there are three factors: senile plaques in the brain, tangles in neurons, and cell death. We solved the plaque problem 15 years ago. You can clean up the plaques—but no cognitive goals for patients are being met. That's because we don't know the role that plaques play or their cause. Aging is this multifaceted. What we need to do is clean up lots of things at the same time. Initially, this could be a cleanup every 10 years. Then later, we might develop injections or oral medications. Right now, though, we have a 50-50 chance of getting it all into place in about 25 years."

Indeed, de Grey is confident that if we can figure out how to repair just seven bodily systems prone to breakdown—ranging from chromosomal mutations over time to protein junk accumulated from the cell disintegration that accompanies aging—there is no reason for any of us to die. The only obstacle he sees to our living, say, at least 5,000 years (unless we're unlucky enough to be hit by a car or whatever will substitute for a car in 7000 A.D.) is the money that SENS and its affiliated scientists committed to the hope of realizing eternal or near-eternal life need to develop those complex repair systems that they envision. "If we had ten times the money we have now, we could work at three times the speed," de Grey told me.

Right now SENS, founded in 2009 by de Grey and others, has a mere $4.5 million annual budget, funded heavily from a $16 million inheritance to de Grey from his mother's side of the family in 2011. That—coupled with the maverick nature of de Grey's theories—undoubtedly accounts for the modest appearance of the SENS headquarters; most of the budget funds a handful of university research grants. Indeed, it took years for anyone in the world of mainstream science to take de Grey and his theories about regenerative medicine seriously.

De Grey himself looks on paper like someone hard to take seriously. A graduate of Harrow, the elite boys' school in northwest London that Winston Churchill attended, de Grey received his bachelor's degree in computer science from Cambridge's Trinity Hall in 1985. His specialty was artificial intelligence. In 1990 he met and married his wife, Adelaide Carpenter, a fruit-fly geneticist at Cambridge 19 years his senior. Through his wife's connections, he started managing a fruit-fly database part-time at Cambridge.

That was his first introduction since a biology class at Harrow to the world of biochemistry—and also to experiments on fruit-fly telomeres, the molecular caps at the ends of cells' chromosomes that are thought to protect them from degradation. The shorter the telomere, it seems, the more prone an organism is to aging and then dying. The original length of telomeres is crucial, because as cells divide over the course of their host-organisms' lives, telomeres' lengths shorten substantially until they no longer offer any protection, hastening natural death, or at least the senescence that leads to death. Experiments on telomeres began during the 1970s, and more recently researchers at Harvard, using an enzyme called telomerase that inhibits telomere shortening, found that they could actually reverse the aging process in laboratory mice. Telomerase is a tricky substance for humans because it also reduces inhibitions for cancerous tumors to grow, but the discovery of its anti-aging powers has led scientists to explore the possibility of reducing cellular-level aging in other ways.

In 1999 de Grey published a book, *The Mitochondrial Free Radical Theory of Aging*. It centered on senescence-causing damage to mitochondria, the nonchromosomal genetic material in cells, from "free radicals," atoms or molecules with extra electrons in their outer shells that can damage cells over time by changing their chemical composition, typically by bonding with other atoms and molecules and causing oxidation. That book became the basis of de Grey's doctorate, which Cambridge awarded

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him in a shortcut process that bypassed the usual graduate-school classes and comprehensive exams. The Cambridge Ph.D. gave him the street cred in the scientific world to try to insinuate his theory of aging as a form of cell damage reversible via "regenerative medicine" into the world of mainstream geriatric research.

He has been startlingly successful, even though actual regenerative medicine is still in the highly theoretical stage. In 2003 de Grey established the Methuselah Foundation, headquartered in Springfield, Virginia, which awards hefty cash prizes to researchers who can use genetic modifications to extend the normal three-year life of a lab rat. So far the longest-lived "Methuselah mouse" has survived nearly five years. (The foundation is also offering $1 million to any scientist who can build a synthetic liver; such an organ would be invaluable as a substitute for expensive clinical trials in drug development.) Both the Methuselah and the SENS foundations have been funded partly by multimillion-dollar donations from Peter Thiel, the San Francisco-based cofounder of PayPal who has become fascinated by "transhumanism," the potential for using technology to alter and improve the human body. Every two years or so de Grey holds a SENS conference at Cambridge's Queen's College. The most recent of those, in September 2013, featured papers presented by researchers from such prestigious institutions as Harvard, Yale, Stanford, the University of California Berkeley, the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, the Mayo Clinic, the Albert Einstein College of Medicine, the Buck Institute for Aging Research, and the International Immunology Foundation in Germany.

A craving for immortality—living forever in defiance of death—has been a human preoccupation at least since humans learned how to write down what was on their minds. The Mesopotamian *Epic of Gilgamesh*, composed at least 4,000 years ago, featured its hero's arduous quest for immortality, ending only when he was told that the gods had decreed that death be man's lot from the moment they created him. In classical Greek mythology Eos, goddess of the dawn, fell in love with a mortal man, Tithonus, so she asked her father, Zeus, to grant Tithonus the immortality of the gods so that she might be with him forever. Zeus complied, but since Eos had forgotten to ask her father for the eternal youth that the gods also enjoyed, Tithonus grew older and more feeble with each passing year. There was a lesson to be learned from both myths: that death is an inescapable part of the human condition, but so is a longing for transcendence and eternal life.

The current fascination with achieving immortality via science seems to track the general loss of religious faith in the modern West. Since the New Testament phrase "death hath no more dominion" no longer resonates with many people as a promise of heavenly survival, scientific life extension can be explained as an effort to achieve transcendence and eternal life by other means. Aldous Huxley explored those themes satirically in his 1939 novel, *After Many a Summer*, whose most entertaining character, the cynical Dr. Obispo, during the day experiments with carp, fish that were reputed to live for centuries, so as to distill a longevity drug for a tycoon who is terrified of dying, and at night fornicates with the tycoon's youthful mistress. Dr. Obispo's ideological counterpoint is Mr. Propter, an eccentric who lives the ostentatiously simple life, making wooden furniture and philosophizing about his own route to transcendence by rising above earthly concerns. Huxley took the title of his novel from a line in Tennyson's "Tithonus," a poem that explores the classical myth.

The current fascination with achieving immortality via science seems to track the general loss of religious faith in the modern West.

Interestingly, today's living-forever movement involves precisely the same two themes that animated Huxley's novel: advanced medical technology and primitive living. And also faith of a steadfastness to rival that of a medieval saint. Living-forever people tend to display a consistent cluster of traits and fixations, of which de Grey's major benefactor Peter Thiel is a quintessential example. Among them are: political libertarianism (a *New Yorker* profile of Thiel in 2011 explains that he built PayPal—since sold to eBay—in part because "he wanted to create an online currency that could circumvent government control"); boundless optimism regarding a technically enhanced utopian future (for Thiel, according to the *New Yorker*, it's "seasteading"—floating city-states on the high seas; for others, it's colonizing Mars); and a preoccupation with one's food intake. Nearly all living-forever people are on one version or other of the currently fashionable carb-free "Paleo diet," if not cutting back on eating altogether. Whenever Thiel is interviewed, wild salmon—very tasty and high in antioxidants and thus every life-extensioner's favorite protein source—seems to be on the plate. Finally, most living-forever people seem to be confident that they personally will be around long enough to take advantage of the biomedical breakthroughs that Aubrey de Grey predicts lie just around the corner. Thiel told *New Yorker* writer George Packer that he expected to live until age 120—which, because he's just 46 right now, should give him plenty of time to become that man of de Grey's prophecy who lives until age 1,000.

For a time, those who dreamed of scientifically

engineered immortality had to resort to cryogenic freezing: having their bodies, or at least their brains, encased in liquid nitrogen immediately after death, to await, like corpses in a churchyard, for the trumpet sound that would usher them into eternal life, or at least into a second go-round when awakened by a scientist of the future who would know how to undo whatever got them dead in the first place.

Cryonics is still relatively popular—some 2,000 people plus a few pets are currently signed up for flash-freezing at various storage centers around the country—but the trend today in achieving immortality is to try to do it while you're still breathing. De Grey has coined the term "escape velocity"—or rather borrowed it from the space-travel jargon for overcoming gravity—to describe the process by which he and others believe that people will soon be able to live for centuries if they can manage to stay alive for just a few more decades. Escape velocity in this context is analogous to Moore's Law, the computer-industry maxim that microprocessing speed doubles every two years. The idea is that advances in anti-aging technology will similarly proceed not linearly but exponentially, so that there will eventually be a point at which, long as one may live, there will always emerge a new medical development that will allow one to live even longer. It will be eternal life the easy way. Back in the 1960s, when cryonic freezing changed from a topos of science fiction to the giant cooling bottles of the Alcor Life Extension Foundation in Scottsdale, Ariz. (home to the head of the late Red Sox slugger Ted Williams), alternatives to cryonics seemed the stuff of fantasy. But that was before the arrival of such brand-new developments —most still at the conceptual stage—as de Grey's microphages, "liquid computers" (programmed systems of molecules that could enter the bloodstream and short-circuit viruses), biological nanotechnology (molecule-size robots that would travel through the bloodstream repairing systems, killing senescent cells, and cleaning out junk), and as-yet-unconceived-of stem cell therapies.

