

**THE
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the weekly

Standard

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IRAN'S SUPREME CENSOR

Ali Khamenei,
deadly literary critic
BY ALI ALFONEH AND
REUEL MARC GERECHT

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Smith's 'Racist' President

When last we wrote about the womyn at Smith College, they were protesting the invitation of Christine Lagarde, a French leftist in good standing and the first woman to head the International Monetary Fund, to be the commencement speaker at the school's 2014 graduation. The Smithies—both students and faculty—believed that Lagarde was insufficiently radical because she ran an organization that exists as a mere tool for neocolonial oppression. Lagarde withdrew.

This came after a year in which tensions flared between students and the administration over the issue of “transgendered” applicants. The school's liberal, feminist administrators maintained that high school boys who claimed to be women should not be allowed into the women's college, because this would be transgressing upon sacred space. The school's liberal feminist students believed that this position amounts to sexist bigotry.

All of which is to say that Smith College is a charming example of an environment where the liberal grown-ups are always struggling to stay in step with the radical children. Often with amusing—if depressing—results.

So it was no surprise that the Smith campus was thrown into turmoil yet again two weeks ago when the president, Kathleen McCartney, attempted to support protests that had begun to crop up in the community concerning the Ferguson grand jury decision.

As the *Daily Hampshire Gazette* reported, McCartney sent out a campus-wide email about Ferguson on December 6. She began by proclaiming, “As members of the Smith community we are struggling, and we are

hurting. . . . In my conversations with you, I hear discouragement as you share how your lives have been disrupted, how you have lost faith in the quest for racial equality, and how you fear for people of color. . . . We gather in vigil, we raise our voices in protest; yet we wake again to news of violence



Smith's Kathleen McCartney

that reminds us, painfully, of the stark reality of racial injustice.” McCartney then provided a list of activities designed “to hold and heal those who are in pain.”

In truth, McCartney's prescribed activities were thin gruel—a vigil, a panel discussion, “listening”—you know how these things are. She then closed by saying, “We are united in our insistence that all lives matter.” At which point, all hell broke loose.

The phrase “All Lives Matter” was also the subject header of McCartney's email, and the Smith community did not like it. Not one bit.

Your first reflex may be to think that the Smithies were offended that McCartney was trying to sneak in a

cryptic reference about abortion and the unborn. But that's inconceivable, of course. No, the womyn of Smith were offended because saying “all lives matter” was an act of racist white privilege. Really.

The phrase “all lives matter” “minimizes the anti-blackness of this the current situation,” wrote one student. Another told the *Gazette*, “It felt like she was invalidating the experience of black lives.” A third added, “A lot of my news feed was negative remarks about her as a person.” Well, of course.

Within hours, McCartney was groveling for forgiveness. She sent out a follow-up email that should stand for all time as a symbol of what the liberal academy has become:

I am writing as a follow-up to my email from earlier today to reflect what I have already learned from members of the community. Specifically, I regret that I was unaware the phrase/hashtag “all lives matter” has been used by some to draw attention away from the focus on institutional violence against Black people. . . .

I thank those of you who shared your wisdom and wise counsel with me today. I am committed to working as a white ally, to learning from the lived experiences of people of color, and to acknowledging mistakes, despite my best intentions.

There's a lot to marvel at, but perhaps the best detail is McCartney's capitalization of “Black people” but lowercase “white ally.” We hope this small acknowledgment of the hierarchy of victimology was enough to mitigate some of the harm she did to the tender souls under her charge. ♦

The Crony Cromnibus

There are many signs that our politics are broken; one of them is the constant need to create new

words to more exactly describe the terrible state of affairs. Most recently, we've been saddled with “cronibus,” which is a portmanteau of “continuing resolution or CR” and “omnibus.” A continuing resolution

is a way to appropriate funds to keep the government operational, usually done under some form of duress and/or out of a desire to avoid the hard choices involved in drawing up a new budget. An omnibus bill is a bunch

SMITH COLLEGE

of disparate bills lumped together so they can be voted on at once. It's basically a gimmick to pass unpopular bills by forcing members of Congress to approve the bad legislation along with the good.

A cromnibus bill wasn't just a bad idea; it was two very bad ideas rolled into one. Naturally, President Obama has indicated he will sign the bill if it passes. If the House GOP and this Democratic White House agree on appropriations, you can be sure that the legislation is bad for taxpayers. And after handing Republicans a historic victory in last month's election, we're sure voters are going to be thrilled to learn the supposed party of fiscal responsibility slapped together a metric truckload of spending bills on short notice and got to work strong-arming the bare minimum number of votes needed to get it passed.

Though it is currently fashionable to pass the bill to find out what's in it, at *National Review Online* Yuval Levin was masochistic enough to read the cromnibus ahead of time. He notes the following section of the bill as a classic example of how bad legislation gets made:

SEC. 102. MODIFICATION OF TREATMENT OF CERTAIN HEALTH ORGANIZATIONS. (a) IN GENERAL.—Paragraph (5) of section 833(c) of the Internal Revenue Code of 1986 is amended— (1) by striking “this section” and inserting “paragraphs (2) and (3) of subsection (a)”, and (2) by inserting “and for activities that improve health care quality” after “clinical services”. (b) EFFECTIVE DATE.—The amendments made by this section shall apply to taxable years beginning after December 31, 2009.

What exactly does this mean? Well, this essentially rejiggers the way medical loss ratios are calculated in Obamacare, which in turn dictates how much money insurers, as private companies, can spend on overhead vs. paying for medical care. Except in this case, it only applies to one insurer—Blue Cross/



Blue Shield—and is retroactive four years. One of the nation's most powerful insurance companies would get a huge fiscal break from Obamacare regulations, giving them a competitive advantage over the rest of America's insurance companies (nearly all of whom lobbied for Obamacare in the first place).

In other words, the 2,700-page Obamacare legislation created a problem for insurers, so one insurer lobbied for a loophole buried in opaque legalese in a 1,600-page omnibus bill wrapped in a continuing resolution. Once you know what's

really going on here, it's more accurate to say the CR in cromnibus stands for cronyism. ♦

Fire at Will, Commander!

THE SCRAPBOOK was thrilled to learn that the U.S. Navy finally has a fully operational laser—and, no, not the kind we've been using for years with guidance systems, but rather an actual laser *weapon*.

According to *USNI News*, “The U.S. Navy has declared an experi-

mental laser weapon on its Afloat Forward Staging Base (AFSB) in the Persian Gulf an operational asset, and U.S. Central Command has given permission for the commander of the ship to defend itself with the weapon, the head of the Office of Naval Research (ONR) told reporters on Wednesday.”

This 30-kilowatt “asset” is known simply as LaWS, which stands for Laser Weapon System (although we would have preferred to call it a blaster). ONR rear admiral Matthew Klunder explained to *USNI News* that the laser “was installed aboard USS *Ponce* this summer as part of a \$40 million research and development effort from ONR and Naval Sea Systems Command (NAVSEA) to test the viability of directed energy weapons in an operational environment.”

In a video provided by ONR, you can see the laser, which resembles a telescope, take aim and directly hit moving sea targets as well as a drone in midflight. There aren’t any mas-

sive explosions, just a sudden burst of smoke. In fact, the laser itself is not visible (unless, perhaps, it were fired in the midst of fog). And LaWS does not have the capacity to obliterate planetary systems. At least not yet.

You can watch the Navy’s video by going to www.youtube.com/watch?v=D0DbgNju2wE. ♦

Sentences We Didn’t Finish

‘In the last several years, allegations that college administrators mishandled complaints, or even discouraged victims from filing complaints, have cropped up at Columbia, Yale, Amherst and Vanderbilt, among dozens of other universities. The exact scope of the problem, though, remains muddied. Earlier this year, Vice President Joseph Biden Jr. said that ‘one in five of every one of those young women . . . ’” (“Rolling Stone and Rape on Campus,” *New York Times*, December 8). ♦

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Plato's Diner

Urban strivers like to insist suburbia is a soul-deadening place to warehouse failed ambition. I, however, feel no need to defend my choice of safer streets, lower taxes, better schools, and local officials who are misguided rather than criminal. In fact, when my wife and I finally abandoned Washington, D.C., for Northern Virginia four years ago, we really had only one regret: We could no longer walk to Jimmy T's.

My wife and I are not the only ones with an unnatural affection for the place. I casually mentioned it recently, and a former colleague immediately responded, "Jimmy T's is the world's most perfect diner. The *form* of diner."

Maybe this has the ring of hyperbole, but, honestly, I can't disagree. In some respects, it's a unique place. Just five blocks down East Capitol Street, it has a majestic view of the U.S. Capitol. It's the only commercial enterprise on a residential block and occupies the first floor of a historic townhouse surrounded by a large brick patio.

For years, the only sign was a piece of paper taped to the inside of the window that said "Jimmy T's." These days there's a more permanent sign, though we longtime patrons have mixed feelings about it.

Inside, it feels familiar and lived-in. There's a pressed-tin ceiling, a long counter with stools, three beat-up wooden booths, and a few tables. They still use a mechanical cash register (they don't take credit cards), and the walls and shelves are adorned with bizarre and sentimental detritus of the kind that can only be earned by a beloved neighborhood establishment over the course of four decades.

Washington and the surrounding neighborhood have undergone massive gentrification in recent years, but Jimmy T's hasn't changed. There aren't many places left you can see a senator standing in line to eat breakfast with everyone else.

The joint just feels alive, and in some respects, it is. It's run by John and Cynde, who are still rais-



ing their children upstairs. In fact, if you go there on a weekend, there's a good chance one of the kids will be your waiter.

Cynde's father, the one and only Jimmy, started the place while he was also working full-time as an elevator mechanic at the Library of Congress. Cynde has been working there full-time, breakfast and lunch six days a week, since 1978. If there's any more uplifting way to start the day than watching her Greek-immigrant work ethic maneuver eggs around a crowded flattop grill, I have yet to find it. Somehow she manages to cheerfully greet the regulars walking in the door while keeping all the orders straight.

Mind you, there's nothing particularly fancy about the food. Specials

are written on a white board behind the register, but the menu is pretty standard diner fare—only consistently better than you would expect (as are the prices). They have simply the best burger in the city, because it is deliciously uncomplicated. Each patty is made to order, and the lettuce and tomato are always fresh. Cynde will allow pickle and American cheese if you're feeling adventurous. The *form* of burger.

This is reason enough to love the place, but it also happens to be where I got to know my wife.

When we met, she was living catercorner across the street, and we would go to Jimmy T's together every Saturday. During the initial stages of the arrangement, this involved her telling me over coffee how her date the previous evening went, while I gritted my teeth and deftly plotted my Steve McQueen-esque escape from the friendzone. John, who is rather imposing, by the way, gave me the stink-eye for years until he ascertained my intentions toward her were honorable. He finally relented on the morning of our wedding when he refused

to let me pay for breakfast.

After we were married, our housing arrangements were determined in no small part by our proximity to Jimmy T's. Alas, the inevitable suburban migration means we only get back to the place a handful of times every year. But if we wait too long, we inevitably feel the gravitational pull of Jimmy T's.

John plies our children with milkshakes, and their eyes light up when he hands them two dollar bills. In between bites of burger and sips of coffee, we peruse the newspaper together and it almost feels like when we first met.

I've been to Paris, and it's nice, but we'll always have Jimmy T's.

MARK HEMINGWAY

A Tortured Report

For most of last week, the report on enhanced interrogations produced by Democrats on the Senate Select Committee on Intelligence dominated headlines. To the extent that there was a debate at all, it was one-sided. News coverage routinely described the findings as the “Senate torture report,” often failing even to note that it was written exclusively by Democratic staff or account for the differences between techniques used as part of the CIA program and abuses committed outside of that program.

We have no doubts that there were abuses. And some of those abuses, if they happened as the report describes, are horrifying and inexcusable. There is no justification, ever, for pureeing the meal of a detainee and inserting the liquefied results in his anus. This isn’t interrogation, it’s torture.

But approved techniques, including some that test the limits of what ought to be morally permissible, were effective. The report’s attempt to demonstrate otherwise is entirely unpersuasive, and its case is marked by the kind of breathtaking intellectual dishonesty that should make us all wary of trusting its conclusions.

Consider the case of Abu Zubaydah. The Feinstein report claims that Zubaydah’s identification of Jose Padilla, the “dirty bomb” plotter: (1) was of little value, (2) came before he was subjected to enhanced interrogation, and (3) helps prove that EITs were ineffective. Only one of those claims is true, and even that’s true only on a technicality.

The Feinstein report says “there was significant intelligence in CIA databases acquired prior to—and independently of—the CIA’s Detention and Interrogation Program to fully identify Jose Padilla as a terrorist threat and to disrupt any terrorist plotting associated with him.”

In support of this claim, it relies on an email from February 10, 2004, from the chief of the Abu Zubaydah Task Force. The report quotes this language from the email: “AZ [Zubaydah] never really gave ‘this is the plot’ type of information. He claimed every plot/operation he had knowledge of and/or was working on was only preliminary. (Padilla and the dirty bomb plot was prior to enhanced and he never really gave us actionable intel to get them).” The “them” referenced in the email are Padilla and his accomplice, the ex-Guantánamo detainee Binyam Mohamed.

As presented, the email bolsters the case the authors of the report want to make. But they don’t quote the entire

email. And the rest of the email Democrats cite in support of their argument actually invalidates it.

The CIA’s response to the Feinstein report tells us the former head of the Abu Zubaydah Task Force went on to write that Padilla’s “identification would not have been made without the lead from Abu Zubaydah.” The CIA response also notes that the CIA officer explained in the same email that after Zubaydah had been subjected to EITs, he “became one of our most valuable sources on [sic] information on al Qa’ida players.” The CIA summarizes the rest of the officer’s email, saying the officer “backs up that assertion” regarding Zubaydah’s importance “with a detailed recitation of concrete ways in which Zubaydah facilitated interrogations of other detainees by providing specific information concerning their identities and plans.”

Why, if the authors of the Feinstein report wanted a serious examination of the value of Abu Zubaydah and the effectiveness of EITs, would they quote only the part of the email that supports their case? The question answers itself.

More to the point, how many times in the 500-page executive summary released to the public did they engage in such sleight-of-hand? We did not keep a running tally, but the answer is clear: many.

Was the CIA playing games, too? That’s not only possible, but likely. There’s little doubt that the agency sometimes exaggerated the results of its interrogations and, in the case of the “dirty bomb” plot, used old information for too long. (Padilla’s “dirty bomb” plotting, for instance, was aspirational, and he’d moved on to more realistic targeting.)

But the way to resolve those conflicts is to be more transparent, not less. Once the decision was made to release details of the program—something that deserved more debate than it received—it was incumbent upon the committee to provide as much information as possible to the public.

That didn’t happen. Instead, the authors cherry-picked information to make their case and set aside virtually everything that complicated it.

The Feinstein report goes to great lengths to distance top Democrats in both houses of Congress from the interrogation techniques and any knowledge of them. And while the report makes public reams of internal CIA documents that the authors believe help their case, the records of congressional briefings—CIA records and committee accounts—



Senator Feinstein

are largely withheld. Why is that? If Republicans and the CIA are to be believed, it's because those Democrats were informed about and supportive of the EIT program, in some cases enthusiastically supportive, until it was made public.

During a press conference on April 23, 2009, Nancy Pelosi claimed that she had not been briefed about the use of enhanced interrogation techniques. "We were not, I repeat, were not told that waterboarding or any of these other enhanced interrogation methods were used," she insisted.

Pelosi's claim has been the source of much contention over the years, with the CIA releasing a detailed timeline based on what it says were contemporaneous notes indicating that Pelosi's claims were false. And Porter Goss, who at the time of the briefing was chairman of the House Permanent Select Committee on Intelligence and later served as CIA director, directly challenged Pelosi's account. "The chairs and the ranking minority members of the House and Senate intelligence committees, known as the Gang of Four (including Pelosi), were briefed that the CIA was holding and interrogating high-value terrorists; we understood what the CIA was doing; we gave the CIA our bipartisan support; we gave the CIA funding to carry out its activities."

The Feinstein report refers to the CIA memorandum about what was briefed, but only to point out that CIA leadership cut a sentence from the draft memorandum about the meeting indicating that House leaders present had asked about the legality of the programs. Fair criticism. But why not release the entire memo? And other memos—from both the congressional oversight committees and the CIA—detailing what was briefed and when? The full memorandum about the briefing for Pelosi makes clear that her protests seven years later were false. No wonder it wasn't made public.

Similarly, we understand that retiring senator Jay Rockefeller, who served as chairman of the intelligence committee, repeatedly voiced his backing of enhanced interrogations when he was briefed. And his public statements would seem to support those claims. In an interview with CNN on March 2, 2003, shortly after the apprehension of 9/11 mastermind Khalid Sheikh Mohammed, Rockefeller said KSM would be "grilled by us. I'm sure we'll be proper with him, but I'm sure we'll be very, very tough with him." Rockefeller noted that "there are presidential memorandums that prescribe and allow certain measures to be taken, but we have to be careful." He added that getting information from KSM "will save American lives" and warned "we have no business not getting that information." When Wolf Blitzer asked him directly if the United States could outsource the interrogation to an ally that permits torture, Rockefeller said: "I wouldn't take anything off the table where he is concerned, because this is the man who has killed hundreds and hundreds of Americans over the last 10 years."

