

J.R.R. TOLKIEN  
AND THE BATTLE  
OF THE SOMME  
JOSEPH LOCONTE

the weekly

# Standard

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## SUMMER READING



# Contents

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- 2 The Scrapbook *The welcome wrecking ball, gun-control theater, & more*
- 5 Casual *Mark Hemingway, collector*
- 6 Editorials *What's in a Name? • Ignoring Reality • Two Senior Juveniles*

## Articles

- 12 Who Speaks for the Party? BY JAY COST  
*The novel problem of a presidential nominee who can't make a cogent argument*
- 13 Life in the Slow Lane BY FRED BARNES  
*Good luck getting from Point A to Point B in the nation's capital*
- 14 Be Careful What You Vote For BY MIKE GODWIN & JOSIAH NEELEY  
*Lessons from the Austin ride-sharing debacle*
- 16 Stimulus: The Sequel BY STEPHEN MOORE  
*Hillary promises to revive a failed policy*
- 17 An Anti-Terror Success Story BY STEPHEN SCHWARTZ  
*ISIS, Kosovo, and the New York Times*

## Features

- 20 Jesus' Wife? BY CHARLOTTE ALLEN  
*The final debunking*
- 26 The Somme, 1916 BY JOSEPH LOCONTE  
*Funeral of a great myth*

## Books & Arts

- 30 The Mouse That Roared BY AMY HENDERSON  
*Mickey Mouse, idea and image*
- 32 Writers by Trade BY DOMINIC GREEN  
*Men (and women) of letters in England*
- 33 Unbeautiful Minds BY TEMMA EHRENFELD  
*Famous, yes, but all too human*
- 35 Cleansing Effect BY DIANE SCHARPER  
*A novel of the siege of Sarajevo*
- 36 Pilgrim's Progress BY THOMAS SWICK  
*The middle-aged version of a voyage of discovery*
- 37 Paths Not Taken BY ELI LEHRER  
*Dana Gioia's poetry from memory*
- 39 The Fighting Admiral BY JOSEPH F. CALLO  
*William F. Halsey in peace and war*
- 40 Hungry for Love BY MALCOLM FORBES  
*A life as dramatic as the novelist's inventions*
- 42 First Among Equals BY KEVIN R. KOSAR  
*How George Washington became George Washington*
- 44 Fathers in Chief BY TEVI TROY  
*A revealing look at presidents as parents*
- 45 Room for Murder BY JON L. BREEN  
*Mayhem and mystery in Victorian Edinburgh*
- 46 Being There BY DANNY HEITMAN  
*The divine, and mundane, world of Annie Dillard*
- 48 Parody BY GRAND OLD TECHNOLOGY

## Out with the Old

AS THE SCRAPBOOK briefly noted in February, the new offices of THE WEEKLY STANDARD have afforded us a front-row seat to the ongoing demolition of the *Washington Post* building. The old *Post* building site, we should report, is now a mere hole in the ground—the *Post* itself moved a few blocks away—and work on a successor structure is in the archaeological phase. But reference to the now-pulverized structure as “the old *Post* building” got THE SCRAPBOOK thinking: By any measure, the old *Post* building really wasn’t so old (it opened in 1972) yet it had long outlived its usefulness. And it was generally regarded as a local eyesore.

Which is why THE SCRAPBOOK noticed a recent *Post* story on another subject, to wit: the governors of neighboring Maryland (Larry Hogan, R) and Virginia (Terry McAuliffe, D) are competing against one another to land the future headquarters of the FBI in their states. THE SCRAPBOOK has no horse in this particular race, but our attention was drawn to a stray sentence in the story: “For more than a decade,” the *Post* reports, “the FBI has been pushing for a new headquarters to replace the dated and crumbling J. Edgar Hoover Building in downtown Washington.”

Dated? Crumbling? The FBI headquarters on Pennsylvania Avenue (opened in 1975) is even younger than its cousin the *Post* monstrosity—indeed, a couple of centuries younger

than some of the better-known public structures in the nation’s capital, including the Capitol—but there seems to be a consensus that it has to go. THE SCRAPBOOK suspects the reason is



*The old Post site (top); FBI headquarters*

not that the FBI building is “dated,” whatever that means, or even “crumbling,” which we can well imagine; but because it is manifestly, obtrusively, ostentatiously ugly, 1970s-style.

The pertinent fact of modern Washington’s appearance is that the two great growth spurts of the federal government—the 1930s/40s and the 1960s/70s—coincided with two very distinct architectural epochs. The Washington of the New Deal idealized the nation’s past, especially its Founding era, and so the great majority of federal structures built in that

time were pleasingly neoclassical by design. In contrast, the Washington of the New Frontier and Great Society looked toward an undefined future, and the architecture of that turbulent period reflects it.

And what hideous architecture it is! From the stark concrete boxes of L’Enfant Plaza near Capitol Hill to the great blank tidal waves of masonry that contain HUD and Labor and assorted lesser agencies, not to mention the bland, box-like John F. Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts along the Potomac, the graceful aesthetic of old Washington was succeeded some decades ago by one brutalist bunker after another, altering the city’s landscape from an echo of history to the set of a bad science-fiction serial.

THE SCRAPBOOK has always looked favorably on architectural preservation, and still does. But having suffered through the demolition spree of the 1960s and ’70s, we admit to a certain satisfaction at this moment of nemesis. Indeed, the patience of long-suffering Washington is being rewarded: Now that old *Post* building is an unhappy memory, and the looming FBI slab will soon be another. Even the glowering 1971 cement tower that housed the Christian Science Center near the White House is a thing of the past.

Is the Kennedy Center dated and crumbling? Keep the wrecking ball rolling! ♦

## Anti-Civil-Rights Sit-in

AFTER the Republican House majority declined to schedule a vote on gun control legislation last week, Democrats sprang into action. Well, the minority staged a “sit-in,” so technically we should probably say “shrank into inaction.” Either way, it was a cheap political stunt.

And we fear that, given the favorable media attention it received, we can expect more petulant behavior in the halls of Congress.

The issue here, as explained in these pages last week (“Obama’s Go-to Diversion”), is that Democrats want a blanket ban to prevent anyone on the terror watch list from purchasing a gun. The watch list, however, is

kept secret by the government, and many, maybe most, of the people on it have committed no crime. Indeed, many are on it erroneously. Using a secret government list to restrict Second Amendment rights with no due process is such a terrible idea even the ACLU is forcefully opposed to it.