Simultaneously with these advances or projected advances in the miniaturization of medical technology has grown a burgeoning industry in strategies for staying on this earth for as long as possible on one's own steam until escape velocity arrives. These can be quite drastic, including severe restrictions on caloric intake, the daily ingestion of massive quantities of different supplements (those pills in the boulder-size jars in the Whole Foods vitamin aisle), regular bouts of an intravenous procedure called chelation, originally developed to combat lead poisoning but now used by practitioners of "alternative medicine" to cleanse the bloodstream of a range of presumably debilitating metals and other minerals, and a range of drugs and therapies still regarded as experimental by both mainstream medical practitioners and the FDA. It also involves the relentless monitoring of one's body for the smallest signs of deterioration.

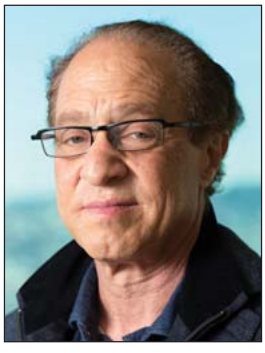
The vast majority of enthusiasts for life-extension techniques are men, possibly because the regimens involved are so demanding, or because their strictness appeals to male ultra-rationality, or because there can be a cult-like quality to the enterprise that implicitly encourages practitioners to consider themselves superior to the ordinary folk who dine on pizza or pasta primavera. To enter into the world of serious longevity efforts is to go way beyond your typical family doctor's advice to eat healthy, keep your weight down, and get plenty of sleep and exercise. It is a world populated by relatively few women, possibly because it is decidedly unglamorous, and possibly because women aren't so prone to the frightening heart disease that strikes down many men at relatively young ages.

It's also a world with its own Golden Age: the Paleolithic era. The theory derives from Jared Diamond's influential 1997 bestseller *Guns, Germs, and Steel: The Fate of Human Societies*, in which he argued that the invention of agriculture was mankind's worst mistake, bringing about war, oppression, subjugation of women, and, worst of all, diseases and shortened lifespans arising from what Diamond—and most longevity people—believe are the nutritional defects of a grain-heavy, carbohydrate-focused modern diet. "People who eat paleo get rid of grains and dairy," said John Durant, the 30-year-old author of *The Paleo Manifesto: Ancient Wisdom for Lifelong Health* (2013), in a phone interview. The Cro-Magnon-bearded Durant regularly runs barefoot through Central Park to simulate the animal-chasing of hunter-gatherer cultures and stores a refrigerated meat locker in his living room. The cover of his book displays a photo of a chipped flintstone.

It is highly unlikely that actual Paleolithic people subsisted on the steaks and bison-burgers that are the typical fare of today's paleo people, or, for that matter, survived much past age 30, thanks to predators, poor hygiene, and generally rough lives. But "they didn't have Type 2 diabetes, obesity, dental problems, mental issues, or difficulty reproducing," Durant says. Like many paleo people, Durant argues that the human body evolved to adapt perfectly to humanity's millions of years of hunter-gatherer existence and is ill-suited to either a grain-based agricultural diet or the complex stresses of present-day life.

Durant represents the primitive-living side of the longevity movement. Epitomizing the technological-progress side is Ray Kurzweil, 66, the indisputably brilliant inventor of a range of revolutionary electronic devices including the first synthesizer to use the sampled sounds of real musical instruments and the first print-to-speech reading machine for the blind—and also a relentless promoter

of transhumanism and futurism in general. Kurzweil popularized the phrase "the singularity," coined by the mathematician John von Neumann in 1958 to refer to a point in the future at which artificial intelligence will surpass human intelligence, so that it will become impossible for humans to predict the future because computers will be so much smarter than they. At that point, Kurzweil predicts, humans will so load themselves with artificial intelligence and other computer-generated features as to become postbiological. The title of Kurzweil's 2005 book, *The Singularity Is Near* (he predicts the year 2045), has become a catchphrase among futurists as popular as "Winter is coming" among *Game of Thrones* aficionados. In 2009 Kurzweil cofounded the Singularity University near Mountain View with impressive cosponsorship from several Silicon Valley corporations (Kurzweil is an engineering director for Google). The unaccredited university, which offers summer seminars, conferences, and the like, operates as a kind of forum for Kurzweil-style futurism, including biological futurism, with Aubrey de Grey as one of its lecturers.



Ray Kurzweil

In a 2006 interview with the writer David Jay Brown, Kurzweil revealed that, in order to defer his death for the maximum possible length of time, he ingested a whopping 250 different pills every day. His all-you-can-eat smorgasbord of supplements included curcumin, a derivative of the turmeric that serious life-extenders now pour onto nearly every plate of food they eat, Ginkgo biloba, believed by some to forestall Alzheimer's, though research hasn't proved that it does any such thing, and a rainbow of antioxidants, including resveratrol, a popular red-grape-skin derivative that again hasn't been definitively proven to be effective and also makes you wonder: Why not just drink wine? In addition, Kurzweil eschewed carbs, monitored "fifty or sixty" different blood levels of his every few months, and flooded his body once a week with intravenously injected phosphatidylcholine, which is supposed to dissolve fat and cholesterol deposits inside cells.

In 1999 Kurzweil became a patient of Terry Grossman, a onetime family physician in Colorado who in 1995 had decided to get into alternative, or, as Grossman phrases it, "complementary" medicine, and opened a clinic near Denver focusing on longevity. After an exchange of some 10,000 emails, Grossman and Kurzweil coauthored a 2004 bestseller, *Fantastic Voyage: Live Long Enough to Live Forever*, that encapsulated nutritional and other theories of "immortality medicine." A 2010 sequel followed: *Transcend: Nine Steps to Living Well Forever*. Like *Fantastic Voyage*, *Transcend* assured its readers that if they could make it through the next 20 or so years, they might never have to meet the Grim Reaper at all (2030 seems to be the magical year during which life-extenders believe that escape velocity will start to kick in). The two books also helped launch an online side business for Grossman and Kurzweil: Ray and Terry's Longevity Products, offering more than 100 different kinds of supplements, plus nutritional shakes and even "healthy" chocolates. The Grossman Wellness Center in Golden, Colorado, is a one-stop shop for every sort of "holistic" medical procedure that may or may not be covered by conventional health insurance: not just nutritional supplements but weight loss, Botox, acupuncture (his wife is a licensed acupuncturist), dermabrasion, stem cell therapy, food allergies, stress management, insomnia, life coaching, and sexual dysfunction (Grossman is a certified homeopathic physician as well as an M.D.). Prices aren't cheap: The one-day diagnostic "longevity evaluation" runs to at least $3,000.

Grossman's own life-extension regimen these days is a toned-down version of Kurzweil's, possibly because his genetic inheritance is better: Kurzweil's father died of diabetes complications at age 58, while both of Grossman's parents are still alive and healthy at nearly 90 and one of his grandfathers lived to age 105, Grossman told me in a telephone interview. Now 67, Grossman, a lifelong jock who had started his practice in Colorado to take advantage of the skiing, discovered while in his forties that two of his favorite recreations, jogging and mountain-biking, had suddenly become difficult for him after a skiing accident. "I had gained 30 extra pounds," he told me. "So I tried herbal medicine, and I became very happy again."

Grossman swallows a mere 30 pills a day ("It's easy: 15 in the morning and 15 before going to bed") in contrast to Kurzweil's 250. "They increase the blood flow to my brain and help my memory," he said. He also pursues what he called "detoxification strategies—we live in a polluted world." They consist of steam showers "to get rid of the toxins," infrared saunas, and regular chelation. Grossman's daily diet, laid out in a 2008 article in *Westword*, Denver's arts weekly, revolves around green tea (no coffee), salmon (but of course!), and blueberries, which life-extenders consider to be the fruit version of salmon because of its antioxidant qualities. Grossman described the diet as "anti-aging." That and the rest of his rigorous self-preservation rituals don't actually make him look any younger, but they do give him the appearance of a reed-slender, exceptionally healthy specimen of a man in his late 60s, helped along by some dazzling dental work. (Kurzweil also looks startlingly vigorous for a man his age, although again, no one would mistake him for a youth.)

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Spartan food consumption is *de rigueur* in much of the longevity world, after research on mice dating to the 1930s revealed that rodents subjected to calorie restriction live from 40 to 50 percent longer than their well-fed cousins—possibly because the mice's reduced blood sugar curtails the production of destructive free radicals. Scientists have tried to develop drugs for humans that mimic calorie restriction, but their sole successful product, rapamycin, approved by the FDA in 1999, has deleterious side effects (provoking cancer and diabetes), so it is prescribed only rarely. Thus many life-extenders devise some version of calorie restriction, or "CR": paleo, vegan, no red meat, no meat at all, no fat, no carbs, just plain fasting, and always, no sugar. It's not unusual for CR people—mostly men, as might be expected—to obsessively weigh, tabulate via software, and take notes on their daily calorie intake (as low as 1,800 or even 1,500 for some). Critics sometimes deride CR, with its skeletal six-footers complaining about their low sex drives, as the male equivalent of anorexia.

It is difficult to assess scientifically how useful any of this is. Visit the websites of most longevity gurus, and you will get a mix of hard-to-evaluate nutritional tips, medical information of a sort that might raise some doctors' eyebrows, and, mostly, marketing. John Durant of *The Paleo Manifesto* credits his inspiration to the thinking of Loren Cordain, a health and exercise professor at Colorado State University whose *The Paleo Diet: Lose Weight and Get Healthy by Eating the Foods You Were Designed to Eat* (2002) has been a bestseller for more than a decade. Cordain's website is a mélange of paleo recipes, photos of the 65-year-old Cordain himself (another preserved-in-amber specimen), pitches for his most recent books (including a cookbook), and a section on foods that supposedly heal "leaky gut syndrome"—food molecules permeating the intestinal wall—an alarming-sounding ailment but not one that's recognized by most of the medical profession. The website of rival paleo guru Mark Sisson, 61, author of *The Primal Blueprint: Reprogram Your Genes for Effortless Weight Loss, Vibrant Health, and Boundless Energy* (2009), blasts grain products and hawks Sisson's own line of supplement pills, an odd feature considering that real Paleolithic people wouldn't have known what a supplement was. Sisson's trademark emblem is a loin-clothed, bare-chested figure (somewhat like Sisson himself, who likes to show off his log-rolling abs in his photos) executing a balletic leap while waving a javelin.