Would Rockefeller have answered this way if he had been either unaware of the EITs or opposed to them? Unlikely. But releasing the congressional briefing records would provide additional clarity.

Surely the committee, having just made public hundreds of pages of details of one of the most sensitive CIA programs in U.S. history, cannot argue that doing so would jeopardize national security. So what are they hiding?

The Obama administration's response to all of this has been disappointing but hardly surprising. Obama has abandoned his pre-presidential claims that EITs never produced valuable intelligence. And in persistent questioning from the press corps on the effectiveness of EITs, White House spokesmen clearly sought to allow for the possibility that the techniques yielded valuable information.

CIA director John Brennan, during a question-and-answer session following a nationally televised speech on EITs at CIA headquarters on December 11, was ambivalent. He listed areas in which the CIA and the Feinstein report "part ways" and included the effectiveness of EITs. "Our reviews indicate that the detention and interrogation program produced useful intelligence that helped the United States thwart attack plans, capture terrorists, and save lives. But let me be clear: We have not concluded that it was the use of EITs within that program that allowed us to obtain useful information from detainees subjected to them. The cause and effect relationship between the use of EITs and useful information subsequently provided by the detainee is, in my view, unknowable."

One cheer for that, we suppose. We remain convinced that the CIA's detention and interrogation program produced valuable information, and we have little doubt about the cause and effect relationship between the use of authorized techniques and the provision of that information. Khalid Sheikh Mohammed, a sociopathic genius, gave CIA analysts hours and hours of tutorials on al Qaeda. Analysts found these sessions essential to understanding the group and its methods and objectives. That is indisputable. Neither the facts nor common sense suggests that he would have done this voluntarily. Other detainees provided critical information on the identities and whereabouts of senior al Qaeda leaders—refusing to cooperate before EITs and choosing to do so afterwards. Brennan would have us believe this was coincidence. We believe it was not.

We recognize that people of good will have strong differences about the detention and interrogation program authorized under the previous administration. But there shouldn't be much disagreement that the U.S. government needs a robust detention and interrogation program.

We no longer have one.

The Obama administration has decided it's easier to kill suspected terrorists than it is to capture and interrogate them. And that's probably true. It is easier. But there are many costs to such a policy.

The U.S. intelligence community has huge gaps in its knowledge of al Qaeda and its branches—gaps that are wider today than they were five years ago because we are not learning directly from the enemy. And that's dangerous.

—*Stephen F. Hayes & Thomas Joscelyn*

The Flight from Reason on Campus

And the madness of crowds.

BY JAMES W. CEASER

The university is often said to be the first place in our society to look for the truth. Unfortunately, it is now one of the last places to find it.

Events surrounding a recent *Rolling Stone* article that chronicles an account of a gang rape at a University of Virginia fraternity make clear how little the critical spirit operates today on our nation's campuses. The story, which *Rolling Stone* no longer supports, begged to be treated with skepticism. Appearing in a magazine that trades in sensationalism—last year it put a glamour photo of the Boston marathon bomber on its cover—the narrative is so pat and faithful to a formula that common sense dictated caution. And most readers, one suspects, did feel at least a tinge of suspicion. Yet opinion leaders and campus activists across the nation quickly embraced the story as gospel truth, with some looking to convert it into a national movement to stem sexual violence.

At the epicenter of this event is the University of Virginia, where I have taught for over three decades. Jefferson's campus became the site of rallies, demonstrations, constant social network exchanges, and endless meetings at all levels. A discourse or rhetoric began to develop that alternated expressions of rage with pleas for compassion. Apologies were issued all the way from the university's Board of Visitors down to informal groups gathered on the campus grounds.

To be in the midst of an occurrence of this kind is to appreciate just how



A protester at a Board of Visitors meeting at the University of Virginia, November 25

powerful is the force of the crowd. What took place resembled nothing so much as the behavior of a gentle mob, postmodern style. Anyone who expressed reserve about the article or who dared to apply the adjective “alleged” to the acts described faced the charge of being indifferent to sexual violence and rape. The penalty was to be written out of the community. Best, one observer cautioned, not to poke the beast.

Like many such crowds, this one sought its own victims to punish. Strangely, retribution against the seven alleged perpetrators was treated as less important than one might have thought, for this result would have placed the onus in the affair on these individuals and their criminal acts. From the moment of the first mass rally, speakers from the

faculty and student body left no doubt that they were in search of much bigger game. Moving in a reverse pyramid from the specific to the more abstract, they decried the fraternity system, privilege (the “money-fraternity complex”), and the rape culture of the South, including Thomas Jefferson for his relations with Sally Hemings. The charges went higher and higher up the ladder of generality until the sex crime committed at UVA became a confirmation of the basic theory of privileged Western male oppression that is so widely subscribed to in the disciplines of cultural studies. The theoretical or ideological dimension that began to take hold, which relies on class profiling, accorded with the subtext of the *Rolling Stone* article that is directed less against sexual violence per se—of which Charlottesville has tragically suffered more than enough in recent years—than against sexual violence perpetrated by males belonging to society’s “upper tier.”

The abandonment of a critical spirit on our campuses is as much a failure of moral courage as of intellectual blindness. Every adult, if not every student, knows what happened at Duke eight years ago, where, under pressure from the same kind of academic crowd behavior, members of the men's lacrosse team were tainted and criminally prosecuted for rape, under charges that ultimately proved baseless. Every professor in media studies and public opinion is fully aware of the spectacular hoaxes of modern journalism, from the gripping accounts of urban poverty by Janet Cooke in the *Washington Post* to the multiple fabrications of Stephen Glass in the *New Republic*. And scholars of literature and history cannot be ignorant of the psychology of false accusation, from the biblical story of Potiphar's wife down to the rape charges by Tawana Brawley, cynically perpetuated by Al Sharpton. Yet, in the climate of the moment, none of the perspective that these teachers could have offered, even if they had wished to do so, was ever brought to bear. A crowd does not listen, particularly when it is convinced it is on the side of the angels.

AP / THE DAILY PROGRESS / RYAN M. KELLY

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University authorities might have helped to keep open a semblance of a discussion. But faced themselves with the prospect of becoming an early casualty of the crowd, which seemed ready to target the administration for alleged indifference, the leadership sought safety by joining with and trying to get out ahead of their critics. The president of the university, Teresa Sullivan, made clear where the initiative lay: “I want you to know that I have heard you, and that your words have enkindled this message.” Still, in a final gesture of restraint, she asked that the community evaluate matters in a way that would ensure that “one of our founding principles—the pursuit of truth—remains a pillar on which we can stand.” She may have had in mind Jefferson’s own promise that “this institution will be based on the illimitable freedom of the human mind. For here we are not afraid to follow truth wherever it may lead, nor to tolerate any error so long as reason is left free to combat it.”

Noble sentiments, but have they been followed? The latest and most disturbing turn in the whole sequence of events came in the aftermath of the unraveling of the published story. No one, of course, knows exactly what, if anything, happened in that fraternity house, or how many, if any, of the victim’s charges can stand up to scrutiny. Despite promises from different parties to get to the bottom of things, one coming from *Rolling Stone* no less, this matter may never be resolved. What stands out, however, is the reaction of the activists. Though disappointed that the veracity of this story of suffering and bestiality has been placed in doubt, they remain undeterred. Now they claim that the facts of this case ultimately do not matter. It is the larger cause that counts. The article, they say, has served to put a spotlight on the epidemic of sexual violence on campus. As one of them put it, “The main message we want to come out of all this is that sexual assault is a problem nationwide that we need to act in preventing. It has never been about one story.” The activists, moreover, can claim already to have won a victory. They are certain

to be at the center of the next step in the process, now underway at UVA, of adopting new measures to deal with this problem.

But the truth *does* matter. Even on the level of future policy changes, this problem can only be properly addressed if it is presented in an unbiased way, not in terms of a preconceived framework. The moral dimension of disregarding the truth also cannot be forgotten. Members of the university community have been vilified as gang rapists. Does anyone mind? The University of Virginia has been charged with bearing the full burden of national obloquy. Does anyone care? If the faculty and administration prefer to abdicate to a crowd rather than offer a defense, even in comparative terms, of the university’s reputation, then who will stand up for the place?

The answer is: no one at the university. The task has been taken up by the

local newspaper, Charlottesville’s *Daily Progress*, which has spoken with a clarity and directness unheard on the campus: “The University of Virginia and its reputation were also vandalized by this story.” The president of the university, having initially invoked the pillar of truth in her first reaction to the *Rolling Stone* article, struck a very different note in her pronouncement on its retraction: “While all of us who care about the University are upset by the *Rolling Stone* story, I write now with a different message.” Surely the truth merits something more than a dependent clause.

Far from being an end in itself, the truth on our college campuses is now treated as a mere instrument of combat. It is wielded with feigned righteousness when it promotes a preferred cause and then abandoned when it produces the opposite result. In the end, this is the sad message that universities now convey. ♦

A Credulous Press Feeds the PC Mob

Where was journalistic skepticism at *Rolling Stone*? BY PHILIP TERZIAN

With nearly every passing day, yet another detail in last month’s sensational *Rolling Stone* article alleging gang rape at a University of Virginia fraternity house collapses under the weight of scrutiny. Its author, Sabrina Rubin Erdely, has retreated into strategic silence; her editor, Will Dana, having publicly disavowed the “facts” of the story, is still issuing clarifications and apologies. At this rate, we are unlikely ever to know what (if anything) really happened to “Jackie,” the story’s protagonist and putative heroine, on

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the UVA campus in 2012, or what impelled her to tell her tale to Sabrina Rubin Erdely.

The conventional wisdom of the moment, especially among those who deployed the *Rolling Stone* article for political purposes, is that this episode discredits future rape victims and will hamper efforts to raise awareness about sexual assault on college campuses. On the latter point, this may be a salutary development: The oft-cited claims that one in five American women are sexually assaulted in their lifetimes and that one in four female college students will be raped are almost certainly exaggerations. As for future rape victims, the opposite

is likely true: There has never been greater public awareness about sexual assault in America than there is now, especially on campuses; and in any case, rape—which used to be a capital crime in some circumstances—remains a serious felony.

How all this will be sorted out by the University of Virginia is an open question. Once the *Rolling Stone* article was published, all fraternity and sorority activities were suspended for the balance of the year; and despite revelations about the story's manifold defects, the administration is sticking with its decision. In the meantime, certain segments of the faculty are determined to prevent this putative crisis from going to waste, and will persist in their efforts to abolish Greek life at UVA.

There is another aspect to the story, however, beyond academic politics, fraternity behavior, or the national debate on sexual assault, the definition of rape, false accusations, and dubious statistics. This is a problem for the press. For just as *Rolling Stone* has discredited itself with its evident recklessness, the media generally—with a handful of honorable exceptions, notably the *Washington Post*'s Erik Wemple—have exhibited all the symptoms of political bias, mob mentality, and lazy practices that have done so much to earn the public's disfavor in recent decades.

There is, to begin with, the abrogation of the bare essentials of journalistic practice. Sabrina Rubin Erdely is entitled to her opinion, of course, and her disdain for fraternity boys and the University of Virginia (not necessarily in that order) is evident throughout her account. But by her own admission, she not only shopped around the country for a story that would support her presumptions about campus "rape culture," but relied exclusively on the veracity of "Jackie," making little or no effort to confirm the story's most improbable details, or confront (much less identify) the seven undergraduates "Jackie" accused of violent rape. For its part, *Rolling Stone* seems to have disdained the very idea of due diligence, content to publish an

accusation of rape without question.

This is not, in itself, a shocking development: *Rolling Stone* was a hot book during the Nixon and Ford administrations, but its "serious" journalism is largely behind it. That does not explain, however, the willingness of the media, in general,

Except that in this case, as in others, credibility and prejudice combine to do genuine harm. For whatever reasons, "Jackie," Sabrina Rubin Erdely, and *Rolling Stone* were willing to generate a virtual lynch mob involving serious criminal accusations against (presumably) innocent people. And the press,

The screenshot shows the top of the Rolling Stone website. The logo is in the center, with navigation links for MUSIC, POLITICS, TV, MOVIES, CULTURE, REVIEWS, LISTS, and RS COUNTRY. On the right, there are links for ARCHIVES and SUBSCRIBE. Below the navigation is the article title: "A Rape on Campus: A Brutal Assault and Struggle for Justice at UVA". Under the title are social media sharing buttons for Like, Share, Tweet, Pin, Comment, and Email. The main image is a blue-tinted illustration of a person with their hands covering their face, with red handprints on their chest. Below the image is a "RELATED" section with a link to "A Weekend of Protest at UVA as RS Rape Story Jolts Campus". At the bottom of the article preview, it says "By Sabrina Rubin Erdely | November 19, 2014".

'Jackie's' story first appears at RollingStone.com, November 19

to accept the truth of the allegations against UVA and its "culture"—unless the media are predisposed to do so. Which, of course, they are. Just as the press was quick to embrace the false premises of the 2006 accusation of rape against the Duke lacrosse team, it was equally eager to believe the worst of frat boys, Greek life, social practices, and campus customs at another prestigious Southern institution of higher learning.

This conscious neglect of professional responsibility—indeed, suspension of the media's natural, and well-advertised, skepticism—might well be explained by an old, and well-warmed, chestnut: political bias.

which should be the first to ask questions, dig into records, and expose contradictions and inconsistencies, was the voice of unreason.

This *Rolling Stone*/UVA debacle is bad enough, but it is not the first time that fraud, false rumors, and political mythology have gained credibility in the press. Some media legends—domestic violence during the Super Bowl, for example—are almost laughable in retrospect. But others—the "epidemic" of rural church burnings, racial "incidents" on campus, allegations of molestation at nursery schools—have spread discord, deepened crises, and sent innocent people to prison. ♦

Novorossiya Is Still a Dream

And the ruble is in free-fall.

BY CATHY YOUNG

A year ago, Ukraine's "Euromaidan" protests, spurred by then-president Viktor Yanukovich's decision to reject a promised trade agreement with the European Union and rush into the well-paid embrace of Vladimir Putin, began to escalate in Kiev, turning to violent clashes with government forces. A Ukrainian revolution, a Russian land grab, and months of undeclared war later, we still don't know whether these events signaled the beginning of a revival of Russian power or the beginning of the end of the Putin regime.

There is a widespread view in the West that Putin is a super-savvy operator, a master strategist who plans far ahead, cleverly manipulating events in his quest for both personal and national dominance, and always comes out ahead. (That view is also common among Russian political analysts, pro- and anti-Putin alike; one blogger mockingly summed it up as the "Putin has outsmarted everyone" meme.) Yet it is hard to see his Ukraine strategy as particularly smart. Had Ukraine finalized the deal with the EU, Yanukovich likely would have continued to maintain friendly ties with the Kremlin, playing off his suitors against each other and getting expensive presents from both. Instead, Putin used both carrot and stick to sabotage the agreement—unwittingly precipitating his Kiev pal's political demise, pushing Ukraine all the way into the "enemy" camp, and escalating a crisis with far-reaching and mostly negative consequences for Moscow.

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Many pundits have said that, at the very least, by fomenting conflict in Ukraine, Putin has achieved his goal of sabotaging that nation's opportunity for development as a market-oriented, pro-Western, liberal democracy with membership in the EU and especially NATO. Support for joining NATO among Ukrainians themselves may have skyrocketed, from just one in five in 2012 to nearly half this past summer, according to polls; but NATO is understandably wary of being drawn into an unpredictable confrontation. Meanwhile, the Russia-sponsored insurgency in eastern Ukraine has exacerbated both Ukraine's economic woes and the volatility of its politics. The brief moment of national unity at the time of the Euromaidan revolution has

already given way to squabbling, partly over ways to deal with the separatist enclaves that serve as vehicles for Russian aggression.

It's far too early to tell how Ukraine will fare in the face of these challenges, even with increased Western assistance. What's not in question, however, is that Russia's stealth war against Ukraine has high costs for Russia itself.

For one, while the Western response to the Kremlin's aggression can hardly be called an exemplary display of backbone, the sanctions directed at the Russian financial sector, political elite, and billionaire presidential cronies are inflicting some pain. (Even sanctions-averse France finally mustered the will to suspend, indefinitely, the delivery of Mistral helicopter carrier ships to Russia.) For the general population, including the urban middle class that has been Putin's principal constituency, the damage has been compounded by Russia's counter-sanctions targeting imports of Western goods, particularly food. In a poll conducted in mid-November by the Levada Center, Russia's leading polling firm, nearly half of the respondents said they had experienced "problems" because of Western sanctions (and, presumably, Russian retaliatory measures). Only 16 percent described these perceived sanctions-related difficulties as fairly or very serious; fewer than a third, however, were unconcerned about

THOMAS FLUHARTY

the effects of sanctions on themselves and their families down the road.