By ignoring due process concerns, more than a few observers have

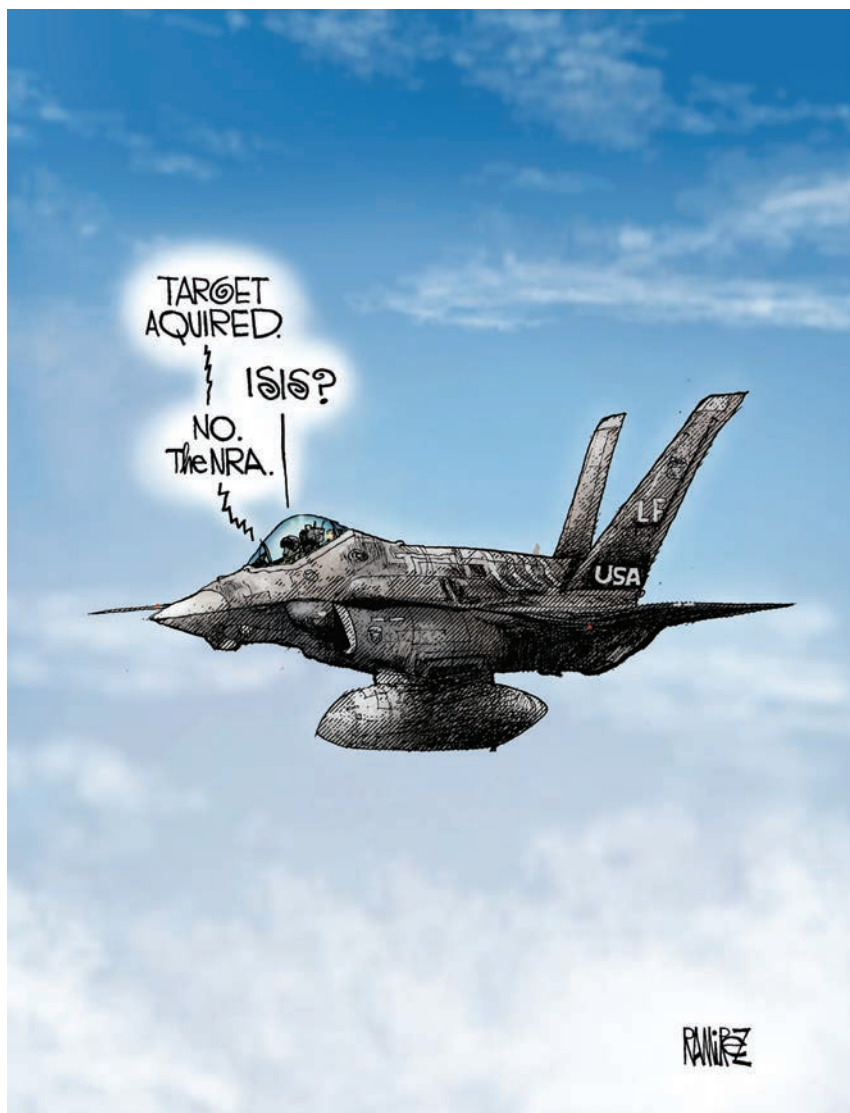
TOP: THE WEEKLY STANDARD; BELOW: AUDE

noted, Democrats effectively staged an anti-civil-rights protest. The observation is all the more pungent as the sit-in was led by Rep. John Lewis of Georgia. Lewis is a genuine hero of the civil rights movement, and his courage 50 years ago is worth celebrating. However, we are sad to report that in recent years he has diminished his reputation by engaging in petty and nakedly partisan grandstanding.

Let's count the civil rights Lewis and his cohorts were making a mockery of. There's the Second Amendment, of course, which has a long history of being intertwined with the civil rights movement. A helpful reminder is about to hit theaters—the new film *The Free State of Jones* is based on the true story of Newton Knight, a Confederate deserter who led an uprising that included escaped slaves and eventually liberated several Mississippi counties in the middle of the Civil War. As you might imagine, such an insurrection involved guns. A little more recently, Martin Luther King Jr., under constant threat from the Klan, applied for a concealed weapons permit in 1956. He was denied.

The Fifth Amendment concerns are obvious enough. It wasn't that long ago liberals were shrieking that the Bush administration's secret terror lists were unconstitutional and un-American. Now they want to use them to enable even broader restrictions of rights? Lewis himself was once erroneously put on the terror watch list and, as a result, was singled out for extra security checks at airports "35 to 40 times" over the course of a year, according to a statement from his office in 2004.

The charitable way of viewing what happened is that Democrats are so desperate to prevent another tragedy like Orlando, they simply are not thinking through the consequences of what they are doing. Unfortunately, this is also part of a long pattern of Democrats' viewing the Constitution as just an impediment to imposing their political will. ♦



## Antarctic Adventure

Readers of Jonathan Last's email newsletter (you can sign up for it at [newsletters.weeklystandard.com](http://newsletters.weeklystandard.com)!) are already familiar with last week's amazing exploits at the bottom of the world. It's winter in Antarctica, which means constant darkness (the next time the sun rises there will be in September), extreme cold (wind chill keeps the temperature around -100 degrees F), and a mix of snow and wind that makes whiteouts a frequent (and terrifying) occurrence even if you have artificial light. It is the most extreme and deadly place on earth.

Because it's winter, the staff at the American Amundsen-Scott station has been reduced to 48 people. And last week two of them took sick—sick enough that they needed to be moved off-base for medical care.

So the National Science Foundation sent a rescue. Normally, the Antarctic bases are totally cut off during the winter months. But two Twin Otter aircraft were dispatched from Canada and made their way south to Punta Arenas, Argentina. (The Twin Otter is the only aircraft even theoretically capable of surviving the elements.) From there they set off on the 1,000-mile journey to Antarctica. In the snow. In the dark.

And with their instruments just this side of useless.

That takes a metric ton of guts.

How much guts? So much that the rescue operation sent two aircraft, in case one of them needed to act as search and rescue in the event that the other one went down.

And it worked! The pilots got to Amundsen-Scott, took a 10-hour lay-over to rest, and then got their plane and their patients back.

It's a welcome reminder that there are still people who dare, and accomplish, great things. ♦

## Gun Shows Should Be Dangerous, but Aren't

SCRAPBOOK friend Daniel Gelernter, an occasional contributor to these pages and an NRA-certified firearms instructor in his spare time, emailed us last week with some reflections we thought worthy of reprinting here:

"According to liberals, the most dangerous place in the world must be a gun show: It's a giant room full of macho, vigilante maniacs with itchy trigger fingers and several guns apiece, with evil assault rifles everywhere, and a mysterious loophole that somehow allows the criminally insane to walk away with AR-15s.

"According to liberals, the safest place in the world is a 'gun-free zone': a school, a bar, a movie theater with a 'no guns' sign, or, since 1993, any American military base.

"But there has never been a mass shooting at a gun show.

"Some societies are more prone to violence; some are less prone. America is a relatively violent society, a relatively hyperactive society, a risk-taking society. And yet, the safest place in America is a place where everybody has a gun.

"The only excuse for a 'gun-free zone'—the only justification that is not intellectually dishonest—is as one step on the march to a gun-free world. This is a favorite liberal pipedream. And yet, assuming we could delete every gun in the world with the touch

of a button, would that be a good idea?

"Not unless you believe that when someone attacks you with a knife, you should be forced to defend yourself with a knife. Some liberals do think this—or, rather, they think that, when you are attacked, you shouldn't have to defend yourself at all. They are not comfortable with the idea of self-defense and do not see how anyone else could possibly be comfortable with it. A variant of this view is the idea that AR-15s are scary and trauma-inducing and that, if you're not afraid of them, well, you darn well ought to be.

"To a liberal, the reliance on collective responsibility replaces the idea of individual responsibility. If someone collapses on the sidewalk, it's the community's responsibility to get him an ambulance, but no individual is deputized to check his pulse or deliver CPR.

"Oddly enough, the absence of individual responsibility is how our government operates—especially the one particular branch that liberals imagine is saving us from the need for self-defense: In the 1981 case of *Warren v. District of Columbia*, the D.C. Court of Appeals held that the police had no specific duty to protect individual citizens. Which is how the D.C. police got off after failing to respond to multiple 911 calls from Carolyn Warren when she and two friends were held captive and raped repeatedly over a period of 14 hours. The police have a responsibility to protect society as a whole, but don't expect them to be there when your life needs saving.

"Gun owners, as liberals know, are quick to anger and whip out their guns on the slightest pretext and mow down everything they see. They're mentally unstable. They're playing with fire. So why aren't gun shows dangerous?

"If you want to get shot, your odds are slightly (though infinitesimally) higher in a gun-free zone. If you'd rather avoid getting shot, carry a gun. And if you're afraid to carry a gun yourself, find some people who are not afraid, and stand next to them." ♦

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# The Swastika in My Basement

On Memorial Day, I was in my basement looking for a cat. (Yes, it was a cat, as opposed to my cat—but that’s another story.) Anyway, I was sorting through the clutter when I came across a bag containing various tokens of my youth. At the bottom of the bag, I peered in and saw one of my possessions that I hadn’t seen in years: A swastika armband that had once belonged to a Nazi soldier.

People who own Nazi artifacts are somewhat suspect, and the suspicion is not unwarranted. Human Rights Watch has long been critical of Israeli military actions, but in 2009 the organization suspended their lead investigator on Israel after it was revealed he was an avid collector of Nazi memorabilia and went by the name “Flak 88” on Internet message boards. (H is the eighth letter of the alphabet, and 88 is code for “Heil Hitler” among Nazi sympathizers.)