This is advertising, of course—and the Internet is clogged like a drainpipe in autumn with pitches for life-extending pills and free-radical neutralizers. But a more important question than the efficacy of pills, protein, and chelation looms: Even if we had the technology, would it really be possible to extend life by centuries just by repairing 7—or even 10—features of genetic and cellular breakdown, as Aubrey de Grey predicts we soon will be doing? The answer of mainstream geriatrics researchers is sorry, but no. "Aubrey says there are seven pathways to repair, but the problem is that there are hundreds of thousands of genes involved in aging," said Michael R. Rose, a lab director in the University of California, Irvine's ecology and evolutionary biology department, in a phone interview. "His theories don't take into account the genomic complexity of aging." He added: "Maybe 70 years from now, we'll have a better understanding of that genomic complexity, where molecular repairs, nano-repairs, will be possible. But right now that's a fantasy."

S. Jay Olshansky, a public-health professor at the University of Illinois-Chicago who has devoted the past 20 years to researching the upper limits of human mortality, maintains that lifespan is built into an organism's genes. The bristlecone pine trees of the Western-state mountains can easily survive for 5,000 years or more, but human beings simply aren't evolutionarily programmed to live much longer than they do now, Olshansky argues. "Human biology doesn't change," he said in a phone interview. "We can trace human ancestry back maybe 200,000 generations, and it would seem that human beings going back that far are pretty much like us." He continued: "We can see a biological strategy at work, a life-history strategy that favors parenting and grandparenting for children's survival. A woman is usually able to have her last child at about age 38. So it makes sense that you can survive into your 50s, and you can push that up to age 60, so that people generally can live into their 50s and 60s in relatively good health and vigor. But the further you get into your 60s and 70s, gerontological processes inevitably take over. It's like the difference between a pond and a white-water river."

In other words, *The Epic of Gilgamesh* might have expressed a hard truth: that death really is man's lot, and that aging really isn't a disease awaiting a cure. But even if Rose and Olshansky are right and Aubrey de Grey is wrong, the scientific quest for immortality has produced some beneficial side effects: a better understanding of how to stay in reasonably good health for as long as possible and perhaps—at least in the future—some ways to cure some of the killer-diseases associated with old age. "There's a lot of snake oil in this business," according to Christine Peterson, a cofounder of the Foresight Institute in Palo Alto, which sponsors nanotechnology research. Peterson, 56, is one of the handful of women in the life-extension movement. "But most of us—I just want to be healthy and not lose interest in people at the other end of my life." ♦

He Chose Wrong

Gabriel García Márquez's ignoble decision to embrace Fidel Castro

By Lee Smith

While the encomia from world leaders and cultural figures continue to pour in after the death of Gabriel García Márquez at the age of 87 last month, a Charles Lane column in the *Washington Post* last week on the 1982 Nobel Prize-winning novelist threatened to reopen a 40-year-old wound. Lane recalled the Padilla Affair—the arrest, imprisonment, and show trial of a Cuban poet, an episode that once divided writers and intellectuals across the world, with García Márquez coming down on the wrong side.

In 1971 Cuban state security jailed the poet Heberto Padilla for a book that appeared to criticize the revolution and its father, Fidel Castro. Padilla was forced to confess his sins and denounce other transgressors, a handful of Cuban writers including his wife Belkis Cuza Malé, also a poet. Padilla apologized to Castro, to whom, as Padilla said, he had "been unfair and ungrateful [and] for which I will never tire of repenting."

Castro's subsequent speech underscored the purpose of the arrest and confession—a "rigorous alignment with the revolution and subordination to its political dictates," as one scholar put it, "was a precondition for intellectual activity." In other words, this socialist utopia would cut off the tongues of its subjects unless they sang its praises. Many literary figures, including a number of major Latin American novelists and poets like future Nobelists Mario Vargas Llosa and Octavio Paz, turned on Castro and withdrew their support for a revolution that they came to recognize as simply another color in the totalitarian spectrum. In response, Castro fumed in the clichéd rhetoric of revolution that these were "brazen Latin Americans" who "live in bourgeois salons 10,000 miles from the problems."

Living nearly 5,000 miles from Havana in Barcelona, García Márquez refused to sign a letter criticizing Castro—which is to say, he not only came out against a fellow writer, human rights, and free speech, but also on behalf of false imprisonment, torture, false confessions, show trials, and executions. The Padilla Affair was the most notorious moment in a long career of what Lane rightly characterizes as García Márquez's "political rottenness." In reward for his loyalty, as Lane explains, he "gradually rose in Havana's estimation, ultimately emerging as a de facto member of Castro's inner circle. Fidel would shower 'Gabo' with perks, including a mansion, and established a film institute in Cuba under García Márquez's personal direction."

His friendship with Castro, the Colombian novelist flattered himself, was based largely on their shared literary tastes. He never published a book without first showing the manuscript to the man who'd imprisoned dozens of Cuban writers. For Castro's part, it's not hard to see why he felt indebted to García Márquez—the great man of modern Spanish letters had not only proven his loyalty but had more importantly provided the revolution, and Castro himself, with invaluable legitimacy, without which the course of modern Latin American history might have turned out differently. In soliciting his friendship and continuing to make sure García Márquez remained personally invested in the revolution, Castro was feeding the ego behind what had become the happy and most famous face of a monstrous regime.

Years after the Padilla Affair, García Márquez defended his stance, arguing that it was by staying close to the revolution, as he hinted to the *New Yorker* in a 1999 profile, that he was able to work on Castro directly, and behind the scenes, to win Padilla's release in 1980. (Writing last month in *National Review*, another Cuban emigré poet jailed by Castro, Armando Valladares, charges that García Márquez in fact informed on dissidents to Cuban intelligence.) When asked why he continued to support Castro after so many of his friends and colleagues had seen the mask fall, García Márquez said that it was because "I have much better and more direct information, and a political maturity that allows me a more serene, patient, and humane comprehension of the reality."

Reality is a peculiar word for a writer whose literary reputation is tied to the genre he brought to a sort of perfection—"magical realism," a technique combining supernatural elements with the real world: blood that comes alive and slithers through the streets, for instance, old men

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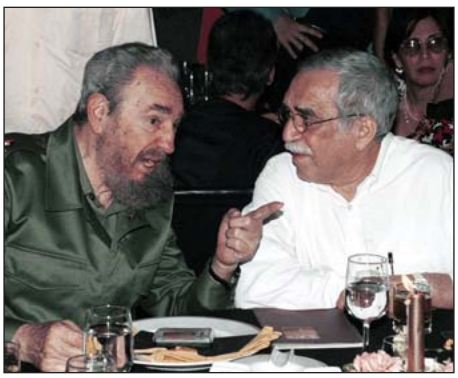
with wings, and so forth. Some critics argued that García Márquez employed magical realism to critique the existing political culture of Latin America. However, outside his friendships with numerous world leaders (and a bizarre effort to facilitate negotiations between the Colombian government and the Cuban-backed terrorists of FARC who were trying to overthrow it), it's hard to see how the novelist had much connection with any political reality at all.

García Márquez was an opportunist; he enjoyed the proximity to power that his fame as an artist made possible. Vargas Llosa called him Castro's courtesan, but García Márquez's vanity made him indiscriminate in his affections; loving to be loved, he was available to any powerful suitor. The adolescent Marxist and lifelong anti-imperialist blushed to find himself befriended by Bill Clinton, a big fan who lifted the longstanding U.S. travel ban and facilitated his visa. Clinton gushed when he finally got to meet the author of what he said was his favorite novel, *One Hundred Years of Solitude*, at a cocktail party hosted by William and Rose Styron in Martha's Vineyard. Later, García Márquez seems to have convinced himself that he was a go-between serving both Clinton and Castro as well as, from his perspective, the greater good of restoring relations between the United States and Cuba. In both his work and his political convictions, García Márquez was a fantasist.



Fidel Castro with García Márquez, 2000

Employed by García Márquez and other Latin American novelists, magical realism partakes of a tradition in Spanish letters that dates back to the renaissance. *Gongorismo*, named after the poet Luis de Góngora (1561-1627), is typically described as a literary style characterized by obscurity, extravagance, and violation of accepted laws of language, logic, and sentiment. The purpose of this stylistic shock treatment was to lay waste to a calcified classicism. From Góngora's perspective, the use of the same accepted themes, conceits, and language, rehearsed repeatedly by both genuine poets and their lesser imitators, had effectively drained the life out of Spanish verse.

García Márquez and other stars of what became known as "El Boom," the great late-20th-century flourishing of Latin American literature, were reacting to the novel, a European literary form that was invented and developed in tandem with Europe's changing political and social realities, especially the rise of the middle class. Since Latin America was the product of a different political and social reality, it called for a new interpretation of the novel. This is what gave rise to magical realism, a technique that, in the hands of García Márquez at least, also relied on a local oral storytelling tradition. The important point is that, like *Gongorismo*, magical realism's subversion of literary rationalism is a style, a technique for reviving and renovating a literary genre. However, García Márquez's international success depended in large part on the fact that his audience, especially in the United States, confused magical realism with Latin American political reality.