Between the sanctions and the drop in crude oil prices, the ruble has been in free-fall, depreciating by some 60 percent against the dollar over the past year. In a Levada Center poll in late November, the fall of the ruble easily topped the list of the last four weeks' most memorable events for Russians, spontaneously named as such by nearly 40 percent of respondents. (Continued fighting in Ukraine was mentioned by just 25 percent.) In early December, a satirical verse commentary on the ruble's woes by writer Dmitry Bykov, published in the independent newspaper *Novaya Gazeta*, quickly went viral on the Russian-language Internet. It depicted a surreal dialogue between the ruble and Russia's collective manhood—one pathetically drooping, the other rising in self-destructive pride and imperial lust.

Russia's national ego may be taking a hit as well. In the mid-November poll on the effects of sanctions, an overwhelming 80 percent of Russians agreed that Russia is facing a "dramatic" drop in living standards and a decline of the economy; while this was most commonly attributed to falling oil prices, a third of those expecting such a downturn blamed Western sanctions, and almost as many mentioned expenditures on the annexation of Crimea and on supporting the rebels in eastern Ukraine. The fact that in another poll around the same time some 60 percent of Russians said that the country was headed in the right direction attests to staggeringly high levels of cognitive dissonance.

And yet, regardless of polls, a mood shift may be happening. Back in March, at the peak of Crimea-induced euphoria, *Komsomolskaya Pravda* columnist Ulyana Skoibeda penned a somewhat notorious article entitled "Back to the USSR," in which she hailed the rebirth of Soviet-style glory, patriotism, and willingness to sacrifice quality food and stylish clothes for Motherland and brotherhood. (Skoibeda is one of a kind

even in the blighted landscape of the pro-Kremlin Russian press.) In a November 1 column, however, Skoibeda sounded a far more pessimistic note: Apparently, the return to the USSR had missed the mark, and Russia had found itself back in the 1990s instead. "I hear dejection," wrote Skoibeda. "The upsurge of patriotism on the wave of Crimea was great, but it is passing, it has passed. It needs a new infusion, but we haven't conquered Novorossiya [the Russian nationalists' term for

With winter almost here, new Russian military action in Ukraine on the scale of last August's operation that halted the Ukrainian Army's anti-insurgency offensive is virtually out of the question. Russian political analyst and Hudson Institute visiting fellow Andrei Piontkovsky argues that Russian military casualties in eastern Ukraine have been a major deterrent factor as well. (There is no reliable body count; estimates range from several hundred to a staggering 4,500.)

eastern Ukraine]—the insurgents don't count—or defeated Kiev."

With winter almost here, new Russian military action in Ukraine on the scale of last August's operation that halted the Ukrainian Army's anti-insurgency offensive and allowed the separatist enclaves to survive is virtually out of the question. Russian political analyst and Hudson Institute visiting fellow Andrei Piontkovsky argues on the Ukrainian news site *TSN* that Russian military casualties in eastern Ukraine have been a major deterrent factor as well. (There is no reliable body count; estimates

range from several hundred to a staggering 4,500.)

All this leaves Putin in a quandary: To retreat is to lose face; to push forward is to risk domestic and international disaster. It's no wonder that, in his December 4 presidential address to the federal assembly—the Russian equivalent of the State of the Union—he sounded rambling and testy, carping that the West has been putting the squeeze on Russia "for decades, if not centuries . . . whenever someone thinks that Russia has become too strong or independent."

This belligerently aggrieved paranoia is very much in keeping with the tone of the state-controlled Russian media these days—and, largely, with the national mood. The liberal opposition, banished to shrinking islands of relatively free speech such as Ekho Moskvy radio, seems more beleaguered and isolated than ever. Denied any opportunity to influence politics, the dissidents watch, helpless, reminding themselves that this, too, shall pass—and hope that, if Putin continues on his present self-defeating course, the implosion may begin sooner rather than later.

Perhaps. Indeed, even as Putin denounces attempts to isolate Russia, his policies are ratcheting up tensions with its Eurasian Customs Union partners, Belarus and Kazakhstan. Both countries have been serving as conduits for the transit into Russia of European and American food products banned under the Kremlin's retaliatory sanctions, causing Russian tit-for-tat bans on a growing number of Belarusian and Kazakh imports—much to the displeasure of these countries' leaders. On December 6, Belarus struck back, restoring customs controls on the border with Russia. "The Customs Union goes the way of the Soviet Union," read *Novaya Gazeta's* headline.

Putin's attempt to woo or strong-arm Ukraine into the Customs Union as part of his imperial vision was the catalyst for Ukraine's revolution; now, fallout from the conflict over Ukraine may end up gutting the union itself. History loves irony. ♦

Immigration and Representation

When do aliens count?

BY GARY SCHMITT & REBECCA BURGESS



Manhattan, July 29: Protester sign or executive order?

Anger among conservatives over President Obama's decision to grant amnesty to four or five million illegal immigrants has focused not only on the substance of the decision but also on the constitutionality of his exercise of executive power. And while that debate is important, the separation of powers is not the only significant constitutional matter at stake. In contention as well are the contours of representative government itself.

Knitted to the issue is the question of the apportionment of the 435 seats in the House of Representatives and the distribution of Electoral College votes among the states, which are tied to the census count conducted every

10 years. Under current directives, that count tallies up not only citizens and legal resident aliens, but also those here illegally. The latter's inclusion appears to be mandated by the language of the 14th Amendment which reads: "Representatives shall be apportioned among the several States according to their respective numbers, counting the whole number of persons in each state."

This reading of the 14th Amendment creates a set of incentives for states to tolerate, if not actually invite, more illegal immigration within their boundaries. Reapportionment is a zero-sum game. With the total number of House members set by law at 435, states stand to lose a representative (or two) as other states win additional members. More bodies equals more representatives, and more votes when it comes to selecting a president.

Since the 1980 census, the

government's official tally of population—through the use of the "short form"—has stopped including data as to whether those being tallied are citizens, legal, or illegal immigrants. However, the Census Bureau continued to try and estimate the numbers in these various categories. In 1985, for example, director of the Bureau of the Census John Keane testified before a Senate subcommittee that, based on bureau estimates, California and New York had each gained a congressman (while Georgia and Indiana each lost one), thanks to the number of illegal aliens in those states.

Because of the likely sensitivity of the issue, the Census Bureau did not calculate similar figures after the 1990 reapportionment, but an estimate of the impact of immigration by Texas A&M demographer Dudley Poston Jr. and colleagues found that California gained two congressmen, Texas one, while Kentucky, Massachusetts, and New Jersey each lost one. And, while certainly not the only reason for a "plus-up," it's no coincidence that immigrant-heavy Texas, Arizona, Nevada, and Florida ended up with additional representation in Congress after the 2010 census. And, of course, hundreds of billions of dollars in federal largesse are tied in part to population counts—only sweetening the pot a state stands to collect by pumping up its numbers.

Given voting patterns among Hispanics, the president and his party have further partisan reasons to welcome illegal aliens. According to a March 2013 Department of Homeland Security report, 73 percent of the unauthorized population in 2012 congregated in the 10 states of California, Texas, Florida, New York, Illinois, New Jersey, Georgia, North Carolina, Arizona, and Washington. And while we would like to think noncitizens are not allowed to vote, research done by Jesse Richman and David Earnest has shown that more than 14 percent of noncitizens sampled in 2008 and 2010 indicated not only that they were registered to vote, but also that in some close elections, those votes likely made a difference in determining the winner.

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This is not to mention how President Obama's recent decision only increases the likelihood that those contemplating jumping America's borders will now do so, with the expectation that, once over, they will eventually be amnestied. As even the *New York Times* noted, when "Congress granted amnesty to an estimated three million illegal immigrants as part of a [1986] law that also promised to crack down on further illegal immigration by imposing sanctions on employers who knowingly violated the law," the result was that by 2000, there were "twice as many illegal workers." Legalized immigrants were attractive anchors for relatives who joined them in the United States without fear of any tangible legal repercussions.

Further multiplying those numbers is the growth in population that inevitably occurs when individuals meet, marry or not, and find themselves in the family way. While parents might be "illegals," the children born here are not. In short, any larger discussion of amnesty and a path towards citizenship for any portion of today's illegal immigrant population to be serious must consider these demographics: In 2012, 61 percent of unauthorized immigrants were in the 25-44 age range, according to DHS. There's a fertile field of future voters there who would be, if current trends hold, overly inclined to reward the president's party with their ballots.

All of this has helped stand the Constitution on its head. Along with the 16th Amendment, which allows Congress to levy a federal income tax on individuals, current policy toward illegal aliens undoes the founding logic at the heart of the apportionment clause, which specifies that reapportionment and direct taxes both are to be based on census returns. Madison explains why in *Federalist* 54. Since the federal government at the time was to be dependent on the "disposition, if not the co-operation of the States" for an accurate census count, Madison writes that some counterbalancing measure was needed to keep the states honest in reporting their population, so as to prevent them from inflating those numbers to gain an advantage in apportionment. The solution was to tie the

federal government's ability to tax a state to its census returns as well. "Were their share of representation alone to be governed by this rule, they would have an interest in exaggerating their inhabitants. Were the rule to decide their share of taxation alone, a contrary temptation would prevail. By extending the rule to both objects, the States will have opposite interests, which will control and balance each other, and produce the requisite impartiality."

Addressing the problem is complicated by vagaries in the germane constitutional language—in particular, the issue of what is meant by "persons" in the apportionment context of the 14th Amendment.

On the one hand, the Constitution explicitly states that "persons" are to be counted in the census for congressional apportionment. This seems distinct from "the people" that are mentioned in the Preamble and the Second Amendment—where "the people" clearly refers to the citizens of this specific American polity. And, indeed, during the debate over the use of the phrase "the whole number of persons in each State," Sen. Roscoe Conkling (R-N.Y.), one of the drafters of the 14th Amendment, was apparently insistent about the broad language to ensure that his state's 390,000 "unnaturalized foreigners" be counted for apportionment purposes.

On the other hand, the problem of illegal aliens was not something at the forefront of the minds of the amendment's drafters and can hardly be said to be part of their specific intent to include under the word "persons." And while the "unnaturalized foreigner" in 1866 was easily enough "naturalized" by taking an oath of allegiance to the Constitution, providing some proof of good character, and abjuring foreign titles or allegiance, the individual was also required to have established residency in the country for five years.

In other words, there was an implicit understanding that such persons would be on their way to having a connection to the state beyond mere presence on the day the census taker was in the neighborhood. Bolstering this line of argument are the Census Bureau's own

exceptions to the individuals it counts as part of a state's total: tourists and other short-term visitors, seasonal residents, diplomats, and certain students and persons working and sleeping most of every week in a state other than where their family and possessions are located. In short, while the use of the word "persons" obviously was meant to cover more than just "citizens," it may not have been intended to cover every individual walking the streets.

Somewhat amazingly, the Supreme Court hasn't clarified the issue, despite extensive rulings on the passage of the Voting Rights Act and the adoption of the "one man, one vote" principle. As Justice Clarence Thomas noted in his dissent from a denial of a writ of certiorari in *Chen v. City of Houston* (2001): The High Court has "never determined the relevant 'population' that States and localities must equally distribute among their districts." The closest the federal courts have come to taking cognizance of this issue was in *Barnett v. City of Chicago* (1998), where the Seventh Circuit noted that "the dignity and very concept of citizenship are diluted if noncitizens are allowed to vote either directly or by the conferral of additional voting power on citizens believed to have a community of interest with the noncitizen."

Whether Congress could address by normal legislation the issue of counting "illegal aliens" under the census for apportionment purposes or whether the matter needs to be addressed through a constitutional amendment is an open question—with most legal scholars believing the latter. Regardless, the issue needs attending to. A mixture of constitutional and policy choices has turned the logic underlying the census and apportionment provisions in the Constitution upside down, with consequences that increasingly infringe directly on the core principle of popular consent by distorting the representational and voting power of individual citizens. If liberal self-rule means anything, it means being able to determine—absent considerations of race, ethnicity, or gender—who counts and who doesn't as a part of the body politic. ♦

The Architect of Obamacare Speaks

The government's defense in *King v. Burwell* is not open and shut. BY JOHN McCORMACK

Jonathan Gruber's testimony before Congress last week was a series of apologies, evasions, denials, and outright lies. The MIT professor widely acknowledged to be the "architect of Obamacare" before it was known that he attributed passage of the law to legislative deception and the "stupidity of the American voter" began his opening remarks by declaring: "I was not the 'architect' of President Obama's health care plan." He later refused to say how much money he'd made from his consulting and speeches on Obamacare. But the most staggering and consequential falsehood spoken by Gruber came when he tried to explain away his previous claim that states do not qualify for subsidies under Obamacare if they do not set up their own exchanges (the subject of a Supreme Court case, *King v. Burwell*, that could destroy the law).

Gruber said during his opening prepared remarks:

The point I believe I was making was about the possibility that the federal government, for whatever reason, might not create a federal exchange. If that were to occur, and only in that context, then the only way that states could guarantee that their citizens would receive tax credits would be to set up their own exchanges.

During follow-up questioning, Rep. Justin Amash of Michigan pointed out that Gruber's explanation doesn't

make sense. "The law requires the federal government to create Obamacare exchanges in states that refuse to create the exchanges for themselves,"



Gruber before Congress

Amash said. He was right: The law clearly states the secretary of health and human services "shall" establish an exchange in states that fail to do so. So, Amash continued, "What did you mean when you repeatedly said that the citizens of some states may not qualify for Obamacare tax credits?"

"When I made those comments, I believe what I was saying was reflecting uncertainty about the implementation of the federal exchange," Gruber insisted. "I don't recall exactly what the law says."

Gruber was clearly not telling the truth to Congress. At the very same 2012 speaking engagement in which he said states don't get subsidies if they don't set up their own exchanges, he acknowledged that the federal government is directed to set up exchanges in states that decline to do so:

AUDIENCE MEMBER: You mentioned the health information exchanges for the states. And it's my understanding that if states don't provide them then the federal government will provide them for the states.

GRUBER: Yeah. So these health insurance exchanges—you can go on MAHealthConnector and see ours in Massachusetts—will be these new shopping places, and they'll be the place that people go to get their subsidies for health insurance. *In the law it says if the states don't provide them, the federal backstop will.* The federal government has been sort of slow in putting in this backstop, I think, partly because they want to, sort of, squeeze the states to do it. I think what's important to remember politically about this is that *if you're a state and you don't set up an exchange, that means your citizens don't get their tax credits* [emphasis added].

Gruber's 2012 remarks—and his failure at the December 9 congressional hearing to plausibly walk them back—have dealt a great blow to the government's defense in *King v. Burwell*. Before he became a controversial figure, it would have been entirely uncontroversial to state that Gruber knew more about how the law actually works than Nancy Pelosi, Barack Obama, or Max Baucus. "I was involved in writing the legislation," Gruber said in a 2010 lecture. "I know more about this law than any other economist," Gruber told the *New York Times* in 2012.

Gruber's remarks are consequential not because the Supreme Court will look to them to determine legislative intent, but because they will significantly affect the legal and political debate surrounding *King v. Burwell*. Democrats and their allies in the media have tried to create a political environment in which the pressure on the Supreme Court would be simply too great for the Court to rule against the government. When cases challenging the legality of Obamacare subsidies began making their way through the courts, liberals roundly mocked and ridiculed the idea that

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the federal government had broken the law.

In 2013, Gruber himself told *Mother Jones* that the lawsuits were “screwy . . . nutty . . . stupid”:

Jonathan Gruber, who helped write former presidential candidate Mitt Romney’s Massachusetts health care law as well as the Affordable Care Act, calls the theory behind the legal challenges a “screwy interpretation” of the law. “It’s nutty. It’s stupid,” he says. And beyond that, “it’s essentially unprecedented in our democracy. This was law democratically enacted, challenged in the Supreme Court, and passed the test, and now [Republicans] are trying again. They’re desperate.”

After the 2012 video of Gruber saying the opposite was unearthed by Rich Weinstein, a private citizen and investment adviser, and circulated by the Competitive Enterprise Institute, no intellectually honest person could argue that the interpretation that states don’t get

Obamacare subsidies if they don’t set up exchanges is absurd. As federal judge Ronald A. White wrote in another case challenging Obamacare’s subsidies in states without their own exchanges, “The court takes [Gruber’s] statement for the limited relevance of words of interpretation, not intent. That is to say, the statement cuts against any argument that the plaintiff’s interpretation is absurd on its face, or that plaintiff’s argument that the statutory language might support a reading of ‘incentivizing’ states to set up exchanges is ‘nonsense, made up out of whole cloth.’”