In 1988, it was revealed that Las Vegas gaming impresario Ralph Engelstad had a secret chamber in his Imperial Palace casino filled with Nazi memorabilia, including a portrait of himself in full Nazi regalia, and he hosted at least two Hitler birthday parties. According to the *New York Times*, Engelstad insisted the “Hitler festivities were just ‘theme’ parties to boost employee morale.” The Nevada Gaming Commission fined Engelstad \$1.5 million and insisted he stop celebrating *der Führer*.

Others appear to have more innocent motivations. Actor Peter O’Toole begins his memoir *Loitering with Intent* by discussing a letter he owns that was personally signed by Hitler, a signature he describes as a “foul little gash.” The largest collector of Nazi artifacts in the world, Kevin Wheatcroft,

is a wealthy British heir whose father fought bravely and honorably in World War II. Wheatcroft is fairly public about his obsession. Like O’Toole, Wheatcroft seems more like a classic British eccentric than a closet sympathizer.

As for me, well, it was my grandfather’s brother Jack who served in Europe fighting the Nazis. I don’t know how my great-uncle Jack



acquired the armband. It’s rather large, so it appears it was worn over a heavy coat in a cold climate. And I assume it was not handed over willingly.

As to why Jack gave my dad the armband, aside from being a piece of history, it’s my understanding it was simply a totem of the hard-won victories and sacrifice the whole family endured. On December 7, 1941, my grandfather was a buck sergeant in the Marine Corps stationed at Pearl Harbor. As gramps ran to his battle station, my 5-year-old father and his younger brother hid under a table when the bombs started falling. Dad returned to the mainland and didn’t see my grandfather for two years. When he came back, my grandfather was an officer thanks to a

battlefield promotion at Guadalcanal.

I’m sure Jack would have obliged me with the story behind the armband, though I never asked him. Jack’s own story is probably more worth telling. After World War II, he fought in Korea, where he commanded the 2nd and 3rd battalions of the 223rd Infantry Regiment. He did two tours in Vietnam, where he helped head Army Aviation—he was in charge of 23,000 soldiers and 2,000 aircraft. By the time Vietnam rolled around, Jack was fighting alongside his two nephews. Both my dad and his brother were career

Marine officers and Vietnam vets. Jack retired a brigadier general and then spent 27 years as a municipal judge. He died eight years ago, and it’s a shame I didn’t get to spend more time with him. It’s a cliché because it’s true: They don’t make them like Uncle Jack anymore.

I’ve ventured out in public with the armband exactly once. In the fourth or fifth grade, I managed to convince my parents to let me to take it to school for show-and-tell. (They sagely insisted I first clear it with the parents of the lone Jewish girl in my class.) I brought it to school and proudly told the story of my grandfather’s and

uncle’s service in the war. These days, I am quite confident that sending my kid to school with a Nazi armband would result in a national news story at best and three dozen congressmen proposing new hate-crime legislation at worst.

Of course, I’m not about to frame the armband and hang it above the mantel. But I make no apologies for hanging on to it, either. Uncle Jack probably deserves a better memento than the one I have of him, but the foul little rag sits in my basement nonetheless. It may have a swastika on it, but it’s also a symbol that evil is real—and it takes men of real character and courage to fight it.

MARK HEMINGWAY

# What's in a Name?

Barack Obama's habit of avoiding Islamic nomenclature and highlighting American gun violence whenever Muslim terrorists strike is surely, in part, a product of his fear of anti-Muslim xenophobia in the United States. Before the rise of Donald Trump, Americans on the right might have scoffed at that concern as an expression of left-wing anti-conservative bigotry. That isn't as easy to do now: Understandable anxiety about Islamic militancy—how a small number of American and European Muslims can go jihadist with internal-security services unable to stop them—has led many Americans to become sympathetic to a ban on Muslim immigration and much more intrusive surveillance of Muslims in the United States. Whether Obama's trepidation is a wise choice domestically—Trump's nasty rhetoric, at full volume after the Orlando massacre, feeds on the president's caution—is nevertheless secondary to the question of whether it is wise strategically. Islamic radicalism generated in the Greater Middle East, after all, has sparked, if not defined, the holy war embraced by Muslims in the West.

Would a more intellectually honest description of this militancy prove helpful in the soft- and hard-power fight against Sunni and Shiite Muslims who intend non-Muslims harm? Many on the right, and not a few on the left, seem certain that correct labeling is essential if we are to confront effectively this radicalism. Many on the left, and a few on the right, are equally certain that the president's lexical caution is astute.

Labeling can certainly matter. Imagine if the White House had been more accurate in describing Iranian president Hassan Rouhani and supreme leader Ali Khamenei. Neither of the clerics, who have often worked together closely on internal oppression, terrorism, the development of ballistic missiles, and nuclear-weapons research, merits the moniker "moderate." "Pragmatic revolutionaries" or "religious fascists" would be more truthful but would have led to more difficulties with Democratic senators troubled by Obama's nuclear diplomacy. The lack

of precision abetted the administration's foreign policy.

Throughout the nuclear negotiations, senior Iranian officials and clerics, including Khamenei and Rouhani, gave speeches, often laden with religious allusions, about the enduring villainy of the United States. The mullah and his minions even let loose venom directly at the president. The nuclear deal certainly did not depend on Obama and Secretary of State John Kerry remaining mum about the animadversions hurled at the United States. Khamenei didn't agree to the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action because he found Obama sympathetic to the continuing Islamic revolution. At a minimum, a more forceful American response to such bile would have signaled that diplomacy wasn't making the United States soft. But Obama and Kerry appear to believe that any public criticism with religious overtones leads ineluctably to a counterproductive slippery slope that, in this case, would have threatened the president's most consequential foreign achievement.



*They probably don't care what we call them.*

Now imagine that President Obama had more forthrightly dissected and named the menace that is terrorizing the United States and Europe and convulsing the Middle East. He might have spoken about Islamic radicalism and the Islamic State with the erudition of Princeton's Bernard Haykel and Michael Cook, exemplars of thoughtful scholarship. Such analysis wouldn't have caused, in Obama's words, a "clash of civilizations" or prevented the Egyptian, Jordanian, Saudi, or Pakistani security services from working as they do now with the Central Intelligence Agency.

Indeed, Westerners have often decisively contributed to deeply factious debates among Middle Eastern Muslims—about slavery, women's rights, tyranny, and other issues that touch on the holy law, the most important building block of Muslim cultures. That so many influential Islamic thinkers spend so much time excoriating Western ways demonstrates the seductive power of Occidental culture. Muslims in the heyday of their empires showed little curiosity about, and even less umbrage at, Christian cultures and hostile Christian ruminations.

Most Westerners surely don't consider it unacceptably intrusive that their ideas and actions stopped the Islamic slave trade. They should be aware that they reflexively elevate their views into "universal rights" while faithful Muslims, let alone fundamentalists and radicals, don't have that privilege. There is a moral hubris within many Western conversations about Islam. But that doesn't mean Westerners shouldn't try to advance certain ideas, especially when large numbers of Muslims openly aspire to make Western values and rights their own.

The fundamentalist backlash in Muslim lands against women's rights and a brutal stance against homosexuality—particularly in the Middle East, which once attracted gay Westerners because a respect for privacy and the holy law's demanding standards for proving illicit sexual contact often produced more tolerance than in the West—is in part a reaction to the continuing reach and magnetism of foreign ideas. But today's ethical crisis within Islam is different from the East-West clashes of yesteryear. The lodestars of Islamic thought in the Greater Middle East—Saudi Arabia, Iran, Pakistan, and Egypt—have all become engines of militant, if not revolutionary, Islamic orthodoxy. At the end of the 19th century, the most famous and convulsive Muslim theologians and thinkers were Islamic modernists, who could say, as the renowned Egyptian religious scholar Muhammad Abduh once did, "Oriental nations . . . [have] no ambition, little hope of life, and are willing to accept inferiority while the Western nations have the highest and noblest of objectives." Egypt and Pakistan, where more liberal interpretations of Islam were once competitive with a stern traditionalism, have become satellites of Saudi Arabia's well-funded primitive Wahhabi creed. The nominally secular, oppressive Egyptian and Pakistani militaries have inextricably intertwined themselves with deeply conservative religious forces.