New York publishing legend has it that García Márquez owed his fame to a used-book dealer. The Strand has long been the first stop for the New York publishing set, book reviewers, literary critics, and underpaid editorial assistants looking to unload their unwanted review copies for a handful of fast cash. The story goes that when they came in to dump their copies of a new novel from a 33-year-old Colombian writer shortly after the 1967 Spanish-language book was translated into English in 1970, one Strand employee told them they were making a mistake—they should keep the book and read it. When they heeded his advice, *One Hundred Years of Solitude* became a sensation, destined to reach every corner of the earth.

Regardless of this account's veracity, the fact is that it was America that made García Márquez a literary colossus. He was a terrific storyteller, and as a writer of prose fiction his *Gongorismo* was not vulnerable to the exigencies of translation that poetry in a similar mode cannot possibly survive. Instead, it was precisely García Márquez's magical realism that thrilled readers with the sense of the new, while adhering to standard novelistic conceits—beautiful and tragic women, serial intrigue, love, and family. *One Hundred Years of Solitude* was fantastic and familiar at the same time.

García Márquez is typically said to be an heir to Faulkner, whose Yoknapatawpha County, explained the Colombian novelist, was the model for his imaginary town of Macondo. But Salman Rushdie, citing Tolkien, Harry Potter, and other adolescent fantasies in a recent tribute to García Márquez, may have hit a little closer to the truth. García Márquez wrote escapist literature. As with all fantasy literature, the most significant feature is the locale, the world that fantasy, unchecked by reality, creates. The great psychological novels are studies in human character shaped by and responding to circumstance and fate. In fantasy, the characters are typically cut-out figures, allegories, embodiments of moral attributes, like virtue, courage, greed, and gluttony. It is place that breathes with the life of a unique

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individual, and it is the character of the place—Narnia, the Shire, Hogwarts—rather than the psychology of a human character, that tends to live on in the minds of readers.

García Márquez's great fortune was that his fantasy world happened to be set in Latin America. This fact could not help but appeal to a Vietnam-era audience certain that America was doing bad things all around the world and possibly much worse things in Third World countries even closer to home. Wasn't our adventure in Southeast Asia just the most recent iteration of what we'd been doing in Latin America for a century or more? Imperialism, colonialism, the subjugation of Third World peoples. Surely this was the grand theme of *One Hundred Years of Solitude*, as articulated by a genuine voice of the global South. Hidden under all the fantasy, his American readers were convinced, García Márquez must have a political message that indicts America for its criminal actions across the world.

Insofar as there are any real politics in García Márquez's books, they simply echo what any reader of the *New York Times* was already predisposed to think about Latin America or anywhere else in the Third World in the 1970s—the bad guys of course are right-wing, and the good guys are for overthrowing the system, i.e., revolution. He claimed that his grandfather, the model for the protagonist of the novella *No One Writes to the Colonel*, was the source of many of his political ideas. A military man and a liberal, García Márquez explained, his grandfather "would regale me with horrifying accounts of the last civil war that free-thinkers and anticlerics waged against the Conservative government." García Márquez, according to one scholar of his work, held "socialist and anti-imperialist views . . . in principled opposition to the global status quo dominated by the United States."

The novelist's political commitments then were of the boilerplate left-liberal variety—as readily available in Parisian lecture halls as they were in Upper West Side living rooms. His political ideas were already part of the atmosphere of the moment. Accordingly, for his American readers, García Márquez's work offered something like an invigorating, albeit perfectly comfortable, vacation in a Third World theme park. And that's why he became so popular. An overtly political novelist who truly sought to unnerve his readership never would've gotten the same reception, and won the same wide readership, even in the 1970s. For instance, the struggles of the Palestinians and their war against Israel have long been of abiding interest to the international left, but a novelistic account of them, as depicted, say, by the Palestinian writer Ghassan Kanafani, spokesman for the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine, a terrorist group, while perhaps popular on some college campuses, was simply not bestseller material. It was not because García Márquez was deeply engaged in the revolutionary struggle that he was politically useful to Castro, but because his novels were international bestsellers, thanks to America.

It's worth imagining what might have happened had García Márquez come out against Castro over the Padilla Affair. In 1971, the year after the English-language translation to *One Hundred Years of Solitude* was published, García Márquez was probably the world's third-most famous Latin American, after the Brazilian soccer star Pelé and Castro himself. Had he joined his less famous Latin American colleagues as well as other writers like Susan Sontag and Italo Calvino in coming out against Castro, García Márquez would have stripped the revolution of any of its remaining luster. That's not to say that Castro would've fallen or that other revolutionary movements would've died in the womb, but the Cuban revolution would have been exposed by the continent's most popular spokesman, its greatest living writer, for what it truly was—a brutal dispensation that turned husbands and wives against each other, jailed dissidents, writers, homosexuals, and anyone who deviated from the strictures of Castroism, all in order to extinguish freedom. The issue then isn't simply that García Márquez made the wrong choice when he backed Castro in the Padilla Affair, but that he legitimized totalitarianism, in Cuba and throughout the rest of Latin America.

The fact that he continued to believe in Castro and the revolution until his death is indisputable, and it's perhaps not hard to find the reasons why. Like many writers he was vain and susceptible to flattery, especially that of the powerful. He was from a modest background and, compared with many other Latin American literary stars schooled in Paris or London, only moderately well educated, which is not to say that a lack of intellect played a part in his choice but rather that an abundance of resentment almost surely did.

But biography can't entirely explain his choices, and it may prove useful to turn to one of García Márquez's precursors, the greatest of all Spanish novelists, one of Góngora's contemporaries, Miguel de Cervantes. *Don Quixote* is a book whose hero is incapable of distinguishing fact from fiction, fantasy from the real world. In a sense, this theme is also that of García Márquez, a novelist who constructed an imaginary universe by combining and confusing the visible world and the supernatural. It is not always advisable to draw analogies between an artist's style and his beliefs, but it is difficult not to conclude that in his public life García Márquez lived like Quixote, and mistook fantasy for the real and visible world. He saw in Castro and the revolution something of wondrous beauty, his Dulcinea, when in fact it was coarse and violent. But if García Márquez chose to back Castro because of his fantasy-riddled political imagination, it turns out that the windmills the novelist tilted at were real. And those he sided against suffered deeply. ♦

Old woman with ducks from 'A History of British Birds'

Natural Wonder

Celebrating the art (and life) of Thomas Bewick. BY SARA LODGE

When we first meet Jane Eyre in Charlotte Brontë's classic novel, she is hiding behind the curtains reading a forbidden book that transports her to the polar tundra:

> In these forlorn regions of *unknowable* dreary space, this reservoir of frost and snow, where firm fields of ice, the accumulation of centuries of winters, glazed in Alpine heights above heights, surround the pole, and concentre the multiplied rigours of extreme cold; even here . . . there appears to subsist an abundance of animals, in the air, and in the waters.

The Art of Thomas Bewick
by Diana Donald
Reaktion, 328 pp., $65

Jane is gripped. Her lonely, 10-year-old imagination flies to the extremities of the earth, where still lonelier creatures survive against the odds. She isn't reading adventure fiction; she is reading Thomas Bewick's *A History of British Birds* (1797). For the Brontës, as for many early-19th-century children, these exquisitely illustrated books of natural history were as inspiring as *Moby-Dick* and *The Call of the Wild* would be to later generations. Thomas Bewick (1753-1828) became famous for his exceptionally fine wood engravings depicting different species of bird and animal. But to contemporary readers, he was more than an engraver; he was a storyteller, a familiar guide who led the amateur naturalist into new territories that became theirs to explore.

In her fascinating new study, Diana Donald looks again at Bewick's rich contribution to natural history and visual art and asks what his illustrated volumes meant: what views he was expressing

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through his work and what his books came to mean to later readers. She also endeavors to place Bewick's work in the context of a spectrum of books that made different implicit arguments about the natural order of species, the position of animals in the moral universe, and their relationship to man.

When Bewick published his *General History of Quadrupeds* in 1790, he was entering a market that was divided between luxury plates, typically sold separately but collected by connoisseurs who valued them for their beauty and rarity, and cheap multivolume series that were used as reference guides and were often sparsely illustrated. There were also "bestiaries," aimed at children, some of which still included fabulous animals such as unicorns. Bewick's approach was winning because it was both accessible and precise in its depiction of animals and its description of their habits. He engraved on wood rather than copper: Woodcuts were cheap and durable, and were thus associated with popular publication.

But Bewick's wood engravings were of unrivaled quality. Rather than cutting designs into blocks of wood that had been sawed along the plank, exposing soft fibers that could be roughly cut with a knife, Bewick engraved designs on the hard, polished cross-section of close-fibered boxwood: a medium that, like metal, allowed tiny, delicate incisions. He evolved his own technique of moving between "white line" (highlights within areas of shadow) and "black line" (ridges of wood left standing to define form in lighted areas), producing images that still astonish the viewer with their lyrical grace and minute detail.

Wherever possible, Bewick drew from living specimens—in the wild, traveling menageries, or private collections. The result is that his animals and birds have the inquisitive eye and questing gait of creatures caught for a moment before going on with their lives. Their fur and plumage is alive with texture. They have distinctive characters. As the editor of *Blackwood's Magazine* commented in 1825, "Study Bewick, and you know a British bird as you know a man, by his physiognomy. . . . You can make him out even at a distance, as sailors say, by 'the cut of his jib.'" As Donald demonstrates, this was not true of many contemporary natural histories, for example John Hill's (1752), in which the "blue tit" resembles a monstrous cross between a wagtail and a quail.