The political debate surrounding a legal case isn’t supposed to influence its outcome, of course, but we know that political pressure may have already saved Obamacare once. As Jan Crawford of CBS reported, Chief Justice John Roberts initially sided in 2012 with four other Supreme Court justices to strike down the individual mandate

as unconstitutional. As pressure began to mount, Roberts inexplicably changed his mind and decided to uphold the provision of the law with a jesuitical argument that it was a constitutional tax rather than an unconstitutional mandate. This led many to conclude he changed his mind out of fear for the reputation of the Court.

“That’s where the Gruber recordings are really going to have the greatest impact. It creates space for the Court to do the right thing over the objections of people who want the Court to rewrite the law,” says Cato scholar Michael Cannon, one of the masterminds behind *King v. Burwell*. “I think the odds are still against the plaintiffs, but it’s not because the facts of the law are not on their side,” Cannon tells *THE WEEKLY STANDARD* in an interview. “It’s just that it’s a high-stakes case. If this weren’t about Obamacare, the Court would rule for the plaintiffs nine to nothing.” ♦

The Right to Risk and Be Rewarded

By **Thomas J. Donohue**

President and CEO
U.S. Chamber of Commerce

What if failure was never an option in our country?

Thomas Edison might not have brought the world-changing advancement of electricity into our lives—he went through 1,000 failed attempts before achieving a successful prototype of the light bulb. Henry Ford might not have pioneered the assembly line and precipitated one of the most significant industrial transformations in history—his first two attempts to establish the Ford Motor Company collapsed under partner dispute and bankruptcy. Bill Gates might have missed out on important lessons, or even thrown in the towel, before founding Microsoft and helping make computing possible for the masses. His first venture was a flop.

Failure can be a critical ingredient of success. We need to preserve a culture that allows people to try, fall on their faces, get back up, and try again. And when their risks pay off, that success should be rewarded.

The right to take a risk and to reap its rewards is at the heart of our free enterprise system. It has driven innovation throughout our history and helped build and sustain a competitive, resilient economy. It creates capital for businesses and consumers alike and produces jobs and opportunities for American workers.

But that right is under threat by some leaders—from the left and the right—who discount, disparage, or distort the positive role of business in society today. It’s shocking how little many of our political leaders seem to understand the business system of this country, how capital is formed and multiplied, and how jobs are really created and paychecks are expanded.

Some politicians claim that business doesn’t really create jobs or build things. They promote the falsehood that success is a result of stepping on others and that wealth and profits are inherently evil. They wrongly believe that risk can be eliminated from our system without harming innovation, capital, and entrepreneurship.

Successful businesses are a good thing. Businesses that do well almost always do good—like giving folks the dignity of a job, bettering their communities, or giving to charities.

America needs successful entrepreneurs and businesspeople. It’s what drives stronger economic growth and puts people to work. It’s what keeps the American Dream alive and energizes our free enterprise system. It’s why we remain the envy of the world.

We need to remind ourselves, Congress, the White House, and the American people what made this country great. The United States is a land of opportunity, where all individuals can develop an idea, pursue a dream, succeed beyond their wildest expectations, and share opportunities with others.

And if at first they don’t succeed, they can try and try again.



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As the Swedes Go, So Goes Europe

The populist backlash against immigration and the EU superstate continues. **BY DOMINIC GREEN**



A Stockholm rally against the right-wing Sweden Democrats, September 15

‘**T**he winner,” ABBA advised in 1980, “takes it all. The loser has to fall.” But not in Swedish politics, where proportional representation has created a smorgasbord of parties and has now contributed to a crisis of democracy.

Why should Americans care about Sweden, one of the many faraway countries of which we know little? Because where the Swedes go, Europe follows. Lightly burdened by war guilt, Sweden was the first European state to declare itself the moral monitor of the world. Sweden’s *folkhem*, or “people’s home,” was the gold standard of welfare states; it was also the first to run out of money. In the ’70s, Sweden pioneered the anti-Zionism that has become the only coherent element in

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the EU’s foreign policy. Today Malmö, Sweden’s third-largest city, is becoming the first city in postwar Europe to expel its Jewish minority through mob violence. And last week, Swedish democracy broke down. The causes of the breakdown can be seen in every European state. As ever, Sweden leads the way.

After last September’s election, Sweden ended up with a minority government, a “red-green” coalition of socialists and environmentalists. On December 2, its leader, Stefan Löfven, presented his budget for 2015. The *Riksdag*, the Swedish parliament, voted it down. The failure of the budget was a drama. The crisis came when the Alliance group of right-wing parties proposed its own budget. The Alliance does not have enough seats to form a government. But its budget passed with the support of the Sweden Democrats, a new party that is outside

the Alliance. Humiliated, Löfven has called a snap election, Sweden’s first since 1958.

Until last week, the Alliance, like the left-wing parties, had reviled the Sweden Democrats as racists and a threat to democracy. It is true that, like all of Europe’s “New Right” parties, the Sweden Democrats have an unsavory prehistory of racism and neofascism. It is also true that, like the other “New Right” parties, the Sweden Democrats have purged their platform and leadership of these associations. Still, they remain a party of ethnic grievance. Like France’s National Front or the U.K. Independence party (UKIP), they’ve made immigration their biggest issue. Their sudden surge into parliament shows how their grievances have become mainstream in Europe. In 2014, by winning 12.9 percent of the vote and 14 percent of the seats, the Sweden Democrats became the *Riksdag*’s third-largest party. Neither of the coalitions wanted anything to do with them. They still don’t—but after last week, they may have to deal with them.

Sweden has led the way in European immigration, and Muslim immigration in particular. Some 20 percent of Sweden’s 9.5 million people are immigrants or the children of immigrants: the highest figure in Europe. Most European states were until recently monocultural. They have trouble assimilating immigrants, especially rural Muslims who wish to keep their cultural and religious identity. Sweden has applied the noblest of ideals—shelter to the oppressed—with the narrowness of mind that can happen when you live in a small society on the quiet side of the Baltic. The state has failed to assimilate its immigrants. Ordinary Swedes, both indigenous and immigrant, have paid the social cost. In a May 2014 poll, 44 percent of respondents wanted the new government to reduce immigration.

Nigel Farage of UKIP likes to be photographed holding a frothing pint of bitter and a cigarette. Jimmie Åkesson of the Sweden Democrats looks like a ’50s rocker. He longs for the days when the welfare state was strong and society coherent. It turns out that

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plenty of Swedes feel the same. Last week, the comments sections of Swedish press websites abounded in conversions from both left and right. All said the same thing: Mass immigration has dissolved Sweden's social cohesion and overburdened the welfare system. The established parties are too cowardly or corrupt to stop the rot. The Sweden Democrats are not; and so, holding his or her nose, the voter backed them.

Before this week's budget vote, the Sweden Democrats had conditioned their participation in the Alliance on a 90 percent reduction in immigration. Löfven's coalition, by contrast, recently announced its intent to accept 100,000 Iraqi refugees. The forthcoming election will be a referendum on immigration, and the related question of the EU. Like Britain, Sweden is an EU member that has retained its currency. It has not, though, retained control over its borders.

When the winner fails to "take it all," the losers in modern Europe take their chances. Sweden's New Right party has now played a decisive part in the politics of Europe's quintessential Old Left state. On current form, the Sweden Democrats may play the kingmaker's role after the March election. France's National Front and Britain's UKIP may play similarly prominent roles in their countries' next elections.

If Sweden leads the way, Europe's political future is grim: a governing class unwilling to acknowledge a systemic failure of democracy, a populist backlash against immigration and the EU superstate, and deep hostility between an aging indigenous population and a fertile immigrant one. This is bad for Sweden and bad for Europe. And a weak, introverted, and increasingly extremist Europe is bad for the United States, too.

The Swedes have one of the world's highest life expectancies, but they have a higher percentage of people on sickness benefit than any other Western society. Jimmie Åkesson seems to be doing his bit to preserve this Swedish custom: He was too ill to take part in last week's events. He is on the sick list, for "nervous exhaustion." And so is Sweden. ♦

The Democrats Double Down

Will Republicans seize the opportunity?

BY STEPHEN MOORE

Right after Democrats got routed in the midterm election, the left-wing group MoveOn.org blasted their activists with a message not to panic. Party leaders should, in fact, "double down on progressive policies."



This is the kind of advice you would expect from a gang of young ideological activists, but what is amazing is that Barack Obama and the Democrats have followed it. On immigration, energy, climate change, regulatory overreach—Obama issued 3,000 new rules before Thanksgiving—the Democrats have pretended that the election didn't happen.

Obama's immediate response to middle- and working-class economic anxiety was a new global warming deal with China and a call to close down coal-burning power plants, both of which will destroy even more jobs. The White House followed up with a new program centered on

"gender equity" in the workforce.

Democratic approval ratings have gotten even worse in the month since the blowout election. Some Democrats, like New York's Chuck Schumer and retiring senator Tom Harkin of Iowa, have rung the alarm that the party is out of sync with working-class voters. But they're lonely voices. The party's New Democrat Clinton wing—Bill Clinton, that is—is extinct.

The left is flummoxed that their progressive economic message has fallen so flat. After the election, the seven-figure-and-up donors gathered with Democratic leaders to assess what went wrong. "Many Democratic patrons and party strategists concluded that the White House did not offer a compelling argument about how much has improved on President Obama's watch and how people's lives would benefit if congressional Democrats held their seats," the *Washington Post* reported. "There's a strong sense that we weren't full-throated enough about jobs and economy—both in talking about accomplishments and what we need to do," one attendee said. "We needed a broader narrative."

It's not at all clear what this broader narrative might be. Some liberals have argued that the president and congressional Democrats should be taking more credit for this recovery, which is clearly picking up and creating more jobs. Paul Krugman wrote in *Rolling Stone* (and we've discovered how accurate that magazine is) that Barack Obama should be heralded as an economic savior. Yet even with the recent improvement, the dramatic underperformance of

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GARY LOCKE

the economy of the last five and a half years is just too pronounced for all but the most ardent of “hope and change” true believers. Even Democrats are undermining the recovery narrative: Heir apparent Hillary Clinton has been telling people around the country the middle class is getting squeezed and the poor are getting poorer—under Obama.

Meanwhile, liberals have been grouching that Republicans won by stealing from the left’s populist playbook and emphasizing issues like reducing poverty, rewarding work, making health care affordable, and increasing working wages. How can this be? Can voters be so “stupid”—to borrow a Gruberism—that they don’t understand Republicans only care about rich people?

But on issue after issue, that isn’t how working-class voters see things. Take, for example, the Democrats’ continuing and lunatic opposition to the Keystone pipeline. Why would a party that allegedly cares about blue-collar unions kill a project that would create 10,000 jobs for their members? Keystone symbolizes why blue-collar Reagan Democrats have started abandoning the party. The working class wants jobs and high incomes—how many times do they have to say this to pollsters? Billionaire Democratic funder Tom Steyer wants a green agenda that would block any and all energy projects and the \$60-, \$80-, and \$100K-a-year jobs that go with them.

Another example: In the weeks before the election, Barack Obama ran around the country and the world declaring that climate change is the biggest problem facing the nation and the planet. According to almost every recent poll, only about 3 percent of voters agree. Most voters say they are concerned about climate change, but it ranks at the very, very bottom of their concerns.

The slightly deranged climate change obsession on the left is a weighty albatross around the neck of Democrats when the number-one story of economic revival is massive increases in fossil fuel production, falling gas prices at the pump, and

major oil and gas job gains all over the country. Without this technology-driven drilling explosion, there are almost no net job gains over the last six years. Democrats want to grind it to a halt and still pretend they are the party of the working class. The idea that we’re somehow going to power an \$18 trillion industrial economy with windmills is absurd to all but climate change professionals and seven-figure Sierra Club donors whose lives won’t be disrupted by higher home heating costs. The new coal plant emission standards will raise working- and middle-class utility bills by 35 percent or more.

If the Democrats weren’t so tethered to the radical green left, they would have taken credit for the shale oil and gas boom rather than denouncing fracking and other smart drilling technologies that have made it all possible. After all, this energy revolution has happened on Obama’s watch. And instead of bemoaning lower gas prices as a disaster for the environment, as many green commentators have been doing recently, Democrats could be celebrating the benefits to the middle class. Privately, Democrats that I talk to whisper the obvious point that the party has found itself on the wrong side of the energy issue. But they’re trapped by activists and donors who sound like members of Earth First.

Or take the Democrats’ standard retort to the problem of falling real wages: Raise the minimum wage. It’s true that raising the minimum wage is popular with voters and most ballot measures to hike the wage passed. But few in the middle class see raising the minimum wage as helpful to them personally. They are right to be skeptical, because 95 percent of workers are earning above minimum wage already. (Republicans should get smart and negate some of the harm with a \$6 or \$7 teen minimum wage, which voters would like.)

President Obama boasted on the eve of the election that almost every economic statistic shows improvement under his presidency. That spin fell flat with voters because of the

statistic they care most about: real take-home pay. Median incomes during the recovery have fallen by about \$1,600 a year, according to Census Bureau data.

There’s a stark contrast between the Reagan and Obama recoveries. Under Reagan, the economy grew at just under 4 percent over the first five and a half years of recovery. Under Obama, the recovery has been right at 2 percent. This means we would have \$2 trillion more in annual output and incomes if the economy had grown as fast from 2009 to 2014 as it did in the Reagan boom years. We would have 3 million more jobs if employment had grown at the Reagan pace. This growth deficit is what frustrates voters and makes a mockery of Krugman’s claim that Obama is an economic wonderboy.

So what does the left now propose to jumpstart growth? “The moral to me is that we need a bigger, more ambitious economic plan than just raising the minimum wage,” David desJardins, a left-wing San Francisco-based investor and major Democratic donor, said after the election.

Wait—*more* ambitious? Under Obama’s leadership, Democrats have raised the minimum wage, bailed out the auto companies, spent \$830 billion on a Keynesian stimulus plan, wildly cheered while the Fed printed \$3.5 trillion of debt, borrowed \$7 trillion in six years, passed the big lies of Obamacare and Dodd-Frank, and raised tax rates by \$1 trillion over 10 years on the rich. In the wake of all that, the working class lost ground.

That is why working-class voters in November crossed the aisle to join Republicans and shouted a simple message to Democrats: “Stop.” The Democrats don’t need a more ambitious agenda; they need an entirely new one that puts working-class families—headed by welders, teamsters, electricians, pipefitters, construction workers, machinists—ahead of billionaire funders like Tom Steyer. If they won’t do that, Republicans should welcome these voters—often union members—into the GOP with open arms. ♦

Iran's Supreme Censor

The evolution of Ali Khamenei from sensitive lover of Western literature to enforcer of Islamic revolutionary orthodoxy

BY ALI ALFONEH &
REUEL MARC GERECHT

THE BLIND MAN'S FRIEND: Don't suffer because of the past. You censored books for the sake of God. . . . What is it you are taking?

THE BLIND MAN: Valium. I'm taking it to forget everything, even God.

Mohsen Makhmalbaf's 2003 movie script *Faramoushi* (*Dementia*) never passed the censors at Iran's Ministry of Culture and Islamic Guidance, the clerical regime's gateway for all films, books, magazines, and newspapers. Makhmalbaf's sarcasm and searing allusions often got him into trouble before he went into exile in 2005. His mordancy in *Faramoushi*, aimed at the rampant, crude, and at times comical censorship within the Islamic Republic, must have caused the censors particular unease: The intellectual journey of the central character, the blind censor, bears a definite resemblance to the evolution of Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei.

Khamenei's strange life is worthy of a Makhmalbaf movie: The young Ali was a lover of books; Ayatollah Khamenei bans books he dislikes. Budding with modern curiosity, the young man much preferred the company of intellectuals and poets to that of holy-law-loving mullahs. He tried his hand at poetry and prose, and under the shah endured the humiliation of interrogation and imprisonment for love of the written word. As supreme leader, Khamenei imprisons and assassinates poets and artists to safeguard the republic of God against cultural pollution from the West.

What made the young cleric, an intellectual capable of considerable compassion toward atheists, turn into a torturer of dissident writers, poets, scholars, and students? It's not an unimportant question. It was to Khamenei that Barack Obama started writing letters in 2009 in the hope of ending the rancor of U.S.–Iranian relations. The supreme

leader and his praetorians, the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps, control Iran's controversial nuclear program.

In Makhmalbaf's script, the blind censor as a young man is a film aficionado, in love with Gelsomina, played by Giulietta Masina, in Fellini's *La Strada*. He's an admirer of Sergei Parajanov's *The Color of Pomegranates*. Above all, he is enthralled by Francis Ford Coppola's *The Godfather*. When Saddam Hussein invades Iran, he fights for his country and loses his sight, a victim of Iraqi chemical agents. Returning from the front, the blind cinephile joins the Ministry of Culture and Islamic Guidance to continue the fight on a different front: safeguarding the purity of the revolution against the "cultural onslaught" of the West.