A large part of the Middle East's younger generation may be sympathetic to and envious of Western lifestyles and freedoms. Iranian and Arab Muslim religious identities among the young, especially women, have become more individualistic and less communitarian. But the youth, like many older Muslims who want political and religious reform, are without leadership, institutions, and very often educations of any depth or utility. And among Arab youth, many—probably more than at any time in Islamic history—embrace their faith as a vehicle of political protest. Islam becomes a means for individual empowerment, personal redemption, and communal revenge, a flexible, stripped-down spiritual vessel in which traditional restraints on personal conduct often no longer exist.

Many Westerners want to believe that only Muslims can eliminate the jihadist cancer within their community. That view is probably mistaken, at least in the sense that a consensus of religious scholars, politicians, and public intellectuals could put down this rebellion—and Muslims who embrace religious militancy are ardently rebelling. Western

criticisms of secular Middle Eastern authoritarianism and Islamic culture—they combine to form mainstream fundamentalism—don't have the sympathetic echo they once had now that Westernized Muslim intellectuals in so many lands have collapsed or write from exile. And even in a post-imperial age, highly Westernized Arabs (think Edward Said and friends) can be reluctant to criticize Muslims, even fundamentalists, for fear of diminishing the opprobrium against the West, which, somehow, deserves the lion's share of the guilt for ruining the Middle East.

Great progressive Muslim minds today are few. The vast Muslim flight to the West has taken with it most of the best and the brightest, and many of those abandon their faith or run smack into the global network of Saudi-supported mosques, which preach a segregationist creed. The Muslim immune system just may not have the requisite number of healthy white blood cells to stop militancy from growing. It's possible a leaderless upwelling of popular disgust could change the dynamic. This is more likely in the Muslim communities of Europe, where the graphic violence of jihadists, seen most recently in the murder of a French police officer and his wife, may alienate anti-Western Muslims. The Islamic State's rebroadcast of the officer's death deleted the partial decapitation of his wife and the threatening of their 3-year-old child, which the killer livestreamed. Such actions are not, to say the least, historically redolent of the male ethos of early Islam's great bedouin warriors.

The Greater Middle East offers less hope. Looking at the vast geography of destruction and dysfunction, at how its most powerful nation-states fuel radicalism, such a lasting wave of disgust is difficult to envision. An Islamic counter-revolution could develop in Iran, since theocracy has produced rampant dissent. But given the uniquely Shiite nature of the country's faith and politics, it might not have a large impact on the Sunni world.

Americans should understand what is happening within Muslim lands and communities in the West so that they don't believe drones, Kurdish irregulars supported by U.S. Special Forces, or more Federal Bureau of Investigation agents and French internal-security officers are going to dent seriously the biggest problems. President Obama ought to describe "violent extremism" religiously because that is how Middle Eastern Muslims do so. Not doing so does a disservice to those who are trying to turn the tide inside the faith. Iranian pro-democracy dissidents bravely praising President Obama in 2009 didn't want him to ignore them as they were being crushed. Neither should Westerners condescend, which Obama publicly always does. With all the awful things that Muslims have endured since World War II, they're not fragile. There are good reasons to make them wrestle with Western complaints, no matter how unpleasant. Obama can certainly do better in public than to describe Khamenei, who has jailed and brutalized thousands of his own countrymen, assassinated intellectuals, and nourished virulent antisemitism, as simply "complicated."

The United States is engaged in a long struggle. If Islamic terrorism continues to rack up the civilian body count, today's bipartisan isolationism may give way to a renewed willingness to deploy large numbers of U.S. troops in the Middle East. Knowing the nature of the distemper within Islam, discussing it honestly, can only help us appreciate the difficulty of the challenges before us and the patience required.

—Reuel Marc Gerecht

# Ignoring Reality

At 2:35 A.M. on June 12, Omar Mateen called 911 from the Pulse nightclub in Orlando, Florida. For 30 minutes he'd been on a killing rampage and he wanted the world to know why. He spoke for less than a minute.

"In the name of God the Merciful, the beneficent," he began. "Praise be to God, and prayers as well as peace be upon the prophet of God." And then he announced: "I wanna let you know, I'm in Orlando and I did the shootings." The dispatcher asked for his name. "My name is—I pledge of allegiance to Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi of the Islamic State." The dispatcher asked again for his name. Mateen said: "I pledge allegiance to Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi, may God protect him, on behalf of the Islamic State."

In two other calls, both of them much longer, Mateen declared himself an "Islamic soldier" and reported that he was carrying out the shootings in order to avenge the deaths of Muslims in Iraq, Syria, and Afghanistan.

Patience Carter heard one side of those 911 calls from her position near the killer in the bathroom of the Pulse nightclub. "The motive was very clear to us," she told reporters. "Through the conversation with 911, he said that the reason why he was doing this was because he wanted America to stop bombing his country," she said. "So, the motive was very clear to us, who were laying in our own blood and other people's blood, who were injured, who were shot, that we knew what his motive was, and he wasn't going to stop killing people until he was killed, until he felt like his message got out there."

To make sure that message was unmistakable, Mateen posted on Facebook during the massacre. "I pledge my alli-

ance to Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi . . . may Allah accept me," Mateen wrote in one post. "The real Muslims will never accept the filthy ways of the west. . . . You kill innocent women and children by doing us airstrikes . . . now taste the Islamic state vengeance."

This information was available to law enforcement—and to the White House—almost immediately after the attack on the nightclub. And yet, some 36 hours later, when President Barack Obama spoke to reporters, he said that the shooter had pledged loyalty to ISIS only "at the last minute." Obama insisted that the reason behind the slaughter was a mystery: "I think we don't yet know the motivations."

In the days that followed, we learned more about Mateen and his history of radicalism. Mateen's father was a long-time Taliban sympathizer. A decade before Mateen's attack in Orlando, he threatened to shoot a classmate at a cook-out when his hamburger apparently touched some pork by accident. Mateen attended a mosque with a Florida man who would later become a suicide bomber in Syria. In part because of that connection, the FBI investigated Mateen twice as a possible jihadist threat. Perhaps the most chilling piece of information to emerge is that Mateen had told coworkers that he hoped to be "martyred" in an FBI raid on his home.

All of which means the president is wrong, and willfully so. We know Omar Mateen's motivation. He was a committed jihadist. He killed in the name of Islam. None of this suggests that there weren't other factors. Perhaps there were. But it's not necessary to understand them all in order to recognize the most obvious.

The Obama administration efforts to ignore inconvenient realities reached the point of self-parody last week, when the Department of Justice released bowdlerized transcripts of the 911 calls the killer made from the Pulse nightclub.

"I pledge of allegiance to Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi of the Islamic State" became, after FBI censoring, "I pledge of allegiance to [omitted]."

"I pledge allegiance to Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi may God protect him, on behalf of the Islamic State" became "I pledge allegiance to [omitted] may God protect him [in Arabic], on behalf of [omitted]."

The FBI said its redactions were meant to deny ISIS a propaganda victory. But seven years of the Obama administration's non-war on terror point to a different explanation. Truths that complicate Obama's ideological objectives are simply cast aside in favor of his preferred reality.

"Underwear Bomber" Umar Farouk Abdulmutallab confessed to working with Al Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula. Three days later President Obama described him as an "isolated extremist." When Faisal Shahzad tried to bomb Times



Outside the Pulse nightclub in Orlando, June 12

Square, then-secretary of Homeland Security Janet Napolitano was quick to dismiss it as an amateurish “one-off” attack, never mind the involvement of the Pakistani Taliban.