Moreover, Bewick was unusual in representing creatures within a landscape that didn't merely frame them, but suggested their customary habits and habitat—what Donald calls a "continuous ambience." This is especially true of *A History of British Birds*, where Bewick delights in showing

Thomas Bewick (1823)

us a bittern against a leafy riverbank whose curved and mottled reeds echo and camouflage the curved and mottled plumage of the bird's neck. He also depicts a rook against a ploughed autumn field with a scarecrow, over which a parliament of rooks in flight passes like a wisp of smoke. The intricate patterns of nature and of the land are in harmony. As Donald shows, these settings not only helped amateur naturalists to locate the species Bewick described, they also contained an argument implicit in all of Bewick's work about the beautiful fitness of each species to its appointed place in the Divine creation.

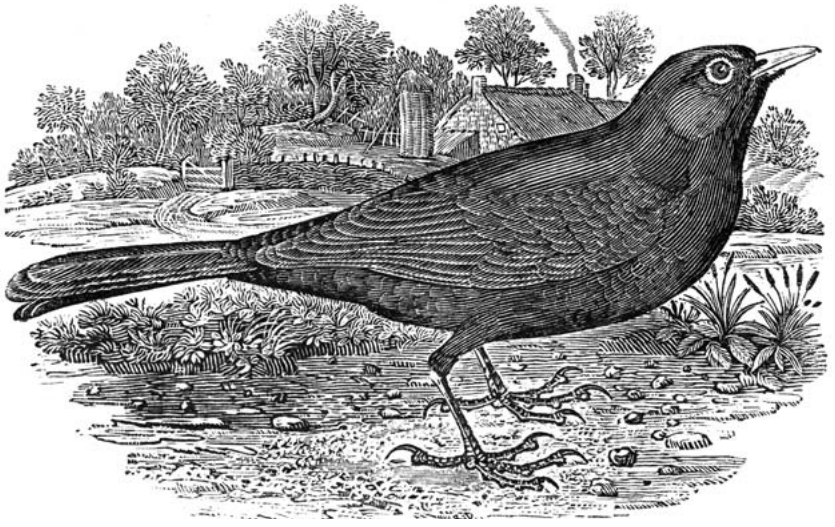
Bewick was an exponent of natural theology. He compared the various competing theories of scientific systemization and classification to "skeletons injudiciously put together." Man was, in his view, unfitted to solve the complex puzzle of Nature's mechanics, but should make it his business to study and admire its munificence. He took, in *Quadrupeds*, a very loose view of species and breed and included large numbers of domestic animals, such as the carthorse, the Cheviot ram, and the Newfoundland dog. By mid-century, therefore, his books were not at the cutting edge of zoological and ornithological taxonomy, as informed by the continental work of scientists such as Cuvier and Temminck.

But for many readers, this was a great part of Bewick's charm. His work did not "murder to dissect." It encouraged naturalists to favor observation of live specimens in the field. The commentary was personal and included common, dialect names for birds. It was also proudly local: Many of the breeds of sheep and cow that Bewick depicted had been raised by farmers in the north of England, around Newcastle, where Bewick's workshop remained. Likewise, the moors, hedges, riverbanks, and wild coasts of his illustrations reflected the rural Northumbrian scenery he had known as a boy. This was fast disappearing due to enclosure and industrial expansion, not least that of the mining industry from which Bewick's family profited. So Bewick's natural histories are not merely "spotter's guides." Like the poems of his contemporary John Clare, they often have an elegiac air, calling to mind the transience of man and the fragility of landscape.

They also, Donald successfully argues, have political and social undertones that are easy to miss. One of the distinctive features of Bewick's books is his use of "tail-pieces," small, engraved vignettes that interspersed the species illustrations. Playful, but also often quite dark, these tail-pieces—which Bewick sometimes referred to as "tale-pieces"—were a particular source of enjoyment for imaginative readers, precisely because they carried no explanation: They were stills from a film of which the reader could invent the beginning and end. In one tail-piece, from the second volume of *A History of*

British Birds (1804), a couple of military veterans—one of whom has lost a leg—are shaking hands on meeting. Bewick's daughter explained that this was a witty allusion to Bewick himself, greeting the reader again, as an old friend, at the start of a new volume. But the engraving is also one of many that show the terrible wastage of war, including depictions of scarecrows hung with military uniforms and amputee beggars.

Bewick disliked cruelty of all kinds, and some of his tail-pieces address violence in a very frank manner. In one, two small boys are hanging a dog from a tree; a gibbet in the distance hints that these young sociopaths will come to a similar end. In another tail-piece, two blind fiddlers pass a rich man's estate, where a notice (which we can see but they cannot) warns of "steel traps and spring guns"—a violent hazard to which these innocents may fall victim. In a third, a man is depicted dead drunk by the roadside on the king's birthday. This engraving is a quiet protest against the custom of politicians dishing out free drinks on this day, by way of a bribe for party loyalty.



Male blackbird from 'A History of British Birds'

Like many freethinking tradesmen of his era, Bewick was interested in radical ideas about modes of governance. He attended a philosophical society and was friendly with Thomas Spence, an impoverished schoolteacher who argued that all men had a right to an equal share in land. Bewick couldn't agree with Spence that it would be right to expropriate land, for property should be held sacred; but he did agree that the gentry, whirling about "in aristocratic pomposity," had forgotten its duty to the poor.

Bewick refused to depict an idyllic countryside with happy peasants and chubby infants; he blamed landowners for exploiting their tenantry and livestock and was explicitly critical of their lack of moral leadership. He read Thomas Paine, supported the Americans in the War of Independence, and even toyed with the idea of emigrating to America himself. It is interesting to consider how Bewick might have fared had he been published alongside John James Audubon. The two men are so different in style: Audubon's work is glorious, vivid, expansive; Bewick delighting always in smallness, intimacy, and "low" scenes. If Audubon is the Gainsborough of ornithological art, Bewick is the Hogarth.

Bewick's influence in the 19th century was profound, and Donald devotes a chapter to reflecting on the inheritance he left to readers such as William Wordsworth, the Brontës, Charles Darwin, John Ruskin, and Charles Kingsley. Part of his legacy was practical. Alongside Gilbert White, whose *Natural History of Selborne* (1789) was a bestseller, Bewick inspired thousands of children and adults to become amateur naturalists. Visiting Europeans remarked on the British passion for ornithology; Bewick, who even at the height of his fame was a tradesman not above engraving a doorplate or a bill of sale, empowered ordinary British people to take up what had once been a gentleman's hobby.

Part of his legacy was moral. Bewick's illustrations for various editions of *Aesop's Fables* and other works depicted the similarity between animals and man so forcibly, and cruelty to animals with such disgust, that they formed an essential text in a changing social climate that refused to tolerate the abuse of horses, dogs, and wild animals such as bears and badgers for human sport. But, as Donald shows, Bewick's influence was also imaginative—and far-reaching in ways that one would not expect. One probable reader of his work was Wilhelm Müller, a German poet whose imagery mirrors Bewick's striking vignettes of lonely travelers and vagabonds passing by moonlit cemeteries. Müller's poems formed the text for Schubert's great song-cycle *Die Winterreise*: So Bewick, as a Romantic artist, may well have been important to the genesis of that work, as he was to Wordsworth's *Lyrical Ballads*.

Bewick was recently reappraised and brought back into public consciousness by Jenny Uglow's 2006 biography. Donald's study is an excellent addition to this growing field. It is academically precise and includes appendices listing the species identified in *A History of British Birds* and the level of scientific accuracy with which Bewick depicted them. But her book is also accessible and interesting to the general reader. One of the great delights of this volume is the number and quality of the pictures Donald reproduces: The illustrations alone are worth the price of the volume. Kingsley and Ruskin were among many Victorian sages who insisted that you should "know your Bewick." Like "knowing your Bible," knowing Bewick was a mark of both sound education and sensitive humanity. This book enables one to know Bewick differently, to look more closely—as his engravings invite us to do—at the habits and habitat of a *rara avis* who possessed the common touch. ♦

B&A

Mediterranean Mystery

A sudden, and inscrutable, Bronze Age catastrophe.

BY SUSAN KRISTOL

Okay, history buffs, let's do a brief test, a free-association game about the Bronze Age. I say Mycenae, you instantly shout out, "Agamemnon." I say Minoans, you say, "palace of Knossos." Troy—"Schliemann, Priam, Hecuba, Trojan horse." Egypt—"Ramses." This is easy, right? On to the next level. I say Hittites, you say—"Suppiluliuma?"

In this enjoyable new book, Eric H. Cline has set himself an ambitious task: Not only must he educate a popular audience about the wealth and power of the eastern Mediterranean civilizations of the Bronze Age, he must then make his readers care that, some time around the year 1200 B.C., these empires, kingdoms, and cities suffered a series of cataclysms from which they never recovered.

Alashiya and its forgotten King Kushmeshusha; Mitanni and its lost capital of Washukanni; wealthy Ugarit; the Kassites and the Elamites; the renegade states of Assuwa: If several mighty kingdoms that you've never heard of have disappeared, does it make a difference? And Cline makes connecting with the Late Bronze Age even more difficult for us when he maintains, with considerable vigor, that the two Late Bronze Age "events" that still resonate most powerfully today, the Trojan War and the Exodus from Egypt, are merely legends told by a later generation craving a heroic past, with little or no archaeological evidence that they occurred.