CHILDHOOD MISERY AND BOOKS

Khamenei was born in 1939 into a lower-middle-class clerical family in Mashhad in Khorasan Province in northeastern Iran. In the tenth and eleventh centuries, Khorasan's aristocrats and poets revived the Persian language and culture, which had been submerged by the seventh-century Arab invasion and the rapid conversion of Iranians to Islam. By the time of Khamenei's childhood, however, the province had become a cultural backwater. Most of Khorasan's men of letters flocked to the more cosmopolitan and liberal Tehran. To judge by Khamenei's autobiographical statements compiled in Hedayatollah Behboodi's recently published *Sharh-e Esm* (*The Elucidation of the Name*), the land "where the sun arrives from" was wretched, backward, and religiously superstitious. In 1943, 4-year-old Ali and his older brother Mohammad enrolled at the neighborhood religious elementary school. It was hardly an Arcadian paradise: The teacher, a lowbrow cleric, often beat the students and tasked Ali to rub paper money against the Koran in the belief it would bring the teacher fabulous wealth. Ali was a *seyyed*, an alleged descendant of the Prophet Muhammad, and thus capable of miraculously "blessing" the money of the miserly mullah.

In 1946 Ali enrolled at a secular school, but his agonies did not cease. Clothed in his father's old rags and slippers, he was ridiculed by more prosperous classmates.

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Ali's undiagnosed nearsightedness, too, made him appear dull-witted and prevented him from doing well at school. Passing by a secondhand store one day, Ali accidentally tried a pair of glasses, and suddenly "the world became clear." His father, however, would not pay for them, or for "shoes with laces." Ali's father thought his son so attired would appear the dandy. A year passed before Ali's loving mother squirreled away enough money from her food budget to buy her son spectacles.

At home Ali and Mohammad continued religious studies under the watchful eye of their introverted and neurotic father, who regularly slapped Ali for incorrect recitations of the Koran and other religious literature. The young man found solace in his mother's recitations of Persian poetry. Her love of poetry ignited his own.

Poetry led Ali to discover other literature, first through serialized newspaper novellas and Persian translations of popular European novels at a small neighborhood bookstall. For a modest fee, he would rent the popular works of fiction and escape from the harshness of his home.

Too timid to rebel against his father's authority and continue his studies at a secular high school, Ali enrolled at the Mashhad Theological Seminary in 1952. Quickly, however, he discovered the library of the Astan-e Qods-e Razavi charitable foundation, Iran's equivalent of the Vatican library. In this beautiful refuge from the daily humiliations of school and home, he encountered masterpieces of European literature. "I would go there to read," Khamenei later recalled. "The voice of the muezzin calling to prayer was broadcast through the loudspeakers, but I was so absorbed in reading that I would hardly notice!"

Which works made the later self-appointed *vali-ye amr-e moslemin*, or guardian commander of the Muslims, forget about the call to prayer? Victor Hugo's *Les Misérables*, the story of Jean Valjean, who finds himself on the wrong side of the law but the right side of virtue. Khamenei later praised the book as "a miracle in the realm of the novel . . . a work of sociology, a work of history, a critical book, a divine book, and the book of affection, sympathy, and love." He also read Leo Tolstoy's *War and Peace*, which, in Khamenei's words, "depicts the initial defeats [of Russia], but in a way that makes them a source of pride and glory of the defeated nation." The morally strong characters in Romain Rolland's *Jean-Christophe* and *L'âme enchantée* (*The Soul Enchanted*) appealed to the young Ali, who also read Dante's *Divine Comedy*, Mikhail Sholokhov's *And Quiet Flows the Don*, the works of Michel

Zevaco, and "anything" by Alexandre Dumas, *père et fils*. Still later, Khamenei discovered Mikhail Bulgakov's *Heart of a Dog*, an "artful" parody of the Soviet regime, which he later praised, but still later dismissed as unrevolutionary and thus "lacking universal appeal."

A RELIGIOUS INTELLECTUAL

Before long, Khamenei, doubtless defying his strict father, began attending the literary gatherings at Mahmoud Farrokh's aristocratic and "eye-pleasing" mansion, which attracted traditionalists, and the Negarandeh circle, an informal association of younger literary hopefuls. Chez Farrokh, Khamenei got to know the poets Mehdi Akhavan-Sales, Mehrdad Avesta, Mohammad-Reza Shafiee-Kadkani, and other literary luminaries from Mashhad. He even tried his hand at poetry under the pen name Zia al-Din, or Light of the Faith, but never dared to publish or recite his own poems. "I knew poetry, knew the difference between good and bad poetry. . . . Looking at my own poems," Khamenei later remarked, "I had the view of a critic and was not satisfied. Therefore, I would not recite a poem. Had the poem been on par with the poetry of the day, I certainly would have recited it."

In the Iran of the 1960s, as wherever political debate is suppressed, there was little distance between literature and politics, and literary circles inevitably led to political activism. Gholam-

reza Qodsinejad, founder of the Negarandeh society, who spent four years in prison after the 1953 coup that restored the shah to power, became a lifelong friend of Khamenei's. Khamenei also got to know Ali Shariati, a French-educated intellectual who became one of the ideologues of the 1979 revolution, and still later Jalal Al-e Ahmad. By mixing Shiism with Marxism, Shariati, who died in 1977, managed to unite the secular and religious opposition to Mohammad Reza Pahlavi's regime. Al-e Ahmad, a Westernized teacher with a deep knowledge of Persian literature, coined the term *gharbzadegi* (Occidentosis) in his book of the same name in 1962, which traced Iran's backwardness to emulation of the West. Unlike most revolutionary clerics, Khamenei was first exposed to politics at literary salons, not in religious schools and mosques.

Having rubbed shoulders with the literati and the chic revolutionary set, Khamenei readily embraced Ruhollah Khomeini's 1963 rebellion against the shah. The shah's modernization scheme, the White Revolution, launched



Khamenei the young bibliophile

in 1963, distributed the lands of the rural aristocracy and religious endowments among peasants, organized a civilian corps to fight illiteracy, and introduced female suffrage. While the traditional and religious segments of Iranian society were enraged by the reforms, the shah's dictatorial rule alienated the secular elites who might otherwise have supported the modernization scheme. Khomeini managed to transform both rage and alienation into a political movement with his own interpretation of Islam as its unifying ideology and political program. For the vanguard of his revolution, he mobilized theology students.

Khamenei claims to have joined Khomeini's rebellion "from the first hours of the struggle" and says he was already acquainted with Khomeini's polemical *Kashf al-Asrar* (*The Unveiling of Secrets*), first published in 1942. Given Khomeini's love of Western literature and lack of interest in clerical polemics, however, this can be doubted. He probably read the book later, after joining Khomeini's revolt. The work, nonetheless, seems to have made a lasting impact on the young cleric, who later described it as "the blueprint for an Islamic government."

Perhaps inspired by Shariati, Al-e Ahmad, and Khomeini, Khamenei spent 1965 translating Egyptian radical theoretician Sayyid Qutb's *Al-Mustaqbal li-hadha'l-Din* (*The Future Belongs to this Religion*), from the Arabic original into Persian. Executed in 1967, Qutb was the most influential Arab Sunni Islamist since the Egyptian Hassan al-Banna founded the Muslim Brotherhood in 1928. His voluminous Koranic commentary has remained required reading among fundamentalists. His emphasis on jihad and on *takfir*—declaring Muslims who fail their faith infidels, not just poor Muslims—was instrumental in the intellectual march to al Qaeda and mass-casualty terrorism. Qutb's book shared a fundamental assumption of Khomeini's: that Islam is fully capable of delivering answers to contemporary social and political needs. Equally appealing to Khamenei, Qutb shared Al-e Ahmad's distaste for Middle Easterners' emulating the West and Shariati's passionate revolutionary rhetoric.

Khamenei's foreword to his translation of Qutb reveals his understanding of political Islam in the 1960s. According to Khamenei, Western imperialism was perfectly happy with Islam as a set of daily rituals, which kept Muslims ignorant of the "revolutionary and mobilizing

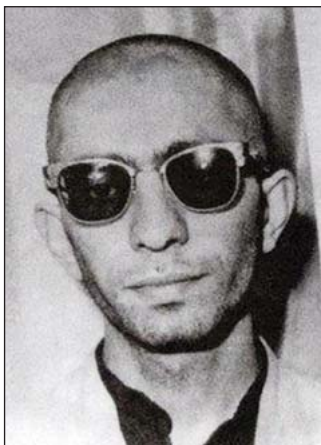
factors" of the faith. Westerners and Westernized Iranians wanted to neutralize "jihad and self-sacrifice for the preservation and propagation of the faith" and the "necessity of using force and violence against its enemies." Khomeini also highlighted that Islam, in spite of its originality, in its traditional garb could no longer appeal to young people, and clearly saw Qutb's theoretical innovations and literary style as a means of countering the appeal of Marxism and scientific socialism among Muslims.

While Shariati and Khomeini revealed to Khamenei the political potency of Islamism, Al-e Ahmad and Qutb radically changed the young man's perception of the West. The West was no longer the civilization that had given him Dante, Dumas, and Hugo; Russia was no longer the mother of Tolstoy, Sholokhov, and Bulgakov. The West and Russia had become "world-devouring" imperial powers. Their materialism and communism were killing the faith and spirituality of Muslims.

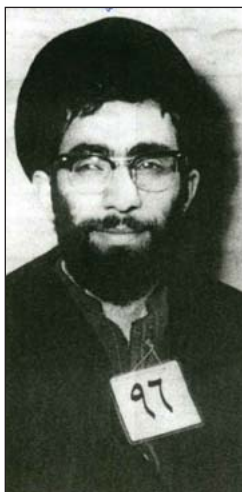
At the time Khamenei was translating Qutb's book, its author was in Gamal Abdel Nasser's prison, and by the time the Persian translation was released, Qutb was dead. In April 1967, Khamenei's translation was banned in Iran. SAVAK, the shah's secret police, arrested the young cleric. During his three-month imprisonment and ensuing legal proceedings, Khamenei consistently claimed that Qutb's book and his own foreword were directed against communism and Nasser's Arab socialism, and not against the Pahlavi regime.

The arduousness of imprisonment appears to have had its intended literary effect. Khamenei took cover. In 1970 he translated Shaykh Radi Aal-e Yasin's 1953 treatise *Sulh al-Hassan* (*The Peace Treaty of Hassan*). In Khamenei's translation, the title of the book also featured a subtitle: *The Most Glorious Heroic Flexibility in History*.

Aal-e Yasin's book defended Hassan ibn Ali (625-670), the second imam of the Shia, who in the face of adversity made peace with his enemy, Muawiyah ibn Abu Sufyan, and relinquished his claim to the caliphate. Muawiyah, with his Syrian army behind him, claimed the caliphate after the death of Hassan's father Ali in 661. This peace has since caused controversy among the Shia, between those who considered it wisely expedient and those who believed Hassan should have chosen war and possible martyrdom rather than the unjust victory of Muawiyah, the first ruler



Khamenei as a shorn and a numbered political prisoner under the shah



of the Umayyad dynasty. In his short introduction, Khamenei argued: “[The third imam] Hussein’s drinking from the chalice of martyrdom under specific circumstances, and Imam Hassan’s preserving life through peace under other circumstances, were two schemes and two means to immortalize the [Shiite] school of thought.” He found both approaches to be “wise solutions . . . from which there was no escape.” Revealingly, Khamenei’s introduction has been removed from postrevolution editions of this translation, which clearly shows the cleric’s unease with his original theme. It is difficult not to interpret Khamenei’s first foreword as the words of a defeated man. Burned by prison, unable to foresee Khomeini’s triumph nine years later, Khamenei advanced an Imam Hassan-style accord with the shah rather than torturous struggle and martyrdom. Curiously, Khamenei used the phrase “heroic flexibility” when he publicly endorsed President Hassan Rouhani’s nuclear negotiations with the United States in 2013. This time, Khamenei stressed, however, that “heroic flexibility” is a tactical stratagem employed by wrestlers who meet formidable opponents. “One must never forget the nature of the enemy,” he added.

Khamenei’s foreword to his translation of another Qutb manifesto published in Iran in the mid-1970s, reflects a similar resignation. Khamenei admits he’d abandoned the Persian translation of Qutb’s essay, and that it would never have been completed without the help of Hadi, his younger brother. Khamenei continues the theme of insidious Western conquest. It remains unquestionably the most salient narrative in the supreme leader’s speeches today. “This is the story of our life, the sad story,” Khamenei writes, “. . . of a people who, by changing and forgetting themselves, totally surrendered their dear and centuries-old heritage to the civilization of the West. Instead of their own rich, original, and deeply rooted civilization and culture, they tried to console themselves with the sorry remains of creations of others. Even strangers pitied them, let alone friends.” On top of his earlier grievances against the Occident, Khamenei also accuses Westerners of “seeking consolation at the feet of idols in Hindu temples, Jainism, yoga, or any other mystical way, if not through ridiculous manners of the hippies or through marijuana, LSD, heroin, and the like.”

Five decades later, Khamenei uses similar accusations against anyone who seeks political or moral inspiration from the West.

In 1974 Khamenei’s writings and his association with leading clerical figures again led to his arrest and imprisonment. Houshang Asadi, a leftist political activist and Khamenei’s cellmate for three months, in his *Letter to My Torturer*, recalls the cleric who would “recite the Koran quietly . . . pray . . . and weep, sobbing loudly . . . losing

himself completely in God” while “looking at the sky from behind cell bars in search of a compassionate and merciful God.” Asadi also remembers his cellmate’s “unique mastery of contemporary literature, especially poetry.” To Asadi’s dismay, Khamenei was not fond of modernist poets like Forough Farrokhzad and Ahmad Shamlou, or Sadeq Hedayat the novelist. But they shared a love for Akhavan-Sales, who wrote free verse, and the more traditional, but socially conscious, Houshang Ebtehaj. To pass the time, the two men would recount novels and poetry to each other. Asadi would even sing Communist hymns, to the cleric’s obvious enchantment. But every time the conversation turned to Asadi’s atheism, Khamenei would say, “You are a Muslim. I can see God in your heart. Even when you talk about atheism, your breath smells of God.” Asadi also recalls “the glow” in Khamenei’s eyes as the cleric, with his own hands, fed a Communist cellmate who had just returned from a session of severe torture. This occurred at a time when most clerics considered Communists religiously impure and performed ablutions if they accidentally touched a Communist in prison. Khamenei, however, was about to change.

A DEADLY IDEOLOGUE

Makhmalbaf’s blind cinophile changed as he began working as a censor. He censored movies according to his own whims, based on his feelings towards the cinematographer, or depending on what movies he considered expedient for the “immature” general public. Sitting in the movie theater of the ministry, the blind censor listens to Vigen, the old Armenian movie operator, describe the clips shown to him. Then the censor adds his own commentary:

A whore deserves to be stoned [to death], but showing such scenes is not expedient. . . . [A] thief deserves to be dismembered as a means of frightening the public from committing theft, but screening this movie is not expedient. . . . [Yasujiro] Ozu’s *Tokyo Story* is fine, but the director had a habit of drinking from dusk to dawn with his pals. He demanded “Nothing” be written on his gravestone. Showing the works of nihilist directors is not expedient. . . . *Fahrenheit 451*? They say it is about the death of literature in the hands of cinema and television, but in Iran, intellectuals who see it will think it is against censorship. Not expedient. . . . *One Flew Over the Cuckoo’s Nest*? No, no, . . . these young people just wait for a window to be smashed to take arson to the streets . . . ! Parajanov? Had he not been a sodomite, I would allow his *The Color of Pomegranates*.

With the Islamic revolution, a failed poet became a powerful critic. Khamenei enthusiastically fanned the flames of Iran’s cultural revolution. The writer Faraj Sarkouhi explains well the significance of culture for most

within the clerical class. “The clergy is a cultural class and aware of its importance. For years they had complained about the assault of Western culture against the world of Islam, and now they wanted to get even with Western culture, and with anything that did not fit their interpretation of Islam. Freedom of speech, thought, and religion, human rights, humanism . . . individualism and anything the Constitutional Revolution [of 1905-1911] had imported into Iran . . . they considered the work of Satan.”

Culture was so important that even in February 1982, in the midst of one of the darkest periods of the war with



Book fair in Tehran: the patron and his sycophants

Iraq, Khamenei, by this time president of the republic, chose to address cultural commentators at the newspaper *Jomhuri-ye Eslami*. Khamenei disclosed that a poet had sent him a letter thanking him for his interest in poetry, but complaining about feeling isolated after the revolution. Khamenei answered, “I had a look at his poetry, and saw that his [real] message was ‘this autumn too will pass. . . .’ I wrote back, ‘You don’t see the spring [the Islamic Republic] has come. How can you complain you are separated from the people . . . ?! The spring is here, but a donkey is grazing in the midst of the flowers. One must chase the donkey, and not dismiss the reality of the spring!’”

Not even the great masters of the past were spared Khamenei’s criticism. He attacked as “unrevolutionary” the poetry of Nizami and Sadi, twelfth- and thirteenth-century poets, respectively, who surely were among the great, classical poets his mother once lovingly recited to him. Complaining about prerevolution poets became a recurring theme in Khamenei’s speeches. He slammed art from before the Islamic revolution as “in the service of masters of power and the government.” He demanded that the arts serve “the people,” which in Khamenei’s

terminology means “the regime,” and attacked “artists who have parted ways from the loving, grateful people.”