The president doesn’t want to answer for a deadly al Qaeda attack on U.S. facilities in Benghazi six weeks before the election? Claim it wasn’t al Qaeda and claim it wasn’t a planned attack. The Obama campaign doesn’t want anything to complicate its 2012 campaign narrative that “al Qaeda is on the run”? Refuse to release the “small college library” full of documents captured at Osama bin Laden’s compound in Abbottabad. Is the DNI assessment of Iran’s involvement in terrorism complicating efforts to win support for a nuclear deal? Simply have them rewrite it and leave out the damning evidence. State Department leaders don’t like video evidence of Fox News correspondent James Rosen catching the spokesman in a lie? Edit it out of the recording. Disagree with the assessments from the intelligence community that some Guantánamo detainees are too dangerous to release? Ignore them and transfer those detainees anyway.

The Obama administration’s efforts to shape our perception of the threats we face doesn’t make the actual threats go away. And yet the president did it again last week, saying that jihadists pledged to fight and die for ISIS “are not religious warriors.” It would be bad enough if he were just trying to fool us. Worse is the possibility that he’s fooling himself.

—Stephen F. Hayes

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## Two Senior Juveniles

As we approach July 4, 2016, the 240th anniversary of the Declaration of Independence, it is proper to recall what the philosopher Leo Strauss, in his introduction to *Natural Right and History*, called the “weight and elevation” of our founding principles. But fine principles are one thing. One must also ask, how do they fare in the maelstrom of history? Can a nation founded on those principles long endure? For the weight and elevation of our founding principles would count for little if the republic based on those principles had been unable, at crucial times, to produce citizens and statesmen with the weight and elevation to defend and advance them.

The 9/11 generation—the young men and women who have volunteered by the hundreds of thousands to fight since the attack on America 15 years ago—provide the

most recent evidence that we retain as a nation that kind of weight and elevation. All is not, in our third century of existence, lost. All is not, in today’s America, merely light and low.

Indeed, even though one loses sight of this in the gloom of our current presidential race, there have been striking moments in this new American century of weighty civic renewal and elevated political leadership. As an example of the latter, one could cite above all the political and military leadership that produced out of the shambles of a mismanaged war, and in the face of bitter political opposition and considerable public doubt, the victorious surge in Iraq in 2007-2008. In the sphere of civic renewal, one could cite phenomena as diverse as the mobilization of youth behind Barack Obama to upset Hillary Clinton and win the presidency in 2008 and the rise of the Tea Party in 2009 and subsequent revitalization of the Republican party with the election of impressive young candidates in the elections of 2010 and 2014. And surely the success of the musical *Hamilton* provides grounds for hope even for our popular culture!

But then we have this year’s presumptive major party nominees, a hack and a demagogue—and, one might add, a remarkably ethically challenged hack and an unusually responsibility-challenged demagogue. Watching Donald Trump and Hillary Clinton exchange juvenile attacks and insults this past week, your first thought was, well, our politics are always somewhat juvenile. But then you realized that we’ve gone beyond the juvenile to the juvenile delinquent. In any case, a normal citizen would conclude from the exchange of insults by our presumptive nominees that—you know what?—each of them is right! Trump is right that Clinton shouldn’t be president of the United States. Clinton is right that Trump shouldn’t be president of the United States.

How to avert either outcome? It’s going to be difficult to deny Trump the nomination at the GOP convention. If he wins the nomination, it’s going to be difficult for an independent candidate to defeat both Clinton and Trump. But the difficult is not the impossible. There is a path to an open convention. There is a path for an independent nominee.

And the unpleasant is not the undoable. It’s unpleasant to think of jumping into the muddy and fetid waters of American politics in 2016. It’s easier to stand on the shore, lamenting our fate and rationalizing our inability to act. But lamentations and rationalizations won’t protect us from decadence and degradation. And lamentations and rationalizations surely won’t help move to completion the unfinished work, the weighty and elevated work, which those who have fought since 9/11 have so nobly advanced.

—William Kristol



# Who Speaks for the Party?

The novel problem of a presidential nominee who can't make a cogent argument. BY JAY COST

Our Constitution distributes power broadly across three branches of government, and the federal, state, and local levels. Yet during presidential campaigns, candidates for offices across the country unite behind their party's presidential nominee. This person becomes the representative of the entire coalition, and it is his or her responsibility to explain to voters what the party stands for.

Hillary Clinton may have many limitations as a candidate, but there's no doubt she's an able messenger for the Democrats. The GOP, by contrast, has selected Donald Trump, who lacks the capacity to make an argument on behalf of the conservative movement. Trump has effectively shifted this rhetorical burden to Republican officeholders, who lack the prominence to make a forceful, unified case for the party. As such, the two sides are grossly mismatched, with the Democrats holding a substantial advantage.

The difference was stark in the wake of the Orlando massacre. Clinton and congressional Democrats were quick to get on the same page—connecting the shooting to the need for more gun control. Clinton gave a high-profile speech that coincided with a legislative push by Senator Chris Murphy in the upper chamber, followed by a sit-in by liberals in the House of Representatives.

Ted Cruz, on the other hand, offered an expert rejoinder on the Senate floor, calling out Democrats for



their carefully staged “political show” to transform a “terrorism issue” into a “gun control issue.” He also wrote an op-ed arguing, “The events in Fort Hood, Boston, San Bernardino and now Orlando demonstrate that this administration has failed to produce a clear-eyed strategy to defeat Islamic-inspired terrorism.” This is a strong and serious argument for Republicans to make, one focused on the failures of

the president to keep the country safe.

But Cruz is not the nominee, so his cogent response received little attention. Instead, the spotlight was on Trump, whose oafish posturing left the GOP without a prominent spokesman to match Democratic rhetoric. Trump's first response was a self-congratulatory *I-told-you-so* tweet. Then he argued that club-goers should be allowed to carry weapons—a position the National Rifle Association's Wayne LaPierre was forced to rebuke. Trump further speculated about the need for racial profiling. Instead of focusing on the failures of Obama, as Cruz did, Trump veered from undisciplined to doltish. The Democrats won the argument by default.

What happens in an election where one side is led by a nominee who cannot make an argument on behalf of his party? The answer is: *Nobody really knows*. Until now, the major parties have nominated candidates who could communicate their basic messages to voters. Even those who lost by large margins—Barry Goldwater in 1964, George McGovern in 1972, Walter Mondale in 1984, Bob Dole in 1996—could at least make their parties' case, even if their salesmanship was less than impressive. Trump is a different species of candidate entirely. His typical argument is a mishmash of catchphrases and off-the-cuff bluster. And when Trump does stumble upon a coherent thought, it's likely to offend some crucial voting bloc.

Republican officials may be tempted to write Trump off and simply focus instead on down-ballot races. That assumes other candidates can effectively communicate the party's message while the GOP nominee is spouting gibberish and the Democrats are marching in lockstep behind Clinton. Will marginal Republican voters alienated by Trump turn out to support down-ballot GOP candidates? Will independents otherwise amenable to Republican arguments find themselves driven to vote for Clinton and down-ballot Democrats?

Unfortunately, there is evidence that the Trump effect is real, and working to the Democratic party's

GARY LOCKE

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advantage. At the beginning of the year, the average of polls by *Real Clear Politics* had Obama's job approval at just 43 percent. Today it stands at 50 percent. The difference is not due to improvements in the economy, which remains so fragile the Fed has kept interest rates historically low. It is certainly not due to victories in the fight against terrorism—with the massacres in San Bernardino and Orlando, domestic allies of ISIS have killed scores of Americans. No, the difference is Trump, who is making Obama look *good*. The president's job approval numbers, for instance, jumped noticeably after Trump was asked in an interview about David Duke and the Ku Klux Klan and failed to denounce them. Obama's approval rating jumped again after Trump defeated Cruz in Indiana.

It is possible, of course, that down-ballot Republicans can mount effective campaigns without a decent nominee at the top of the ticket. Maybe they can "localize" their races. Maybe they can create enough space between themselves and Trump. Maybe they can persuade voters to elect them as a check on President Hillary Clinton. Recent polls from Quinnipiac University show senators Marco Rubio of Florida, Rob Portman of Ohio, and Pat Toomey of Pennsylvania holding their own in competitive races. But other data are more worrying: A Reuters-Ipsos generic ballot test showed congressional Democrats with a nine-point lead earlier this month. Trump's failing and flailing campaign may well drag down many Republicans who, given a normal nominee leading the ticket, would win.