The Bronze Age did recently make a surprise appearance in the *Washington Post* Food section. Last summer, excavators in northern Israel, under Cline's direction, uncovered a wine cellar in a Canaanite palace dating to 1700 B.C. So far, they have unearthed 40 large jars, which would have held the equivalent of 3,000 bottles of wine, possibly destined for export to Egypt and Crete. This clearly was an era of wealth and global trade. What caused it to come to a crashing halt?

1177 is the year in which the Egyptian pharaoh Ramses III described an invasion of his kingdom from the north: "No land could stand before their arms, from Khatte, Qode, Carchemish, Arzawa, and Alashiya on. . . . They laid their hands upon the lands as far as the circuit of the earth, their hearts confident and trusting." Though Ramses was victorious—"Those who reached my frontier, their seed is not, their heart and soul are finished forever and ever"—Egyptian power was never quite the same afterwards.

At roughly the same time in other parts of the Late Bronze Age world of the eastern Mediterranean, many flourishing kingdoms, city-states, and empires saw the sudden dwindling of international trade; destruction caused by battles, earthquakes, and fire; the disappearance of urban populations; and the collapse of palace-dominated economies. Cuneiform writing came to an end, perhaps because it was a skill practiced only by a specialized class of scribes. The region entered the first Dark Age.

Why civilizations collapsed within a span of a half-century in so many locations has long been a mystery. And despite the best archaeological tools (including fossil pollen analysis, oxygen-isotope data, stable carbon isotope data, and sediment cores from the Mediterranean to detect sea surface temperatures and precipitation levels on land), the hypotheses advanced today are not very different from those in a standard history textbook from 40 years ago. The elusive Sea Peoples who battled with Ramses III are frequently mentioned as one of the culprits. But it's debatable whether they were warriors or peaceable farming folks looking to integrate into a new society and find a better life for their families. And why were these Sea Peoples, possibly coming from Sardinia, Sicily, and the Aegean, on the move? Was it because of climate change and an ensuing famine back home?

If the science of current climate change is controversial, the analysis of Bronze Age climate change, with its bold claims of precision, seems even more unreliable. Cline quotes an archaeologist who maintains that "there was a sharp increase in Northern Hemisphere temperatures immediately before the collapse of the Mycenaean palatial centers, possibly causing droughts, but . . . a sharp decrease in temperature during the abandonment of these centers, meaning that it first got hotter and then suddenly colder." As Cline (sanely) points out, "Exciting as these findings are, at this point we must also

1177 B.C.
The Year Civilization Collapsed
by Eric H. Cline
Princeton, 264 pp., $29.95

An Ugarit letter from King Ini-Teshup of Karkemish, 13th-12th century B.C.

NEWSCOM

Susan Kristol, a classicist, lives in Northern Virginia.

acknowledge that droughts have been frequent in this region throughout history, and that they have not always caused civilizations to collapse."

Cline evaluates theories from a host of academics. He dutifully discusses systems collapse, complexity theory, and "hyper-coherence," only to conclude that "it sounds nice, but does it really advance our understanding? Is it more than just a fancy way to state a fairly obvious fact, namely, that complicated things can break down in a variety of ways?"

Lion Gate, Mycenae, 1250 B.C.

Much more interesting is the description of what made the Late Bronze Age something to write home about. And write they did: There are archives full of clay tablets in Linear B and cuneiform script, in early Greek, Akkadian, and Hittite (interestingly, the earliest known Indo-European language), and an abundance of Egyptian hieroglyphics. The tablets contain detailed records of royal marriages, battles, and peace treaties, such as an account of the Battle of Qadesh in 1274 B.C. and the ensuing peace treaty. (Originally inscribed on two silver tablets in Egyptian and Akkadian and still extant in ancient stone and clay versions, the words of the treaty currently adorn the entrance to the United Nations Security Council.) Or this heartrending letter from someone in the kingdom of Ugarit:

> When your messenger arrived, the army was humiliated and the city was sacked. Our food in the threshing floors was burnt and the vineyards were also destroyed. Our city is sacked. May you know it! May you know it!

We study ancient history and archaeology for a variety of salutary reasons. General Allenby, for instance, claimed that he beat the Germans and Turks at Megiddo in 1918 because he had read a translation of Thutmose III's account of his victory there in 1479 B.C. But sometimes ancient history is just fun, because it reminds us that many material aspects of life haven't changed all that much in more than 3,000 years. As Cline tells us, an Akkadian tablet from 1750 B.C. discusses a Mesopotamian king's use of ice in his summer drinks, which included beer, wine, and "fermented barley-based drinks flavored with either pomegranate juice or licorice-like aniseed." Another tablet from the period mentions a "pair of leather shoes in the Caphtorian style" that were sent to the king of Babylon but were returned. The Minoan and Mycenaean word for sesame is "sa-sa-ma, coming from the Ugaritic word *šš̃mn*, the Akkadian word *šammaššammu*, and the Hurrian word *sumisumi*."

Cline calls this period "the first truly global age." A wrecked ship from 1300 B.C., discovered in 1982 off the Turkish coast at Uluburun, contained objects from at least seven different countries: copper from Cyprus, ebony from Nubia, raw glass ingots from Mesopotamia, terebinth resin in Canaanite storage vessels, a small bronze and gold statue of a Canaanite deity, a stone scepter-mace from the Balkans, Egyptian scarabs, and tin and lapis lazuli from Afghanistan. The sheer wealth of these empires, their global reach, their treaties and their trade agreements, command our respect, even if their cultures seem not to have contributed much, at least not directly, to future developments in religion, art, science, philosophy, literature, or technology.

Which leads us back to our original question: Does the collapse of Late Bronze Age civilizations make a difference to us, or is it just a historical curiosity? Cline mentions the 2008 banking crisis and the possibility of devastating climate change as evidence that our own civilization could crumble at any moment. He doesn't mention, but we can hardly forget, the terrorists who daily plot to destroy the West—perhaps the equivalent of those marauding Sea Peoples of the Bronze Age.

The Federal Energy Regulatory Commission recently reported that if just nine electric-transmission substations were destroyed in the United States, we could be plunged into a national power outage lasting weeks or even months—perhaps not enough to destroy our civilization, but surely a calamity worth pondering. Civilizational collapse could happen to us; but aside from voting for bank reform, funding the defense budget, buying a Prius, studying subsistence farming, and joining the NRA, it's not clear what we might do to prevent it or survive it.

The end of the Bronze Age may be most interesting to us for what was to emerge on the far side. After a period of relative chaos, the Mediterranean world reorganized itself. Some of the products of this new age were the Homeric epics, ancient Israel, the widespread use of iron, the democratic city-state, private mercantile enterprise, and the prototype of the alphabet we use today.

In a sense, we of the Information Age are still living in an extension of the Iron Age. Let's enjoy it while it lasts. ♦

NEWSCOM

B&A

Horror Hits Home

A tale of the Warsaw Ghetto and its aftermath.

BY DIANE SCHARPER

In October 1940, the Germans, with help from the Poles, crammed 400,000 Jews into the Warsaw ghetto. They sealed off the ghetto from the rest of the city with six-foot-high walls topped with barbed wire, ensuring that few could escape. If any tried, they were seized, often by Polish "betrayers," who, for a few coins, turned them in to the Germans. Inside the ghetto, Jews lived in squalid, inhumane conditions, sometimes seven to a room. When Warsaw was liberated in 1945, there were few Jews left in the ghetto, and only 11,500 Jews in the entire city.

Gwen Edelman's second novel combines fact and fiction to tell a compelling story about two such survivors. Returning to Poland 40 years after the war, Jascha Kroll and his wife Lilka find a new meaning in the notion that one cannot go home again. Jascha has been invited to read from his best-seller about life in the Warsaw ghetto. Lilka accompanies him.

Lilka is exhilarated and feels as though she's truly coming home. Jascha's not happy to be back and tells her that they have no "home" in Poland. Everything they see during their short visit proves him right. The action is simple enough. But the way Edelman tells the story makes it compelling and memorable, as she juxtaposes scenes of sex, love, and tenderness with torture, chaos, and horror.

She knows the territory well. Her first novel, *War Story* (2001), which also concerned the effects of World War II, won France's Prix du Premier Roman Étranger and was a Koret Jewish Book Award Finalist.

Diane Scharper teaches English at Towson University.

The Train to Warsaw
A Novel
by Gwen Edelman
Grove, 208 pp., $24

Gwen Edelman

Told as one long conversation, the novel unfolds over approximately 36 hours. During the conversation, Lilka and Jascha reminisce about life in the ghetto, where, like thousands of other Jews, they suffered deprivation and torment. There are few descriptors to indicate who is talking, or where or when the scene takes place, and their conversation tends to meander, giving the story a dreamlike effect, but also making it challenging to read. Yet, because of the concrete details, one is seldom confused as to what's happening.

As Jascha and Lilka discuss the hardships they withstood during the war, they remember grisly scenes of Jews being herded into trains to be taken to prison camps and of Jews being forced to shovel snow with no coats, hats, or shoes. Their conversation, which begins with observations about the train ride through the snowy but beautiful Polish countryside, becomes darker and more ominous with every memory. Why did Poles allow the Germans to torture the Jews? Why did Poles conspire against Polish Jews? These questions drive every aspect of this novel: the setting, the plot, the characters, their lives. It's the question behind Jascha's novel, and it's the reason why he accepted the invitation to read his story in Warsaw. It's not that he wants an answer; he wants to confront ordinary Poles with the evil they've done to their own countrymen.