A speech to the Iranian Students’ Poetry and Literature Congress in December 1986 is typical of the new, post-revolution Khamenei, who, like the revolution’s founding father, wanted to birth a new man, the perfect man, which traditional Shiites had once thought was possible only for the chosen few in some eschatological future:

I have a complaint . . . many of those who could have used their superior art in the service of the revolution and the people have not done so. . . . Some of them never claimed to be popular. One would say: “I am the poet of requiems for my own wounded heart,” and would write poems only for himself and had nothing to do with the ideals and goals of the revolution. . . . [And then] there were some who claimed [to be popular and revolutionary] but did not join the people. They failed to do so because of several reasons: their dogmatic thoughts were nullified by the victory of the revolution. . . . Liberal minded Westerners, who talked of humanism and the like, aestheticians who worshipped beauty and love, and indulged in saying absurdities. . . . But the leftists too, those who considered the people the toiling class . . . as their ideal. . . . When the revolution came, it became clear they were all absurd. . . . They did not join the [Islamic] revolution, did not accept the idea of the revolution and they have naturally nothing to say. . . . There were also those who on the one hand desired to be popular poets and now have the honor of being revolutionaries—but at the same time continue their revelry and debauchery, drinking incessantly and the like. . . . There are those who want to be the sole star of the revolution . . . [but with] their evil character, wickedness, and dependence on various counterrevolutionary camps, have no motive to be in the service of the revolution, and have even worked against it.

The once unassuming, awkward young cleric now believed the only goal of the arts was to immortalize the revolution’s achievements. “A call, vocation, revolution, civilization, or culture—be it truthful or false—which is not expressed by art will not survive.” Poetry is capable of making posterity understand “what happened in this society in the days of the revolution, and during the imposed war [the Iran-Iraq war of 1980-1988],” he wrote in 1987. “Revolutionary poetry must be the vanguard of the caravan of the revolution. . . . [T]hrough the arts and literature, the revolution can be exported in an easier and more honest way.” “Make a sword out of your art,” he demanded, “in order to cut away filth and impurities.” Answering proponents of artistic freedom, Khamenei shot back: “There are those who say: ‘You are shackling the artists, you are restricting them. The artist should be free, and art can’t be restricted to ideological frameworks!’ This is a total lie. . . . Art has always been the best means of explaining ideology.”

Khamenei's criticisms were warnings. "The remains of the art from the era of *Taghout* [the rebellion against God, a reference to the era of the shahs], the spirit of which was surrender to the cultural onslaught of the foreigners, cannot have any role in the structure of the revolutionary art of today. Those authors will no longer be allowed to publish."

Shahrokh Meskoob, the Iranian literary critic, once remarked that fathers kill their sons in Persian mythology, not the other way round as with the Greeks. This is what happens in Makhmalbaf's script. The blind censor employs his own son to read aloud book manuscripts submitted to the Ministry of Culture. In the end, however, the son is "infected" and "poisoned" by the dangerous literature. He is imprisoned and later executed in the presence of his father. The blind censor finds refuge from this terrible deed and abundant self-hatred through valium. His wife falls into dementia.

Khamenei went after some of the revolution's most accomplished children. He warned Ali-Akbar Saidi Sirjani, a famous poet and essayist who supported the revolution but whose parables attacked the Islamic Republic's despotism and religious hypocrisy, to halt his writings. Ignoring the supreme leader, Sirjani published an open letter and a satirical poem ridiculing Khamenei. In March 1994, Sirjani was arrested. The Ministry of Security and Intelligence charged him with "drug abuse, production of alcohol, and homosexual activity." After the Iranian branch of PEN questioned why the intelligence ministry, and not the regular Law Enforcement Forces, had arrested the poet, the ministry produced additional charges: "contacts with spy networks" and "receiving money from counterrevolutionary forces." Sirjani died eight months later in custody. Members of PEN who had protested his arrest were also interrogated by the intelligence ministry. Many fell silent.

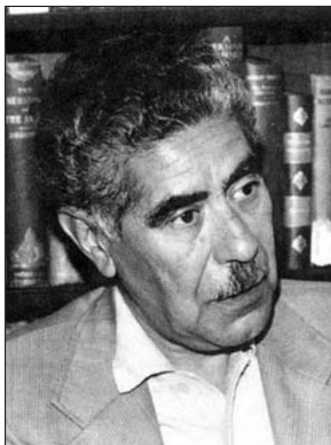
After the murder of Sirjani, the newspaper *Kayhan*, Khamenei's official mouthpiece, went after intellectuals. In a series of articles, later made into a TV series, the newspaper pinpointed public intellectuals—most of whom had refused to turn on Sirjani—as "mercenaries," "lackeys," and "poison pens" of the West. Then in October 1995, the regime killed the writer and literary

translator Ahmad Mir-Alaei, who'd not only refused to retract his support of Sirjani but had met with the British author V.S. Naipaul, who was visiting Iran for *Beyond Belief*, his sequel to *Among the Believers*. In 1996 the regime attempted to kill a group of authors, Faraj Sarkouhi among them, who had publicly refused to take back their support of Sirjani. They were on a bus headed to a literary conference in Armenia. The driver attempted

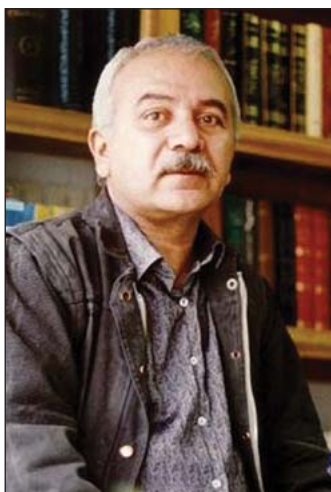
to kill them by steering the vehicle over a cliff as he jumped to safety. Fortunately, passengers thwarted the plot. Again the fingerprints pointed directly to the intelligence ministry and Khamenei. It's a near certainty that the supreme leader authorized all of the assassinations of intellectuals and oppositionists, at home and abroad, since 1989. Although Hassan Rouhani has a long track record of uninterest in or hostility to intellectuals and students who push the envelope of "cultural" expression, the regime's current severe crackdown on journalists and intellectuals ultimately can be traced, too, to the supreme leader.

There are—there always are—artists who side with the regime. Poets who show up at Khamenei's court with panegyrics for the "wise leader"; authors whom the supreme leader praises for their dishonest books about the Iran-Iraq war and the clerics' (disastrous) waging of it; and moviemakers who soften the image of the country. It's a tricky business. Sirjani and Makhmalbaf, once favored by the regime, fell from grace. Khamenei may still admire *Les Misérables*, but he probably now sympathizes with Police Inspector Javert, who imprisons human beings in this world in return for freedom from torment in the next. Khamenei may still like *War and*

Peace, but most likely as a literary device to explain away Saddam Hussein's triumph over the Islamic Republic in 1988. Bulgakov he now dismisses, which isn't surprising. Rather than sympathizing with the dog, the supreme leader surely now identifies himself with the totalitarian surgeon who is striving to create "the new man." Khamenei, who once would have enthusiastically agreed with Makhmalbaf's tearful plea in his film *Gabbeh* (*Life is Color!*), has become his country's Grand Inquisitor. It requires no great insight to see that such a man isn't ready for President Obama's good intentions. ♦



Khamenei victims: poet Ali-Akbar Saidi Sirjani, above, and translator Ahmad Mir-Alaei, below



Philosophy in a Clown Suit

An unexpected key to understanding culture. BY PAUL A. CANTOR

Is there any subject more esoteric than esoteric writing? Turn to the groundbreaking book on the subject, Leo Strauss's *Persecution and the Art of Writing* (1952), and you'll find such chapter headings as "The Law of Reason in the *Kuzari*" and "How to Study Spinoza's *Theologico-Political Treatise*"—topics seemingly of interest only to the most scholarly of scholars. Yet in *Philosophy Between the Lines*, Arthur Melzer shows that understanding esoteric writing is vital to

Philosophy Between the Lines

The Lost History of Esoteric Writing

by Arthur M. Melzer

Chicago, 464 pp., \$45

understanding Western culture and, indeed, culture in general. People interested in a wide variety of subjects—from literary interpretation to philosophy to politics to the history of religious beliefs—need to know something about esoteric, or secret, writing. By producing this clear and comprehensive account of the phenomenon, Melzer has performed a heroic service, finally making it possible for general readers to understand esoteric writing and why it has become such a controversial issue.

As his title indicates, Melzer deals

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'Pierrot' by Antoine Watteau (ca. 1718)

specifically with esoteric writing in philosophy (and thus not with such subjects as alchemy and various forms of religious mysticism, such as Gnosticism and Kabbalah). He begins with the fact that philosophy is a hazardous

venture. In their quest for true knowledge, philosophers are forced to question the unexamined assumptions of the communities in which they live, including any authoritative political opinions and fundamental religious

beliefs. This kind of free inquiry places philosophers in jeopardy with civic authorities, as evidenced by the way Athens put Socrates to death on charges of impiety and corrupting the city's youth. And Socrates didn't even write books; he left no papyrus trail for his prosecutors.

Imagine, then, the plight of philosophers who commit their dangerous thoughts to writing and thereby threaten to publicize their disagreements with the political and religious establishments. Philosophers had to learn an art of writing that would enable them at one and the same time to conceal and reveal their thoughts—to conceal their unorthodox ideas from a potentially hostile public and yet reveal them to like-minded, potential philosophers whom they wished to develop as students. The result was the famous “double doctrine of the ancient philosophers.” They learned to write in such a way that their works had an exoteric and an esoteric meaning, a conventional meaning on the surface that would placate would-be censors and persecutors, and an unconventional meaning tucked away between the lines, which careful readers could figure out by paying attention to various anomalies in the text.

For example, philosophical works often contain contradictions that just about anybody can spot. Superficial readers will treat such contradictions as mere mistakes on the part of the philosophers, but, as Melzer argues, this apparent stupidity is really a deeper form of cleverness. Contradictions appear in a specific configuration: Orthodox views are often strategically positioned at the beginning and end of a work (where conventional readers are most likely to notice them and be mollified by their comforting presence), while opposing, unorthodox views are safely tucked away in the least exposed portions of a text (often right in the middle), to be ferreted out only by intrepid readers. To speak in spy language: The task of the esoteric reader is to distinguish the true information an author is trying to convey from the disinformation he deploys to distract and confuse his enemies.

Such a bare summary cannot do justice to the subtlety and persuasiveness of Melzer's argument. *Philosophy Between the Lines* is a rhetorical tour de force. For one thing, Melzer has spent years accumulating hard evidence from the history of philosophical discourse attesting to the widespread use of esoteric writing. These statements could not be more straightforward and explicit. For example, in his article on Aristotle in *Historical and Critical Dictionary* (1695-97), Pierre Bayle writes: “The method of the ancient masters was founded on good reasons. They had dogmas for the general public and dogmas for the disciples initiated into the mysteries.” In a 1773 letter, Denis Diderot wrote to fellow esoteric writer François Hemsterhuis: “You are one example among many others where intolerance has constrained the truth and dressed philosophy in a clown suit, so that posterity, struck by their contradictions, of which they don't know the cause, will not know how to discover their true sentiments.” Melzer's most telling quotation is appropriately from Machiavelli (in a letter to the Italian historian Guicciardini):

For some time, I never say what I believe and I never believe what I say; and if it sometimes occurs to me that I say the truth, I conceal it among so many lies that it is hard to find it out.

Anyone who thinks that esoteric writing is a fantasy dreamed up by the philosophical equivalent of conspiracy theorists needs to read this book. The evidence Melzer has compiled is overwhelming, and if that isn't enough, he has put together a website with even more testimonials to the existence of esoteric writing (95 single-spaced pages of relevant quotations).

Melzer is also skilled at anticipating objections to his argument and neutralizing sources of resistance to his claims. Aware of what a shock it initially can be to learn of the existence of esoteric writing, Melzer feels his reader's pain. He openly acknowledges:

There are people who have a real love for esoteric interpretation and

a real gift for it. I am not one of them. My natural taste is for writers who say exactly what they mean and mean exactly what they say. I can barely tolerate subtlety. If I could have my wish, the whole phenomenon of esoteric writing would simply disappear.

In one of his most effective rhetorical moves, Melzer begins from his own case and shows that modern readers in the Western world have a prejudice against indirect and subtle forms of communication. He cites studies (including diplomatic handbooks) that show that in many parts of the world, such as China, Japan, and Arab nations, direct and explicit communication is not the norm, but is in fact frowned upon.

As Melzer writes, in the United States and Europe, “one is expected to be direct, clear, explicit, concrete, linear, and to the point. But in most of the rest of the world, such behavior is considered a bit rude and shallow: one should approach one's subject in a thoughtfully indirect, suggestive, and circumlocutious manner.” In analyzing what he calls “a kind of esotericism of everyday life,” Melzer emphasizes that secret writing among philosophers is not as remote from ordinary human experience as we might at first suppose. Even in the modern European and American world, we are familiar with indirect modes of communication, such as sarcasm and innuendo. Melzer refers to James C. Scott's brilliant *Domination and the Arts of Resistance* (1990) for documentation of the way esotericism is a basic phenomenon of human life. By directly confronting contemporary resistance to the idea of esoteric writing, and identifying it as a case of ethnocentric prejudice, Melzer defuses potential opposition to his thesis.

As Melzer shows, we inherit our prejudice against esoteric writing from the Enlightenment. Beginning in the 17th and 18th centuries, Enlightenment thinkers, including Bacon, Descartes, Spinoza, Hobbes, Locke, and Montesquieu, fought against religious intolerance, government censorship of publications, and

all the other establishment forces that made philosophers resort to esoteric writing in the first place. The Enlightenment hoped to create a new world in which philosophers could express their views freely in public. By the 19th century, Enlightenment thinkers in Europe and the United States had substantially achieved their goals, having established such principles as freedom of the press and separation of church and state in many communities. This triumph of the Enlightenment created a kind of historical amnesia: In the climate of a relatively free press, it became difficult to appreciate the fact that earlier oppressive conditions had driven authors to resort to various forms of subterfuge and deception in their publications. It is in the post-Enlightenment 19th century that people lost sight of the phenomenon of esoteric writing.

The Enlightenment movement complicates Melzer's argument, and he devotes a good deal of his book to analyzing it and contrasting ancient and modern views on esoteric writing. Ancient philosophers such as Plato and Aristotle were, on the whole, comfortable with esoteric writing. In the philosophical dialogue, Plato had found, perhaps, the perfect vehicle for at once concealing and revealing his thought. (According to ancient accounts, Aristotle wrote dialogues as well, but they have been lost.) By writing esoterically, the ancient philosophers sought to protect themselves against the civic authorities who regarded their activities as subversive. But, as Melzer points out, they also acknowledged the legitimacy of the political community's need to maintain the myths and opinions on which its authority rests. The ancient philosophers were willing to coexist with the political structures of their world and did not feel a need to overthrow them in practice. If the cities were willing to tolerate the philosophers, the philosophers were willing to tolerate the cities—as, in effect, their hunting ground for the true followers they sought to attract to the philosophic way of life. As Melzer stresses, another reason ancient

philosophers wrote esoterically was to replicate in book form the kind of complex initiation procedures that oral modes of instruction make possible. In sum, for a variety of reasons, the ancient philosophers did not seek to make their ideas easily accessible in written form. They wanted to protect themselves against the unphilosophical multitude, to protect that multitude against the unsettling and disorienting effects of philosophical ideas, and to force would-be philosophers to learn to think for themselves by having to wrestle with the complexities of esoteric writing.

Ancient esotericism thus rested on the premise of a perennial tension between the philosopher, whose true home is the realm of knowledge, and the political community, which dwells in the realm of mere opinion. By challenging this assumption, modern philosophy, beginning with Machiavelli, reconceived the nature and function of esoteric writing. The ancients believed that philosophic truths would forever be the preserve of a small minority of thoughtful human beings. They did not think that philosophic truths could ever be widely diffused throughout society. But that was precisely the hope of the modern idea of Enlightenment: Philosophers could serve as the vanguard of intellectual progress and, by means of their publications, gradually educate the general public to embrace the truths of philosophy—above all, new and enlightened political principles. The famous French *Encyclopedie* (1751-1777) was conceived of by a group of philosophers with just this project of enlightenment in mind.

Thus, as Melzer shows, modern philosophers developed an ambivalent attitude toward esoteric writing. They still lived under the threat of various forms of censorship, persecution, and punishment, as the examples of Giordano Bruno, Galileo, and Rousseau attest. (Because of its religious heresies, Rousseau's *Émile* was publicly burned in Paris by parliamentary order in 1762.) Modern philosophers proved to be as adept at esoteric writ-

ing as the ancients had been, and, indeed, the new power of print raised the stakes for all concerned in philosophical publications. In addition to wanting to protect themselves, modern philosophers shared with the ancients a sense of the pedagogical value of esoteric writing.