There is still a chance to stop this impending debacle. The delegates who meet at the Republican National Convention in July have a great stake in the party's success in November, coming as they do from state and local party organizations. They can choose to unbind themselves from the primary and caucus results, and nominate a decent candidate who can make an intelligent case to voters in November. ♦

# Life in the Slow Lane

Good luck getting from Point A to Point B in the nation's capital. BY FRED BARNES

Drive over the Potomac River from Virginia into Washington across the 14th Street Bridge, and you can't miss a large electric sign overhead. "SafeTrack Is Here," it says. "Rethink Your Commute." That's supposed to be helpful advice. Properly understood, it's a warning.

It tells people in their cars the traffic congestion that's been a feature of living in the nation's capital for decades is worse than ever or soon



*The price of a 'theatrical play,' March 16*

will be. So brace yourself. And getting to work, never easy, will be a nightmare if it isn't already.

This fact of life for the politicians, bureaucrats, planners, media types, and lobbyists won't displease most Americans who live far from the Washington metropolis. Indeed, they're likely to feel that difficulty in getting around town is a punishment the political class deserves. And maybe it is.

In Washington, there's a lot of blame to go around for the traffic crisis. Highways and bridges, necessary to accommodate a surging population

and more cars, were never built. Advocates of "smart growth," environmentalists, and planners who find cars mess up their plans—together they bear a measure of responsibility. Neglect of maintenance throughout the Metro rapid transit system is the fault of Metro personnel.

But accountability not being part of the Washington culture, no one is held accountable. Poor Metro maintenance, the *Washington Post* reported, "resulted from public pressure to keep the subway operating at full capacity for economic and convenience reasons." So the public was at fault? This is doubtful. Did the riders, informed that critical maintenance was needed for safety reasons, insist that it be put off? Of course not.

Anyway, the current disruption began when Metro, the once-elegant, 118-mile system connecting Virginia and Maryland to D.C., started having safety issues, delays, and other problems. Trains broke down. Fires ignited in dark tunnels between subway stations. A woman died of smoke inhalation. Ridership declined.

The National Transportation Safety Board investigated and discovered lousy maintenance, a slipshod safety culture, and a failure to learn from earlier troubles. "Learning disabilities are tragic in children, but they are fatal in organizations," said Robert Sumwalt, an NTSB board member, to the *Post*. "And literally that is true in this case."

So now we have SafeTrack, the euphemism for partial Metro shutdowns that will make life harsher than it need be in Washington from June to next March. The entire system was closed for a day for "inspections"

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last March. Tyler Cowen, the George Mason University economist, called this a “theatrical play to justify” the extensive shutdowns that were announced in May. He was right.

Cowen feared the worst. “There is no longer much resilience in the area traffic patterns, or so many possibilities for rerouting, so downtown might be at a gridlocked standstill much of the time,” he wrote on his blog *Marginal Revolution*. “It’s already hard enough to cross past the White House since the closing of Pennsylvania Avenue.” He got that right too.

Why is “rerouting” one’s travel or attempting to “reroute your commute” so difficult? Very simple. Many of the highways that were supposed to be built along with Metro were scratched. The subway opened in 1976. The highways have been erased from the memory of planners. It wasn’t clear until this year, with the subway under repair, how big a mistake this was. The only roads to which one might reroute today are already clogged with cars and trucks.

Not all the once-planned highways were a good idea. Indeed, Washington would have been honeycombed with interstate freeways if they’d all been built. Settled neighborhoods would have been torn apart. Some were, in anticipation of highways that never got beyond the planning stage.

But it was the killing of one highway in particular that has had an outsized impact. It’s known as the Outer Beltway. Conceived in the 1950s, it was to be a 108-mile loop circling the Washington area outside the famous Capital Beltway, built in the early 1960s. It drew complaints, the most serious being that it would cause a fresh wave of suburban development—catering to two-car families—to reach farther into Virginia and Maryland from Washington. It would generate what its opponents these days call “sprawl.” They were aghast.

Most people weren’t. That’s why new neighborhoods far from Washington were gobbled up so fast by home-buyers. One thing should have been obvious from this phenomenon: Development is inevitable. It

doesn’t depend on the construction of another beltway to spur it. So much far-flung development has occurred around most metropolitan areas, it has its own name—exurbs.

Today, the Outer Beltway would be a way around the Washington area, a “regional bypass facility.” Tens of thousands of travelers up and down the East Coast would no longer be forced to merge with local traffic on the Capital Beltway to get through the Washington area. They’d have an easier route. And traffic on the Beltway, often a parking lot, would ease.

The Three Sisters Bridge crossing the Potomac above Georgetown

would be another safety valve in today’s pinch. It would connect with a freeway on the Washington side and replace an ugly elevated highway. The North Central Freeway would be a new route into D.C. from Maryland. None of these was built.

Metro was once dubbed the “Great Society subway” because it was dreamed up in Washington and initially funded during the late 1960s. It was a wonderful idea. Its stations were beautifully designed. But like much of what government runs, it was allowed to deteriorate. And like its namesake, what it had promised to deliver, it no longer could. ♦

## Be Careful What You Vote For

Lessons from the Austin ride-sharing debacle.

BY MIKE GODWIN & JOSIAH NEELEY

Rarely has a vote had such an immediate effect. On May 7, Austin residents elected not to overturn restrictions on ridesharing companies their city council passed in December. Two days later, both Uber and Lyft ceased operations in the Texas capital. The new rules required transportation network companies (TNCs, as they’re known) to expand their background checks on drivers to include fingerprinting, processed through the FBI. Uber and Lyft—which hadn’t met government demands to have run fingerprint checks on 25 percent of their drivers by voting day—declared it was now impossible to do business in the city.

The popular ridesharing companies warned they would disable their apps in Austin if voters didn’t

reject the regulations, but it seems neither the government nor the people believed them. “Nobody wants them to leave and we’re not asking them to leave,” council member Ann Kitchen, who led the effort to impose the regulations, told KUTX radio. Mayor Steven Adler said both before and after the referendum that he hoped the city could come to some compromise with the TNCs, hinting that the phase-in of fingerprint requirements could be delayed. Residents of the traffic-choked city with few mass-transit alternatives switched not to traditional taxis but to a new, decentralized ridesharing service that launched as soon as Uber and Lyft left. Arcade City, which had been working on its own app, set up a Facebook page to connect residents wanting transportation with residents willing to provide it (for a price). “Need a ride ASAP from riverside area to downtown!” one post reads. “How do I use this to

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get a ride?? Going to the Walmart on w Anderson ln, I'm off 183 right now thanks," says another. (The city's transportation-department detectives have already starting busting the drivers coming to their rescue.)

So what no one wanted—except Austin's Big Three incumbent taxi companies—is precisely what everyone got. Sadly, this fight is all too typical of what happens when technology companies run head first into the buzzsaw of politics. India's telecommunications regulator decided in February, for example, to ban "Free Basics," a nonprofit Facebook program designed to give low-bandwidth information services to the country's poorest citizens. What should have been an easy sell—offering free Internet to underserved rural poor—opponents successfully painted as a colonialist plot to exploit India's poor economically and reshape its government to the company's advantage. Given that fights like this are liable to keep popping up as technology changes the way people can connect, it's worth considering what lessons both government and business can learn from how Austin's ridesharing experiment unraveled.

Chief among the lessons for companies is that politics is a very different business from business. This is particularly true when it comes to making your case to the public. Tech companies often make the mistake of thinking that their services are so self-evidently valuable that people will automatically flock to their banner. Yet in Austin, many of the voters bombarded with flyers, ads, and text messages weren't familiar with ridesharing services and those who were had concerns the companies didn't address.