When, in the final section, Jascha reads from his novel about a Jewish child from the Warsaw ghetto, several people object to the description of horrific events: Some complain that Jascha lacks good manners and protest his reading; others leave. Finally, 5 people remain from an audience of 100. The few who stay excuse themselves, saying that they had been unaware of what was happening or that they, too, had suffered during the war.

Jascha accepts none of their excuses. "You can leave," he says. "But that won't change what happened here."

Each paragraph in *The Train to Warsaw* is like a separate prose poem, driving home Edelman's point that some evil can never be forgotten and is beyond forgiveness. She uses white space, imagery, repetition, allusive dialogue, fragmentation, disjointed conversations, and juxtaposition to underscore her effect. Indeed, the imagery and tone are reminiscent of scenes from Marguerite Duras's film *Hiroshima, Mon Amour* (1959), whose central image of a powdery residue from the atomic bomb is similar to Edelman's repeated mention of snow falling, a white powder covering everything. Both stories concern events from the Second World War, both achieve their effects through juxtaposition, and both possess a quiet intensity that escalates to a nightmarish horror.

The effect can be chilling, as when Lilka describes a former teacher, still young but toothless and haggard,

DAPHNE YOUREE

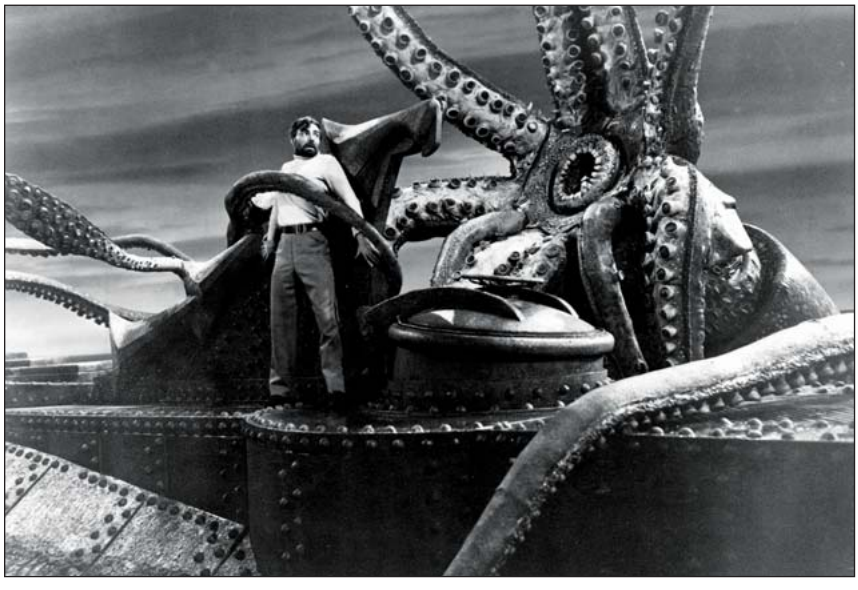
dying from starvation. Or when she tells of her elderly grandfather walking to a Hebrew bookstore and being shot by "tourists" for sport. The most horrendous scene occurs during the 1944 ghetto uprising, when Jewish fighters burn to death while Polish couples on the other side of the wall listen to music and ride a carousel at a spring fair. ♦

B&A

Hello, Suckers

What you don't know about the versatile octopus.

BY TEMMA EHRENFELD



James Mason and friend in '20,000 Leagues Under the Sea' (1954)

This volume is full of unexpected revelations, not for the squeamish, starting with the fact that the preferred plural of "octopus" is "octopuses," not "octopi." Octopuses, we learn, can lurch onto land and can change color and shape in seconds. After 272 pages in the company of these animals, they no longer seem weird because of their four pairs of arms lined with suction cups. They're weird because of the ways they contradict our ideas about intelligence.

Even Aristotle got it wrong, although octopuses are, of course, plentiful in Greece (where they're often served in balsamic vinegar). When he wrote that "the octopus is a stupid creature, for it will approach a man's hand if it be lowered in the water," he missed that octopuses are more curious than afraid. Like small children, they grab unfamiliar objects, such as underwater cameras, and seem to embrace and fondle them. They *gaze* through the glass at visitors to aquariums and, like attentive dogs, watch their researchers.

This is all the stranger since, unlike dogs (or dolphins or bees or humans), octopuses are not social. An octopus is a model of self-reliance. Its mother dies as soon as her eggs hatch, and the father soon thereafter. It lives for six months to five years, depending on the species, without bonding to a mate or learning from other octopuses. No man is an island, but every octopus is. Yet octopuses react to us, turning "black with joy" or "white with anger" in response to human actions.

Why might a loner behave in ways that seem social? One argument is that extreme self-reliance requires extreme engagement with the environment. We associate intelligence with dependence in childhood, longevity, and civilization; but in the case of the octopus, it seems that the opposite conditions promote curiosity, problem-solving, speedy learning, and sensitivity.

Roland Anderson, a retired biologist from the Seattle Aquarium, tells author Katherine Harmon Courage that octopuses are the "smartest invertebrate," and to prove the point, he lists a set of very human traits:

> They are a predator, they go out to find food, they build dens and then modify them, they use tools, they use spatial navigation, they have play behavior, they recognize individual people.

In one experiment, Anderson and his colleagues gave a female giant Pacific octopus named Billy a plastic bottle of herring with a childproof cap. In 55 minutes, she figured out that she needed to push and turn the lid simultaneously and was able to open it; with practice, she could do the trick in five minutes. An octopus can also learn to distinguish vertical from horizontal bars and the letter "V" from "W." The intelligence of the octopus lies "somewhere in the middle of the birds—maybe not as smart as an African gray parrot," Courage writes. And birds are an impressive bunch. Many species seem sharper than we once guessed, the author notes, largely because researchers are getting better at reading behavior without imposing a human bias. Still, it's hard to gauge when imaginative observation is influenced by affection. People who study lobsters, for example, claim that they are smarter than octopuses.

EVERETT COLLECTION

Octopus!
The Most Mysterious Creature in the Sea
by Katherine Harmon Courage
Current, 272 pp., $27.95

Temma Ehrenfeld is a writer in New York.

Katherine Harmon Courage reports several tales in which octopuses react to human actions. One researcher describes an octopus pushing up the lid of its tank, apparently trying to get out. The researcher banged on the lid and the animal retreated. The next day, as she sat nearby, the octopus lifted up the lid, brought its funnel to the crack, and squirted a jet of water at her. To test whether an octopus can distinguish between two people, Roland Anderson created a good-cop/bad-cop routine. The bad guy approached a giant Pacific octopus and harassed it with a bristly stick; the good one would come close and feed it. After two weeks, when the bad guy entered the room, the octopus "would shrink back into the corner, it would turn its suckers out to be ready to fight, and it would blow jets of water toward that person," says Anderson. It also assumed an expression that scientists identify with aggressiveness. When the good cop arrived, the octopus "would come up to the surface or raise its arms up toward the surface," ready to receive the anticipated food.

Octopuses even exhibit signs of what we call boredom. Trapped in a small, bare tank, they are likelier to throw themselves against its side, to eject ink, or to turn white. When an octopus gets time in a more interesting environment and is then put back in a bare tank, it may eat its own arm.

That need for stimulation may seem surprising in creatures with such a smallish brain; but, upsetting our assumptions again, most of their neurons are in their arms. These jointless appendages have a huge range of motion: too wide, scientists argue, to be subject entirely to centralized control. Octopuses do sometimes stiffen their pliable arms into a three-jointed appendage like ours, perhaps when the brain needs to keep track of them. Thus, the arms are both under the control of the brain and independent of it. Some species can eject an arm, which slithers off and distracts predators to chase it.

A severed arm remains active for some time, as Courage amusingly demonstrates in a story about a Korean restaurant in Flushing, New York, where customers select a live octopus from a tank. (The manager tells Courage that, in Korea, farmers feed raw octopus to sick cows and bulls, which consequently recover from their illnesses in a day.) The octopus meal arrives cut-up but alive, along with plates of dipping sauces: "The muscular arm segments look like little slugs, writhing about, gray and stubby, seething all over one another," Courage writes. The suckers grip the plate: "Once you do manage to get one of these dang things on your chopsticks, it will likely wrap or suction onto the wood with one end, another end twisting around in the air, as if exploring like a blind inchworm." Inside the author's mouth, the suckers grab her gums until she pries them off with her tongue.

Octopus! feels a bit plumped out for length, and the author, a journalist who often contributes to *Scientific American*, shares too much information about her travel arrangements and upsets as she visits Spanish fishing boats and Italian laboratories. But the prose is enthusiastic, funny, and unpretentious, steering clear of the style of science writing that risks too much metaphor and speculation. The octopus remains intriguing and baffling. ♦

B&A

Vanna-ty Fare

The confessions of a 'Wheel of Fortune' fan.

BY JOHN SIMON

Let me say, remotely alluding to Robert Frost, that something there is that loves a puzzle. Any kind of puzzle, as long as it makes the solver feel good. His conquest cannot compare with Genghis Khan's or Napoleon's, but conquest there is, and the glow of satisfaction.

How much more so when monetary gain is involved! That's what's at stake with *Wheel of Fortune*. As you may know, the show's title alludes to the Roman goddess Fortuna, to whose wheel our ancestors were attached, like it or not. At the top, everything went their way; at the bottom, they might as well have been up the proverbial creek—assuming the phrase had already been coined.