Yet modern philosophers developed a new form of writing, which Melzer calls political esotericism. For the first time in history, philosophers began to pursue a political program in their writings, seeking to remake modern states on philosophical principles. Enlightenment thinkers could thus foresee a time when philosophy and the political community might be reconciled. If the general public could be educated through philosophical writings to accept the principle of religious toleration—perhaps even toleration for nonbelievers—then philosophers could look forward to someday being open about their free thinking.

When the Enlightenment movement began in the 17th and 18th centuries, this outcome seemed remote, and thus modern philosophers had to continue to present their ideas esoterically, often going to the extreme of publishing their works anonymously. Indeed, once philosophers developed concrete political programs of their own, their ideas became potentially more threatening to established authorities. Still, as Melzer documents, Enlightenment thinkers could at least hope for a future moment when esotericism might no longer be necessary, and they began to develop a bad conscience about their own secret writing. For the first time in the history of philosophy, secret writing began to look like a form of cowardice, and some philosophers began to reproach others for not confronting the prejudices of their day more forthrightly. Melzer shows that much of the resistance today to the very idea of esoteric writing has its roots in the way Enlightenment authors began to question the ethics of secret writing.

As should be evident by now, *Philosophy Between the Lines* is much more than a scholarly treatise on the abstruse subject of esoteric writing.

In order to treat his topic properly, Melzer offers no less than a history of philosophy from the ancient to the modern world. By the time he is through, he has given as good a sense as any of what it means concretely to practice philosophy. He explores the difficult problems thinkers encounter when they try to pursue truth in the face of all the obstacles society erects to such an unconventional endeavor.

In the deepest level of his analysis, Melzer draws out the full implications of the fact that modern thinkers have lost sight of the phenomenon of esoteric writing. No longer in on the secret, a modern commentator on older philosophers may well mistake their rhetorical concessions to the prejudices of their day for their genuine beliefs. In effect, modern readers let the exoteric level of earlier works of philosophy obliterate the esoteric level. The result is to underestimate massively the unconventionality—indeed, the intellectual audacity—of earlier philosophers, particularly ancients such as Plato and Aristotle. Modern thinkers began to develop the idea that all earlier philosophers were trapped in the conventional opinions of their day, a doctrine known as historicism.

As Melzer shows, it is no accident that this understanding of philosophy developed in the 19th century—that is, just when the Enlightenment triumph began to obscure the phenomenon of esoteric writing. Beginning with Hegel, and culminating with Nietzsche and Heidegger, philosophical historicism presents all human thought as occurring within limited horizons. Truth itself becomes a historical phenomenon. Philosophers are no longer viewed as having access to any kind of absolute or eternal truths, only to the limited or relative truths of the particular era in which they lived.

In short, Melzer shows how much is at stake in the subject of esoteric writing: no less than the issue of the freedom of the human intellect. By losing sight of esotericism, modern thinkers have radically changed their conception of philosophy and have come to question its original claim to be the search for true knowledge

as opposed to the limited opinions of particular political communities. In the terms of Plato's *Republic*, contemporary thinkers deny that the philosopher can ever ascend from the intellectual cave constituted by the city. In his most significant contribution, Melzer argues persuasively against this view, insisting that only an understanding of the use of esoteric writing in earlier philosophers can alert us to a perennial human potentiality: freedom of thought. In Melzer's view, grasping the importance of esoteric writing is a liberating and inspiring experience:

The whole course of Western philosophical thought is not so well-known and settled as we have long thought it to be. Beneath its conventional exterior, it is more daring, original, and alive.

Although *Philosophy Between the Lines* is not itself an example of esoteric writing, it does operate on two

levels. While offering the best introduction to esoteric writing, it is much more than a primer for the nonspecialist (although one of the most helpful chapters is entitled "A Beginner's Guide to Esoteric Reading"). Even people who think that they are already experts on secret writing will benefit from reading this book, and not just because of its wealth of historical detail. Melzer has formulated the central issues at stake with unparalleled clarity, and he probes the subject with genuine philosophical depth. He obviously draws upon Leo Strauss's work on esoteric writing—this book ends up being one of the best introductions to Strauss's thought—but *Philosophy Between the Lines*, despite its popular touch, is not the work of a mere popularizer. With its fresh insights, it makes an original contribution to our understanding of esotericism in philosophy, and it is one of the most important books I've read in years. ♦

BCA

The China Effect

Please understand you'll be misunderstood.

BY ABIGAIL LAVIN

Spend a few days in China, and you are bound to witness a stranger exposing his bare bottom on the subway or defecating on the sidewalk. While dismayed, you will find it easy to forgive these lewd acts: The perpetrators are generally under the age of 4. Following Chinese custom, their parents have forgone Pampers in favor of *kaidangku*—open-crotch trousers that effectively make all the world a potty.

Unlike acupuncture and green tea, *kaidangku* has not been embraced in the West. Just last month, the *China Press* reported that, in the Chinese enclave of Monterey Park, California, police cited the parents of a *kaidangku*-

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I Stand Corrected
How Teaching Manners in China Became Its Own Unforgettable Lesson
by Eden Collinworth
Nan A. Talese, 272 pp., \$26.95

clad toddler for "disorderly conduct." This news item sparked an outcry on Chinese social media, with one commenter exclaiming, "So only white people are allowed to run around naked, but Asian babies can't have their little butts exposed? What kind of logic is this?"

The Monterey Park incident struck me as paradigmatic of the chasm between Chinese and Western standards of propriety. During nearly a

decade split between Hong Kong and Shanghai, I was struck by the frequency with which people spat on the ground, inquired about my salary and my weight, and wore blue jeans to weddings.

My own behavior, meanwhile, routinely confounded my neighbors. One evening I returned home from work to find a pigeon tied to the fence outside my Shanghai apartment complex. The security guard explained to me that a family in the building had captured the pigeon as a pet for their son. “But that’s not fair!” I cried.

pecking motions and a beady-eyed glare from the mangy creature.

One morning, an elderly widow and neighborhood busybody knocked on my door to inform me that the pigeon was gone. “Do you know what happened to him?” she asked, a gleam in her eye.

“I assure you,” I replied. “I had nothing to do with it!”

But she wasn’t accusing me; she just wanted to be the first to inform me that the bird had been eaten by a cat. The ribbon was still tied to the fence, surrounded by bones.



Santa in Nanjing (2012)

“Fair to whom?” asked the guard.
“To the pigeon!”

At this, the security guard turned red in the face and spit out his pork bun. The notion of kindness to an animal seemed to him the height of absurdity: “Fairness to a pigeon!” he guffawed, tears in his eyes.

The pigeon remained tied to the fence for the next few weeks, looking increasingly deranged with each passing day. I considered offering its “owners” money to set it free, then thought better of setting the precedent of paying my neighbors not to harm animals. With a pair of scissors, I attempted to liberate the bird myself (as the security guard looked on in astonishment) but every time I approached, I was threatened by

This carnage took place toward the end of my stint in China, and it was a compelling reminder that, as assimilated as I felt at times, I remained a stranger in a strange land.

In 2011, Eden Collinworth—who has a self-avowed tendency to make “deeply insane” life choices—quit her job and moved in with her college-age son, who was studying abroad in Beijing. She ended up writing a guide to Western etiquette that became a best-seller in China: *The Tao of Improving Your Likeability*.

I Stand Corrected is, ostensibly, a book about that book, chronicling Collinworth’s experiences living in China while working on *The Tao*. But it is also a memoir: Woven into her observations on Chinese culture are recollections

from her childhood, motherhood, and successful publishing career, in nothing resembling chronological order. Indeed, she is so deftly discursive that a reader might not even notice that, in the first six pages, Collinworth jumps from 17th-century Versailles to 2010 Beijing to 1990s Los Angeles to 1960s Chicago to 1970s New York City to 1980s Shanghai.

Collinworth’s improbable, globe-trotting life makes for prose that reads like *Mad Libs*. Here, have a try:

(1) When W. and I were wed on the [proper noun] by the captain of a Peruvian [noun], the ceremony was followed by a feast of [noun] meat.

(2) During a week of sanctioned luxury, the turtle [verb] in its tub, dined on [noun], and wandered among the [noun] of the 19th-century furniture in our living room.

Answer Key:

(1) Amazon River, supply boat, monkey

(2) lounged, strawberries, claw-feet

In many ways, her taste for absurdity and tolerance of risk make Collinworth a perfect fit for China, which abounds in both. While in Beijing, Collinworth made the acquaintance of a Cantonese real estate magnate who goes by “Chairman.” During a visit to Chairman’s estate, Collinworth was served “a total of five rare Tibetan cat-erpillars” that cost \$100 apiece.

She pulls off a neat trick with *I Stand Corrected*: While writing about writing a Western etiquette guide for a Chinese audience, she ends up writing a Chinese etiquette guide for a Western audience. We learn, for example, that in Chinese culture, a weak handshake is a sign of respect; that turning over a whole fish on a serving platter is a no-no, as it symbolizes capsizing a boat; and that picking at one’s food with chopsticks is also *verboten*, as it is suggestive of digging one’s own grave.

To complement an intercultural etiquette handbook with its converse is, itself, a display of good manners—a recognition that, when two parties have different definitions of politeness, it often makes sense to meet each other halfway. ♦

WANG XIN NU / IMAGINECHINA / AP IMAGES

Poet of Understatement

Mark Strand, 1934-2014.

BY ELI LEHRER

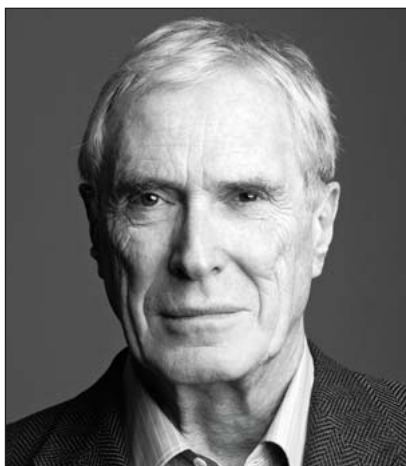
Before his death late last month at the age of 80, Mark Strand could claim one of the most varied careers of Americans active in the arts. Born on Prince Edward Island in 1934 and raised everywhere from Montreal to Brazil to pre-Castro Cuba, Strand was a painter, collage-maker, translator, writer, art critic, and, most of all, a poet. He received nearly every honor available to an American poet: poet laureate/poetry consultant to the Library of Congress (1990-91), a Pulitzer Prize (1999), a six-figure no-strings-attached MacArthur Fellowship (1987), and a slew of other awards.

To a large extent, he deserved these laurels: Strand was an almost always good, sometimes great, writer of lyric and prose poems that conjure up moving, striking images in readers' minds. And Strand wasn't a lightweight, either: It's hard to find a word or thought out of place, or an idea uncompleted, in his work. While he could do a fine job with a simple environmental description of snow, water, and meadows, his more complex works, dealing with big questions like immortality and love, require careful reading and rereading. What makes Strand's work—all together for the first time in this final *Collected Poems*—all the more impressive is that it isn't designed to impress: He almost never used a five-dollar word when a five-cent one would do, he rarely wrote in formal meter, and he used personal experience for much of his material. Over the course of an artistic career that lasted a half-century, he found few

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Collected Poems

by Mark Strand
Knopf, 544 pp., \$30



Mark Strand

new tricks. This lack of showiness, more than anything else, established him as a significant artist.

Strand trained as a painter and, in interviews, spoke explicitly about the ways that painting, particularly surrealism, and his artistic training influenced his poetry. Even in his simpler early poems, he shows a keen ability to connect observation and emotion. Take this passage from the title poem of his first published collection, *Sleeping with One Eye Open* (1964):

*Even the half-moon
(Half man,
Half dark), on the horizon,
Lies on
Its side casting a fishy light
Which alights
On my floor, lavishly lordling
Its morbid
Look over me.*

This isn't all that hard to understand or decode, but it's interesting and lyrical enough to arouse the reader's emotions. It's elegantly crafted, if not traditionally metered. And when Strand gets more difficult, he's just as good. One of his best early poems, "The Story of Our Lives" (1973), might be considered a cubist piece of poetry. Like a painting by Picasso or Klee, it simultaneously describes the same thing from different perspectives: the long-term arc of a relationship between a couple sitting together on a couch, under a variety of circumstances, through the literary device of a written book that is "the story of our lives." The poem then examines that conceit from perspectives in relativistic space-time before ending on an uncertain, but ultimately affirming, examination of human existence, where a narrator's voice concludes:

*The book would have to be written
And would have to be read.
They are the book and they are
Nothing else.*

Hitting this passage, after unraveling a fair amount of Strand's other work, feels like an accomplishment—and one that makes a rather difficult poem well worth working through. It's a solution to a longstanding crux of Strand's own creation.

The Monument (1978), the last major piece of work that can be shelved with "poetry" produced by Strand until 1990, offers similar rewards to those who make their way through Strand's musings on the philosophical concept of immortality in physical science, literary, philosophical, and artistic senses. (Despite its classification, *The Monument* is almost entirely in prose.) Take, for example, his statement that "it has been necessary to submit to vacancy in order to begin again, to clear ground, to make space. I can allow nothing to be received. Therein lies my triumph and my mediocrity." It's a paradoxical thought that raises questions about everything from Harold Bloom's theory of the anxiety of influence to the responsibility of authors to their readers.

Strand also had a zest for language itself. His free translations of the Brazilian poet Carlos Drummond de Andrade are better and more moving than efforts (including some of his own) to do more direct translations from Drummond de Andrade's native tongue. Strand changed lyrical Portuguese into a differently pretty, but clearly Germanic, English.

Strand's short prose poems—which, because they often follow clear narrative arcs, are more like the *microcuentos* of the Peruvian writer William Guillén Padilla than poems, per se—became a more important part of his body of work over the years. His final collection of new work, *Almost Invisible* (2012), consists entirely of these. "Harmony in the Boudoir" is a typical example. The plot: A man *stands at the foot of the bed and tells his wife that she will never know him*. She, surprisingly, isn't that disturbed and ends her reply by telling him: *That you*

barely exist as you are couldn't please me more. This is both amusing and thought-provoking: light on its surface, but with deep resonance.

It can be argued that it takes little sophistication to write free verse, and, on their surface, the short prose poems Strand turned to most recently are among the simplest art forms possible: They are the equivalent of anecdotes that just about everyone relates to in one way or another. But the sophistication of all this (and it's there in almost all of Strand's works) is often found far from the surface. And much like his poetry, Strand himself was modest and rarely showy in interviews.

There's a fair amount of critically lauded modern visual art, and even some modern poetry, that just about anybody could produce. Mark Strand's work—deceptively simple and self-indulgent as it may be—is good, challenging poetry well worth the time and effort it takes to appreciate. ♦

later styles, showing the increasing individuality and intensity of his approach. A visitor could be forgiven for thinking that this show honors several different painters: one who likes to paint biblical scenes; a mystic influenced by painters like Zurbarán; a modern artist for whom the tortured human body reveals the alienated soul; a dreamscape surrealist in the vein of Magritte. Yet, all of these are El Greco: From this welter of styles a unified religious vision emerges in which tenderness, penitence, and estrangement comprise the human condition.

The earliest work here is *Christ Cleansing the Temple* (ca. 1570). The wall caption notes that this was a popular subject for Roman Catholic painters during the Counter-Reformation. To Catholic artists, the church bore responsibility for the reaction its ministers' sins and distortions had provoked, and the artists didn't shy away from comparing their own church to the money-grubbing, Pharisaical religion confronted by Jesus. El Greco's version of this scene is derivative and somewhat confused, but hints of his sensibility emerge: that characteristic blue-and-claret color scheme in Christ's robes, the unearthly glow of the flesh.

Saint Francis Receiving the Stigmata is surprisingly restrained. It's another relatively early piece, from 1585-90, and although it's a dramatic image, in which the saint is enraptured by his vision of the cross, there's a quiet solitude to this painting. It doesn't feel the need to shout. The tones are soft blacks and grays. The stigmata themselves are small: A dark red dot is visible on the big vein on the back of Francis's left hand, as if an IV needle had been inserted there by a well-trained nurse. El Greco's painting, in which flesh reveals that the crucifixion underlies all everyday experience, is not tormented. The saint's expression speaks more of acceptance than agony or ecstasy. The cross itself is sketchy, blurred, in a frame of deep, black, rolling clouds.

El Greco's saints often have this gentleness to them. His *Holy Family with Saint Anne and the Infant John the Baptist* (ca. 1595) gives Mary a tender, tilted, heart-shaped face. She gazes



God and the Artist

The vision of El Greco as seen in Washington.

BY EVE TUSHNET

The nickname "El Greco" reveals two things about Doménikos Theotokópoulos, the weird and sublime painter of the Counter-Reformation: He was Greek, and he was a stranger. When everybody around you is Greek, nobody is "the Greek." El Greco's vision reflected the second part of his identity even more than the first.