Companies are also vulnerable to being pegged "big greedy corporations." That's particularly true when they spend a lot of money advocating their point of view. By the end of the TNCs' campaign backing Austin's Proposition 1, opponents were talking almost entirely about the money the TNCs had spent—\$8 million—and

hardly at all about the substantive policy issues.

Guess what: Your superior economic resources can get you labeled a "bully." (That word was thrown around a lot in Austin, though the success of the opposition in defeating the companies that massively outspent them suggests that flush businesses aren't always the stronger players.) Companies need not deny that their proposals will make them money. But they need to show that they serve interests besides the bottom line. In Austin, ridesharing companies could have declared that their business model included hav-

officials, already grappling with Austin's disproportionate numbers of DWI arrests, speaking out about the value ridesharing provided to the city. (Since Uber and Lyft ceased operations, there's been a 7.5 percent increase in such arrests.)

Governments also need to consider how people will respond to their rules. Austin's officials seemed to be in denial—almost on a daily basis—about the likelihood Uber and Lyft would leave the city if the new rules were implemented, even though the companies had followed through on that promise elsewhere. The TNCs had learned in other cities that this

often had the effect of getting officials back to the negotiating table. (They didn't anticipate that the city whose semi-official motto is "Keep Austin Weird" might decide to tread a different path.) Austin was also unprepared for how much interest the controversy would garner beyond city limits. State legislators have already pledged to preempt Austin's new rules in next year's legislative session. Austin, a traditionally left-of-center

city, may have found itself in the position of inviting intervention on behalf of residents—including those who have lost their ability to make a living—from a Republican-dominated legislature. And the new ordinance has generated loads of bad press that risks damaging Austin's brand as a tech-friendly metropolis.

All this said, cities and companies can take solace in the realization they can correct their mistakes. When San Antonio passed a fingerprint requirement in 2014, Uber and Lyft left that town. But after extensive negotiations, the city came to a compromise, instituting a voluntary fingerprint check everyone could live with. Austin had better act fast, though. The capital has already lost a competitive bid for a \$50 million "Smart City Challenge" to fund transportation innovation. Austin lost to Columbus, Ohio—where, after state lawmakers intervened, Uber and Lyft can operate legally. ♦



*Pro-regulation forces celebrate victory at local Democratic party headquarters, May 7.*

ing a more diverse, gender-balanced workforce of drivers, something that burdensome fingerprinting requirements would have made difficult to achieve. For many female riders, the prospect of more female drivers giving them that last ride home at night looked to be a safer alternative as well as a cheaper one. And that might have put opponents in the position of having to explain the composition of the taxi workforce.

Governments, too, have a lot to learn. First, don't regulate just for the sake of regulating. Austin's new ridesharing rules lacked any plausible rationale. The handful of assault complaints against drivers ultimately had resulted in only one conviction—of a taxi driver. An interim set of regulations had been working fine; there was no public outcry or incident demanding a shakeup. Indeed, it was the new regulations that sparked a backlash, with top law-enforcement

# Stimulus: The Sequel

Hillary promises to revive a failed policy.

BY STEPHEN MOORE

In the wake of the miserable May jobs report and the even more miserable first-quarter GDP numbers, Hillary Clinton revealed her long-awaited agenda to fix the economy: Raise the minimum wage; hike taxes on the rich; and spend a quarter-trillion dollars more on public works. Clinton is calling for “the biggest infrastructure investment since Dwight Eisenhower’s interstate highway system.”

One can be forgiven for experiencing a wave of déjà vu. Doesn’t this sound exactly like President Barack Obama’s \$840 billion stimulus plan circa 2009? All that is missing from this spending blitz manifesto is the mythical rhetoric of “shovel-ready” projects.

The left insists on replaying this vinyl record though President Obama’s mega-stimulus failed in every measurable regard. Over the period 2009 to 2013, job creation was significantly below what the White House promised. Unemployment was higher each year than what the White House had projected it would be without the stimulus. If Obama had simply done nothing in 2009, the economy would have produced more jobs.

Even worse was growth much lower than expected. The combined loss of GDP in these years from what

was predicted adds up to a growth deficit of over \$2 trillion. This is the equivalent of losing a year’s output from the states of Michigan, Ohio, and Pennsylvania.

These are, for the left, embarrassing facts. But they have a response: Things would have been even worse, don’t you know, without all the president’s



*That’s right: Vote for her, and get four more years of me.*

infrastructure spending. This may have been the weakest recovery since the Great Depression, the left demurs, but given the magnitude of the financial crash in 2008-09 it was the best we could do.

What they won’t admit is that nearly everything we were told by the Keynesian economists during the early years of the Obama recovery has proved to be wrong.

What, for example, happened to the magical “multiplier effect”? “Economists agree that unemployment benefits remain one of the best ways to grow the economy,” Nancy Pelosi told

us. “For every dollar spent on unemployment benefits, the economy grows by, according to one estimate, \$1.52; by others, \$2.” None of it worked. Just as with FDR’s failed New Deal experiment, every dollar the feds spent and borrowed was offset by a dollar less in private spending and investment. As economist David Malpass of Encima Global reported, the burst in federal borrowing under Obama was canceled out by a steep decline in corporate borrowing and investing. And it is business investment that is much more valuable to the economy than government make-work programs.

Our neo-Keynesians now claim the effort failed only because it wasn’t ambitious enough—the sort of thinking that got Greece and Puerto Rico where they are today. Japan, too: Tokyo has all but paved the entire island, an extravagance that’s done nothing to dent Japan’s decades-long recession.

Still, it should come as no surprise that Clinton argues for bigger deficits and more public works—it has a certain political appeal. Road builders, unions, and municipal bond traders all get their share.

For all the money spent in the last massive stimulus, our roads are still a wreck. And that’s just existing roads—we need to build more roads

and highways to keep up with the explosion of traffic volume, congestion that wastes hundreds of billions of dollars in lost time and productivity. It isn’t a problem of having enough money, just what that money is used for. Hillary says she wants to spend like Eisenhower; even accounting for inflation the Obama administration has spent three times more on infrastructure than the entire \$150 billion the interstate highway system cost to build in the first place.

So where did all the money go? One answer is that billions of dollars of the money never actually went into

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roads but got siphoned off into welfare benefits, wind and solar energy projects such as Solyndra (which famously went bankrupt), and mass-transit boondoggles such as the more than \$60 billion California high-speed rail project few are likely to ever ride. The dirty little secret is that the left hasn't spent money on road modernization because green groups hate roads and cars. They like traffic congestion and any other inconvenience that discourages driving.

We don't need more money for roads, we just need to spend on roads the money we already collect for them. The real transportation scandal is that Congress keeps taking almost 20 cents of every dollar drivers pay in gas taxes to fund mass-transit projects.

There is one other area of vital public infrastructure neglect. America needs a massive network of pipelines to transport our increasing shale oil and gas output across the nation. Keystone XL and nearly a dozen other cross-country pipelines have been blocked by Obama's regulators. Pipelines would mean jobs and lower fuel costs, but Hillary is so beholden to radical green groups that she has no intention of allowing them.

Don't forget that the pipeline projects would be privately funded. By far the most important infrastructure in America is private spending on factories, plants, machinery, computers, fiber optic cables, satellites, and the like. Chris Edwards of the Cato Institute notes that private companies spend three to four times on infrastructure what the government does.

But private capital spending has fallen, and remains, far below normal trends. This is the real infrastructure crisis. Hillary would make it worse by raising the capital gains tax to as high as 43.4 percent (the highest rate since the Jimmy Carter years). And she has no plans to cut corporate taxes. Business leaders consistently say these are the things strangling private-sector infrastructure investment.

The last stimulus delivered a dismal recovery and falling middle-class incomes. And now Hillary wants to do the whole thing over again. ♦

# An Anti-Terror Success Story

ISIS, Kosovo, and the *New York Times*.

BY STEPHEN SCHWARTZ



Muslim men pray in a mosque in eastern Kosovo, February 19, 2008.