That clever fellow Merv Griffin (1925-2007), whose eponymous television show you may have been born too late to enjoy, invented two television shows that still follow each other: *Jeopardy!* is on at 7 P.M., *Wheel of Fortune* at 7:30 (or vice versa in some locales). Both shows have passionate fans. *Jeopardy!*, to be sure, is for persons with intellectual aspirations. There, the contestants must pose in question form the response to clues such as: "Chris Christie is the governor of this state"—which, of course, is important. Or, less important: "This famous English writer is buried on the island of Samoa." (The latter, by the way, stumped them all.) Clues about the arts are harder for contestants than those about, say, sports. Given the clue "He won the Heisman Trophy in 1947," the contestants would have no problem responding, "Who is Johnny Lujack?" Their memories are fabulous, and their expertise with obscure facts, ditto.

But not every TV viewer is intellectual enough for that program. *Wheel of Fortune*, however, is for everyone, whether one is a contestant or merely a viewer at home. What the contestants on *Wheel of Fortune* are confronted with is a screen with rows of small empty boxes, like a fresh crossword puzzle. They are given a clue, such

John Simon is an author and critic in New York.

as "Person" or "Thing" or "Phrase" or "What Am I Doing?" In front of them is a large wheel that they spin: It bears various monetary or other awards—exotic trips or half a car (you must get the other half later)—on cards, and also several punitive cards. They must pick a consonant, and if it occurs in the correct answer, they get what is on offer—say $450 or $900, or a luxury hotel stay on an island other than Samoa. And if there are, for instance, three of the same consonant, they get thrice that sum.

'Wheel of Fortune' on location in Las Vegas (2013)

When a contestant picks a letter *not* in the correct answer, the next contestant gets his or her turn to spin, and some contestants amass a tidy sum. There is one pitfall, however: When the wheel lands on BANKRUPT, the unhappy contestant loses whatever he had gained. The beauty of it all is that anyone can win on the picked letters—the only prerequisite being familiarity with the alphabet—or better yet, by coming up with the full solution when there are enough letters in the boxes.

I won't go into the various details of how and what one wins, but if you win $100,000, like a recent contestant, or gain a good trip, say, to France or Greece (Hawaii and Las Vegas strike me as somewhat less desirable), you are not Fortune's fool (Shakespeare, *Romeo and Juliet*, Act III, Scene 1) and can giggle, laugh, and jubilate with the best.

Here I must point out that *Wheel* contestants are carefully chosen. Some of them have a husband who proposed on a sailboat or while riding on an elephant. Some have 11 siblings rooting for them back in Alaska. Some are from a deserving minority—black, Hispanic, Canadian—or have various odd jobs in unlikely places, allowing Pat Sajak, the dapper host, to display his whimsical wit. Quite a guy that Sajak, equally capable of offering heartening quips for losers (along with a consolatory gift of $1,000) and a pat on the back, with empathetic gusto, for winners, as he ushers them toward a bonus round at *another* wheel, where they may win a further prize of anything from tens of thousands of dollars to a gleaming new car standing by on the sidelines.

But what's in it for us home viewers? All sorts of things. Many contestants carry on like jumping jacks, letting out unearthly squeals of triumph, terrific for earning viewer empathy. (This includes cheers from their partners, when they are playing in pairs, either conjugal or collegial.) But there is also the chance, during Sajak's questioning, for the contestants to tell wonderful stories about things that have befallen them or what they and their wonderful spouse will do with their winnings.

Even finer viewing is the pretty hostess, Vanna White, who uncovers the spaces where a letter has been correctly called. She does this with a delightful tap, displaying an allure that has only increased over the years. She wears an undeterrable smile and enviably flattering clothes, usually floor-length dresses. It is also gratifying to observe the losers, especially when BANKRUPT strips them of considerable winnings, including, perhaps, the aforementioned car—run over, as it were, by Fortune's wheel. At such times we are allowed to expend, according to our natures, either Samaritan compassion or guilty *schadenfreude*, both equally satisfying in different ways.

For us viewers, there is also the modest pleasure of having guessed the correct solution, perhaps even before the apt contestant. This does not fill our pockets, but it does fill our souls with justified pride for having figured out "Refreshing Coconut Water" (clue: Food and Drink) or "On the Job Training" (clue: Thing) or "An Extraordinary Experience" (clue: Event) or "Stop Texting Me I'm Cramming for Finals" (clue: Phrase) or "Superstition by Stevie Wonder" (clue: Song and Artist) or "Electric Toothbrush" (clue: Around the House). All comfortable, homey things; no Robert Louis Stevenson's grave here.

Blurt out "The Latest Technology" (clue: Thing) 10 seconds before the *hausfrau* with five children or the assistant librarian from the corn belt who studies Chinese on the side, and you bask in the warmth of the halo around your prescient head.

And at the end of the program, you get to see, as they rush up to the stage to embrace the winner, the beautiful wife or the handsome husband or the beaming kinfolk or the best friend—whoever the invited rooters might be. And whatever pleasantries Sajak exchanges with them—not to mention the cute concluding duologue between Pat and Vanna, bristling with highly paid bonhomie—all this, dear home audience, you're invited to wallow in, looking forward to tomorrow's show—except, alas, on weekends. ♦

TOM DONOGHUE / POLARIS / NEWSCOM

B&A

Variation on a Theme

An old idea gets a surprisingly fresh treatment.

BY JOHN PODHORETZ

Adultery comedies usually follow a pat formula: A perfectly sensible married person is being cheated on. Revenge is plotted, and the punishment usually involves taking advantage of the fact that the person with whom the spouse is cheating is either a gorgeous bimbo or a brainless hunk. *The Other Woman* is an inventive riff on this formula. There's a sensible person and there's a ditz, but here the sensible person is the mistress. The wife is the ditz.

Cameron Diaz, a very serious and very sexy type-A lawyer, falls for a wildly attractive banker played by Nikolaj Coster-Waldau (the incestuous swordsman Jaime on HBO's *Game of Thrones*). She doesn't know he's married to Leslie Mann, an adorable chatterbox who has never had an unspoken thought.

When they both find out about the deception, the mistress retreats into cold anger and wants nothing more to do with him. The wife is another story. She won't leave the mistress alone. She is too embarrassed to talk about the betrayal with anyone else. The wife keeps showing up at the mistress's loft in Tribeca, sometimes with her massive Dalmatian in tow, and basically forces the creation of a friendly alliance between them.

The mistress warns the wife to toughen up, get her ducks in a row, and make preparations for what is certain to be a brutal divorce. The wife, who stopped working long ago, is entirely unprepared for the troubles that are now besetting her. The mistress, still in a rage, decides to help.

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

The Other Woman
Directed by Nick Cassavetes

Leslie Mann, Cameron Diaz, Kate Upton

The plot thickens when they learn Coster-Waldau has yet another girlfriend, a drop-dead gorgeous 21-year-old played by the model Kate Upton, whom they befriend as well.

This is the first produced screenplay by a young writer named Melissa K. Stack, who displays a terrific sense of how to build a character and how to give these performers a chance to shine. The standout here is Leslie Mann, who does so many wonderful things with her meaty part that there aren't sufficient superlatives to praise her comic timing, her always unexpected way with a line of dialogue, and her wild grace as a physical comedienne.

Mann, who is 42, has had a very interesting career. She first popped up in the 1990s as a hot chick with a voice that sounded as though she'd swallowed helium. Then she all but vanished for a decade as she raised two children with her husband, the writer-director Judd Apatow. In 2005, he cast her in a one-scene role in his breakout movie, *The 40-Year-Old Virgin*, as Steve Carell's crazy and drunken blind date, who screams "let's get some French toast" as she smashes up her car. She was so sensational you could practically hear everybody in the movie theater thinking, "Wow, who *is* that?"

Apatow featured her again in *Knocked Up* (2007), in a dazzling send-up of herself as a sharp and brittle former-party-girl-turned-L.A.-mom—and then as an overly dramatic former actress in the brilliant *Funny People* (2009), the most underrated movie of our time. At the very least, *The Other Woman* proves that Mann doesn't need Apatow to excel on screen; there is no other actress, save, perhaps, Melissa McCarthy, who can generate as many laughs as Mann can.

Cameron Diaz, whose involvement got the movie made in the first place, proves herself an exceptionally generous actress. She understands that she's basically the straight man here, the George Burns to Leslie Mann's Gracie Allen, and taking the less flashy and more straightforward part is a very difficult thing for a movie star to do. It is easy to overlook just how good she is here, because she is so convincing both in her icy hauteur and in her slow melt.

Like Mann, the movie's director, Nick Cassavetes, has had an almost unclassifiable career. His credits include the delirious romantic drama *The Notebook* (2004), which made a matinee idol out of Ryan Gosling, and the horrifying *Alpha Dog* (2006), a true-crime story about the kidnapping and murder of a 15-year-old boy in Los Angeles that was witnessed by 38 people who did nothing to stop it. Nothing in Cassavetes's past work suggested the facility for slick comedy he displays in *The Other Woman*.

Alas, as the movie moves into its third act, *The Other Woman* turns into a flaccid, uncredited remake of the sprightly 1996 Goldie Hawn/Bette Midler/Diane Keaton comedy *The First Wives Club*. But until then, it's a really fresh and surprising variation on one of the oldest comic tropes in the book. ♦

"The production team for [CNN series 'Chicagoland'] told [Rahm] Emanuel's staff that particular scenes would present the mayor in a positive light, with one of the producers expressing a desire to showcase the mayor 'as the star that he really is.'"

—Chicago Tribune, *April 25, 2014*

PARODY