El Greco's work followed the twisting path of his life. He was born in 1541 in Crete and became an icon painter there; then he traveled to Italy, where he learned the luxe Cecil B. DeMille style of the Venetians. He ended up in Toledo by way of Rome, where he developed the feverish, glowing style

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El Greco in the National Gallery of Art and Washington-Area Collections

A 400th Anniversary Celebration
National Gallery of Art
Through February 16

that would influence modern artists like Picasso and Kokoschka. This year is the 400th anniversary of his death, and Spanish cities have clamored to honor the artist who was rescued from semi-obscurity by Romantic critics and modern artists. Washington is getting in on the excitement with this small but punchy one-room show.

Here are no icons, but the paintings represent several of El Greco's

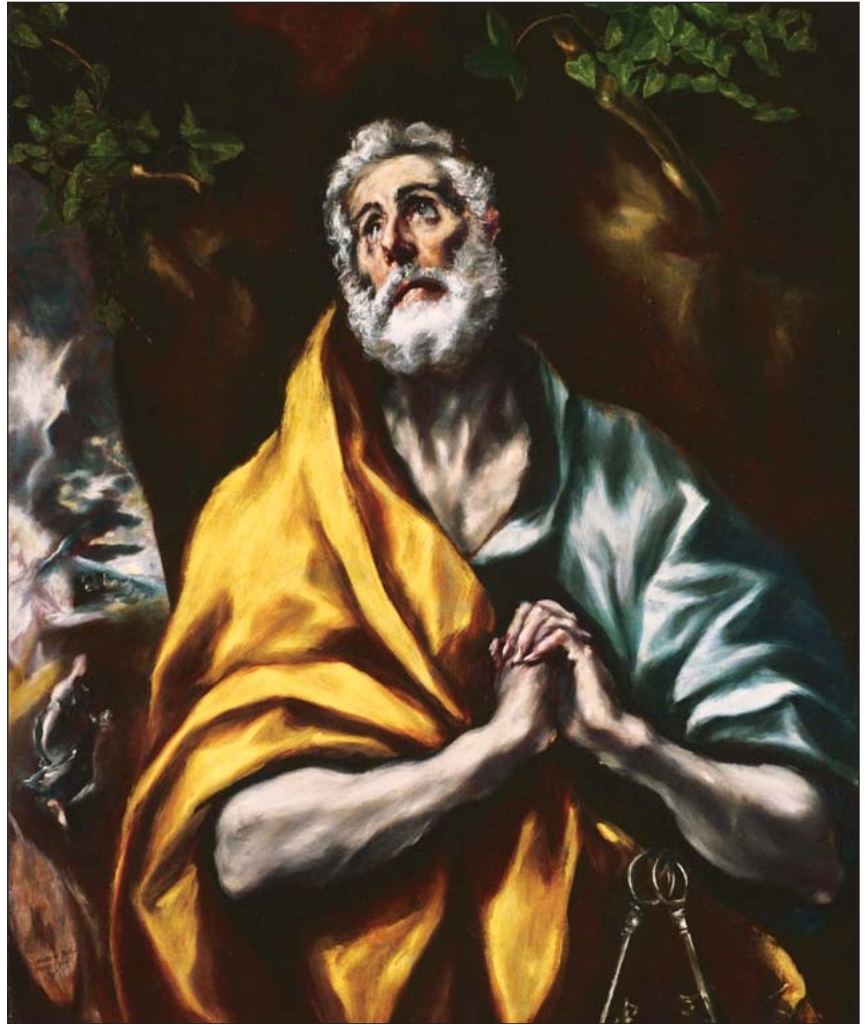
down at her son with a wry, off-kilter smile. Anne is intent and maternal; Joseph is watchful. Mary's arm is around her mother, her blue mantle hiked up on one side, with streaks of light caught in her burgundy dress. This is a family filled with love, but already recognizing that they are under threat.

The other painting which depicts Mary with her family is startlingly different. In *The Visitation*, the human warmth and individual expressions are hidden. Mary and Elizabeth, with Jesus and John the Baptist unseen in their wombs, stand with their arms on one another's shoulders, monumental, swathed in blue. They look like characters in a tragedy, or visitors from a dream. The canvas is closed off at the top and sides, as if viewed through a lens, adding to the feeling of a staged tableau. The image is dominated by the women's light-strewn cloaks, the cousins' hushed and intimate solidarity, with no hint of their holy children.

The Visitation (ca. 1610) lacks many of the El Greco hallmarks that can be seen in most of the other paintings in this exhibition: those enormous hands and little heads, the rich satiny colors—deep blue and wine-red and tawny gold. The clouds here are like water-pierced rock; the heavy cloth is alive and writhing with light; the elongated limbs are twisting in six different directions, every joint crooked, the muscles strained and the scraped grayish flesh glowing. In the larger version of *Saint Martin and the Beggar* (ca. 1597), painted by El Greco himself (this show also has a smaller workshop version), the beggar is even more stretched and knobby than the saint, which seems appropriate.

Not all of El Greco's work was religious. This show includes his *Laocoön* (ca. 1610), with its small, whip-like snakes and huge contorted limbs and torsos, under a turbulent dark sky. It's a stormy painting, violent and punishing.

This is a tight, well-constructed exhibition, whose captions provide helpful context without pushiness. The caption for the unfinished portrait of St. Jerome, for example, notes that the naked, penitent saint is "kneeling in the wilderness while clutching the bloody rock he used to beat his chest



'The Repentant Saint Peter' (ca. 1600)

in repentance for his love of classical learning." It's impossible not to wonder what the painter of *Laocoön* saw in that example, but the captions don't force the viewer into a particular interpretation.

The emotional intensity of the situations El Greco portrays lends itself to the so-called Kuleshov Effect, in which expectations color the emotions one seems to find in another's face. A friend of mine thought *The Repentant Saint Peter* (ca. 1600) looked fearful; to me, his expression was more purely sorrowful. Having betrayed his friend and Lord, Peter is tearful; his hands are clasped as he looks up in childlike trust and sorrow, with strange weather and surreptitious movement in the background. The keys of Heaven are big and heavy at his waist. The caption notes that this painting serves as a

polemic in defense of sacramental confession. But the fact that Peter (whom Catholics believe to be the first pope) is the one who's repenting here—and repenting directly before God, with no other human beings in the foreground—makes this too humble and human to be propaganda.

The show emphasizes El Greco's influence on later artists, especially modern artists. There's a small photo of *The Vision of Saint John* (ca. 1609), depicting what looks like a revival preacher in a thunderstorm, and even in this tiny reproduction, the image is windswept and electric. Modern art distorts the body and its surroundings to show what it feels like to be alone in the world. El Greco used these distortions to show what it looks like to be alone with the living God. ♦

The Children's Hour

Everything old—even the ‘morbidity’—is new again.

BY ELIZABETH POWERS

I admit to being puzzled as to how to place this novel. Not how to evaluate its merits, for there are many. Lisa O'Donnell's first novel, *The Death of Bees*, was the recipient of the 2013 Commonwealth Book Prize; awarded by the Commonwealth Foundation for first novels, the prize "seeks to unearth, develop, and promote the best new fiction from across the Commonwealth." There is a craft to storytelling, and O'Donnell has, to a great extent, mastered it, especially the tricky technique of first-person narration.

Closed Doors is told from the point of view of Michael Murray, 11 going on 12, who lives with his loving parents (Ma and Da) and Granny (personalized by her bad cooking) on a council estate on the Scottish island of Bute. It is the Thatcher era, and Da is on the dole. When not perfecting his game of keepy-uppy, Michael is obsessed with girls and baffled by their inexplicable changeableness. In their presence, his behavior is a tangle of attraction, hate, and violence. His transition to maturity is thus complicated when his mother is raped, resulting in much physical and mental injury.

His parents' attempt to keep the true nature of the event from Michael naturally leads to persistence on his part to understand what really happened. The domestic deceptions have negative effects beyond the home. The mother's refusal to report the crime to the police casts her husband in a bad light (the neighbors are convinced he beat her) and entangles the family in lies, most seriously when the rapist strikes again.

In the end, however, Ma fesses up,

Elizabeth Powers is writing a book on the aesthetic category of the sublime.

Closed Doors

by Lisa O'Donnell
Harper, 256 pp., \$26.99

becoming a local heroine for facing her attacker in court, and Michael matures. It reads easily, and one scene, during which the family goes berry-picking, brilliantly portrays how an innocent gesture by a child brings a family to the breaking point.

But there has to be something more than craft to elevate a work of fiction to the next level, to "serious" fiction, even to "literature." Which brings me to the puzzle with which I began: Who is the audience for *Closed Doors*? A clue can be found in the reaction of readers to *The Death of Bees*, which concerned the fraught attempts of two underage sisters, also living in council housing in Scotland, to conceal the deaths of their drug-addled parents in order not to fall into the hands of social services. Thus, they bury mom and dad in the backyard.

If that sounds familiar, that's because it was also the premise of Ian McEwan's first novel, *The Cement Garden* (1978). Whereas McEwan portrayed the psychological fallout from the attempt by siblings to keep secret the death of a parent, O'Donnell takes a different tack. As one reader-reviewer on Amazon puts it: "I must warn that there's a lot of morbidity in this book and some really graphic scenes that made my gut churn, as well as a lot of teen issues. The author candy coats nothing, but I loved it for that."

There are over 150 five-star reviews of *The Death of Bees* on Amazon along that line, by readers who have probably never heard of *The Cement Garden* (or of Ian McEwan for that matter). As

for the book's "morbidity," let's take this passage describing the sisters' disposal of their father's corpse:

Getting Gene off the bed and into the garden was a living nightmare. His face was swollen, as if someone had beaten the crap out of him, and he was sticky, like he was leaking venom. It was coming out his eyes, his nose, and his mouth. And the smell, I was gagging.

We decided to wrap him in the sheet he was lying on, we couldn't stomach the idea of touching him again, but it was soaked right through with this syrupy fluid and so we had to get another sheet and that did mean touching him again. Rubber gloves would have been useful, but we didn't have any.

What go-to kids! Burying the folks in the ice-cold yard on Christmas Eve is only their first trial. One sister starts drinking, selling drugs, and sleeping with a married man, and there are visits from Gene's mafia-like drug suppliers. *Closed Doors* portrays nothing on that order, but the story is also about resilience, in this case of a family. As in *The Death of Bees*, however, the story is adolescent-centered, with love and security the payoff.

Kids left to their own devices, forced to negotiate the world on their own because adults are so feckless or maleficent, is a theme with an authentic lineage, going back to Charles Dickens's portraits of orphans caught in the maw of heartless Victorian society. In recent years, however, a publishing category has arisen for readers who have never read Dickens, or any serious novel: "young adult" fiction, written by writers who have mastered their craft in workshops and college writing programs but who are, themselves, not as well read as those in previous generations.

The target audience is now 20- and 30-year-olds who, despite coming of age in the best time in history, appear to identify with the insecurities of adolescents. Inadvertently, however, the ending of *Closed Doors* indicates that the Thatcher era marked a change for the better in one family's fortunes: Da gets a job, Ma prepares to become a teacher, and the family purchases its council house. ♦

Accustomed to Interface

'Pygmalion' finds its way to social media.

BY ABBY W. SCHACHTER

Can the television listings and you'll find quite a few shows based on older source material. There's *Gotham*, which imagines the lives of Batman, Commissioner Gordon, and the villains before the comic book. There's *Sleepy Hollow*, which has Ichabod Crane traveling 250 years through time to unravel mysteries. And *Elementary* offers us a modern-day Sherlock Holmes and Miss Watson. Joining the list this fall was *Selfie*, a remake of *My Fair Lady*—which is, itself, a musical reworking of George Bernard Shaw's *Pygmalion*, the classic tale of Professor Henry Higgins betting that he can pass off a poor Cockney woman, Eliza Dolittle, as a member of the upper class by teaching her to speak proper English.

Selfie's creator, Emily Kapnek, deserves credit for mining this vein because, for so many of us, watching any makeover—of a housewife or a house—is entertaining wish-fulfillment and because (as the title makes clear) this is a comedy focused on our current cultural moment of self-obsessed, nonstop social media posting, tagging, and tweeting.

In *Selfie*, Eliza Dooley (Karen Gillan) has 263,000 Twitter followers but no real friends. She is a social media celebrity with no concrete attachments or any sense of decorum or taste. She is also a former high school outcast, so her online popularity seems to her like the perfect reflection of her transformation.

In the opener, Eliza suffers a series of public embarrassments, witnessed by most of her coworkers and providing ample evidence that she's in need of a different kind of makeover.

Abby W. Schachter writes about pop culture for *Acculturated.com*.



John Cho, Karen Gillan

She identifies her buttoned-down coworker Henry (John Cho) as her salvation. He is a marketing genius, so she begs him to “rebrand” her.

Thereafter, Henry spends part of every episode trying to teach Eliza why she makes almost no meaningful connections in her life. She has a better sales record than anyone else at her company, but she doesn't know anyone's name. In one episode, Eliza has to learn why her text-message hook-ups with another coworker are *not* the way to go if she wants deeper personal links. Her overly suggestive wardrobe is also mined for laughs.

Meanwhile, Eliza is supposed to be having an equally powerful impact on Henry. She schools him about becoming a more open and spontaneous person, and, over the first seven episodes, none-too-subtle hints point to a future love-match between this odd couple.

There's a serious problem with *Selfie*, however, since it lacks the one basic element of any good makeover: a goal. The show is keenly aware of the vice of online celebrity and over-devotion to surface attributes such as looks and fashion. But when it comes to identifying true virtues and deeper character traits, the writers don't have much imagination. Henry tells Eliza that

sleeping around with men who don't show any real tenderness or interest in her personality is a mistake. But there's little indication that anyone working on *Selfie* knows what the opposite—a mutually supportive and healthy relationship—would look like. Even Henry, the teacher, doesn't have a clue: He gets hooked on Facebook only to find that a former girlfriend dumped him and married someone else because he wouldn't prioritize her over his work.

This is where source material could actually be helpful, since *My Fair Lady* has a very solid point of view about the virtues of bourgeois values. Of course, it critiques the shallow pretensions of the upper class, and Professor Higgins is gleeful about trying to fool the aristocracy by having them fall in love with, and accept, a flower girl. Beyond that, though, the musical has a serious message about love and responsibility.

Indeed, one of the best lessons of *My Fair Lady* is the way in which both Eliza's father Alfred and Higgins acknowledge that fidelity and commitment are better than remaining poor, full of vice, and selfish. Early on, Higgins sings about the importance of fending off women's attempts to domesticate men, while Alfred explains to Higgins (while extorting drinking money from him) that, if he were to acquire wealth and status, he'd be required to become morally responsible rather than reprehensible. Yet, nearly against his will, Higgins grows “accustomed” to Eliza and realizes (almost too late) that he can't do without her. And Eliza's father, who had felt lucky to have avoided marrying his woman, ends up having to “get to the church on time” because, with his surprisingly acquired place among the bourgeoisie, he has to do the right thing and marry her.

The *Selfie* episodes that aired on ABC earlier this season had absolutely nothing to say about these matters. Sure, being totally self-involved is bad. But what does TV Eliza stand to gain by mending her ways? We have yet to be educated. And given that ABC has canceled the show—though the remaining episodes have been picked up by online streaming service Hulu—we probably never will. ◆

**“A new survey . . . by Harris Poll found that U.S. employees at large-sized companies [spend] 55 percent of . . . their workweek on email . . . meetings, administrative tasks, and ‘interruptions.’”
—Atlantic, December 4, 2014**

PARODY



To: All ACME Furnishings managers
Cc: Front-line personnel
Subject: Efficiency
Importance: High

Team leads –

By now you should have received the link to the online survey from HR re: use of time. Those who have not completed this survey are requested to do so at their earliest opportunity. If anyone cannot access the survey, they are instructed to submit a Help Desk ticket with our third-party vendor, SurveyGremlin. **DO NOT SUBMIT A HELP DESK TICKET THROUGH ACME FURNISHINGS CORPORATE I.T.**, as they are unable to resolve issues with the survey.

Department managers are requested to ensure that all direct reports have completed the survey by C.O.B. Wednesday 12/24. This information will be utilized to help deep-dive operational inefficiencies and concept future improvements that can lead to quick wins.

Every employee should print out a copy of their survey responses. Indicated follow-through will consist of departmental meetings directed by team leads to commentate on results, to be held no later than 1/5/2015. Managers are requested to curate feedback and submit summary reports to their division leaders by 1/12/2015. This information will be cross-compiled with survey results and serve as the starting point for a series of touchpoint conversations with division managers in 2015.

To further ensure every associate can be a change agent, a two-day, all-hands “town hall” on time management facilitated by Mullally Consulting will take place in Q1 of 2015, specific dates t.b.d. Please put your “thinking caps” on in advance of this very special event! It is critical that we have 110% buy-in from all associates on this critical issue which will help keep ACME Furnishings the best-of-breed in office furnishings.

See you at the company holiday party!

Roger

Roger Brown,
Deputy Vice President,
Synergy & Engagement