*Pristina, Kosovo*  
Late last month, the *New York Times* published a lengthy report from the Balkan republic of Kosovo. Under the byline of an experienced correspondent in the region, Carlotta Gall, and totaling almost 4,000 words, the article was titled “How Kosovo Was Turned into Fertile Ground for ISIS.” As if that declaration were not alarming enough, the subhed proclaimed that “a once-tolerant Muslim society” had become “a font of extremism.”

With all the weight typically ascribed to *Times* coverage, the story seemed destined to bury the reputation of the Kosovar Albanians. Kosovo is roughly 90 percent Muslim. Efforts by Islamic radicals to convert the locals to various stripes of extremism are not new. Gall recorded that in the aftermath of the 1999 NATO air intervention that rescued Kosovo from Serbian terrorism, Wahhabi preachers from Saudi Arabia wasted no time in arriving in the country.

The Saudis spent millions of dollars to build about 240 new mosques, leaving the country with some 800

structures for Sunni Muslim prayer. As Gall noted, Serbian paramilitary forces had destroyed 218 local mosques during the Kosovo war. The Saudis thus portrayed their endeavor as one of mosque rehabilitation, not expansion. And no doubt they expected in the process to make converts to their fanatical interpretation of Islam. But Gall treated the campaign by Saudi Wahhabis in Kosovo as an unmitigated triumph for extremism: In “a stunning turnabout . . . Kosovo and the very nature of its society was fundamentally recast,” she wrote.

This vastly exaggerates the success of Wahhabi missionaries in Kosovo. The most important aspect of the radicalization attempt is that it was beaten back by Kosovar Albanians and mostly defeated. Muslim fanatics continue to appear here and there in Kosovo; the leadership of the official Islamic Community of Kosovo has often been slow to react; and some Kosovar Albanians have gone to Syria to fight. Still, even Gall cited as credible a claim by Fatos Makolli, head of the counterterrorism police in Kosovo, that “there is no evidence that any organization [in Kosovo] gave money directly to people to go to Syria.”

After the *Times* article appeared,

*Stephen Schwartz first reported from Kosovo for THE WEEKLY STANDARD in 1998.*

Kosovar Albanians, justly proud of their efforts to beat back extremism, were stunned at the picture it painted of their society having gone around the bend. They weren't alone. Daniel Serwer, a former State Department official who is among the most serious and knowledgeable Balkanologists in the West, commented on his blog, peacefare.net, that "two thirds of the story . . . got short shrift." According to Serwer, the missing pieces were obvious and simple. The Kosovo government, he wrote, had "reacted vigorously and effectively to the inroads Islamic extremists have made." Further, "Kosovo Albanians as well as their government remain overwhelmingly and enthusiastically pro-American and pro-European."

Serwer noted, "The article would have been a clarion call to action three or four years ago," but Kosovo police have counted 110 arrests, 67 indictments, and 26 convictions for violating a variety of antiterror laws, including a law prohibiting ISIS recruitment. Radical Islam in Kosovo, he concluded, "is one of the last things Americans should have to worry about." His blog post in English was rapidly translated into Albanian and posted throughout media in Kosovo, providing some relief from the despair that the *Times* report had caused.

The next substantial answer came from Rabbi Joshua M.Z. Stanton of Congregation B'nai Jeshurun in Short Hills, N.J. Rabbi Stanton has visited Kosovo repeatedly over the years and wrote a May 24 column for the Jewish Telegraphic Agency titled "We can help Kosovo become fertile ground for religious pluralism." He noted, "As a Jew and a rabbi, I have walked the streets of [Kosovo's] capital and several countryside locales with a yarmulke and felt safe and even extensively welcomed when identified by my faith." He described "a very different Kosovo" from that portrayed in the *Times*, a Kosovo that "merits our attention as a bellwether state and exemplar of how to undermine extremism."

Then, Greg Delawie, U.S. ambassador to Kosovo since July 2015, weighed in. Delawie was interviewed

by the Kosovar broadcasting enterprise RTV21, which cited the *Times*'s description of extremism in the ascendant and asked him, "Do you think the government of Kosovo is actually doing enough to combat terrorism and radical Islam?"

The ambassador replied, "I read that article. Actually, everybody, all of my family, all of my friends read that article, too. And my email inbox now is completely full of copies of the *New York Times* article. I think that article missed an important part of the story, which is the very important and very successful actions that the last two governments of Kosovo have taken, especially since August of 2014. . . . There is a foreign terrorist fighter law that was passed in 2015. There were, I guess, more than 50 people . . . arrested for participating in other people's wars—people that have returned to Kosovo from Syria or Iraq."

Delawie referred to a verdict just days before, on May 20, when Zekerija Qazimi, a preacher from the town of Ferizaj with an unmistakably untrimmed Wahhabi beard, had been sentenced to 10 years in prison for ISIS recruitment. Qazimi's codefendants, Ilir Berisha and Sadat Toptani, were also found guilty and received similar sentences. Delawie noted that "the sentence of 10 years . . . is, as far as we can tell, the longest sentence for such types of crimes that has been imposed in the entire region. . . . I think we've got a great partner in Kosovo and I do think Kosovo is doing a lot."

Meanwhile, Serbian media had leapt into the controversy. Hardline Serbs in Kosovo are pressing for recognition of an Association/Community of Serb-majority municipalities, under U.N. and EU protection, that would assure the permanent autonomy of Serbian enclaves in north and east-central Kosovo. Kosovo's Albanian leaders view this exercise as intended to establish parallel Serbian institutions throughout the country. They fear a partition of Kosovo akin to that of Bosnia-Herzegovina, which has been divided since the Dayton Accords of 1995. There, Serbs occupy a "Republic of Serbs" with half the

land area and a minority of the population, while Bosnian Muslims and Bosnian Croats comprise a "Federation of Bosnia-Herzegovina" with a majority of the population living on the remaining half of historically Bosnian territory.

Predictably, the Serbian media sought to magnify Gall's reportage and retroactively justify Serbian aggression in the Bosnian and Kosovo wars of the 1990s as intended to hold back the invading hordes of radical Islam. Serbian representatives alleged without evidence that an extensive network supporting al Qaeda had been established years before in Kosovo.

On May 27, facing criticism from nearly everybody who knows anything about Kosovo, the *Times* published an editorial, "The World Reaps What the Saudis Sow," in which the paper stated, as if it were a fresh revelation, that Saudi Arabia "has spent untold millions promoting Wahhabism, the radical form of Sunni Islam that inspired the 9/11 hijackers and that now inflames the Islamic State." Nevertheless, the editorial stipulated that "the 9/11 attacks quickly clarified the dangers. Several Saudi organizations in Kosovo were closed, and the Saudi government, which appears to have reduced its aid to Kosovo, now insists that it has imposed strict controls on charities, mosques and clerical teachings."

What is the moral here? It would be stereotypically Balkan to think that the *New York Times* harbored an agenda to discredit Kosovo's religious and secular authorities. It may be more instructive to recall that the *Times* has a history of permitting slipshod reporting from abroad, including that of the infamous Walter Duranty, who denied that Joseph Stalin's policies created a famine in Ukraine killing millions and praised Stalinism as a political doctrine. Duranty won the Pulitzer Prize in 1932 for his appalling reports, a prize never revoked, and for which the *Times* has never expressed regret. Given that track record, aggrieved Kosovars are unlikely ever to see the *Times* back down from its unwarranted alarmism about radical Islam there. ♦

# Jesus' Wife?

*The final debunking*

BY CHARLOTTE ALLEN

Jesus' wife has finally taken the sad step that culminates many a marriage: the gruesome divorce. Harvard Divinity School professor and historian of early Christianity Karen L. King, who has spent the past four years championing a one- by three-inch papyrus scrap bearing the Coptic words "Jesus said to them, 'My wife'" as part of an ancient 4th-century "gospel" indicating that many early Christians believed Jesus had been married, has now conceded that the tiny fragment is probably a "forgery."



*The 'Jesus' wife' fragment*

King's statement amounted to an admission that an array of scholars—who had argued that the scrap was fraudulent, starting the day after she unveiled it to great press fanfare on September 18, 2012—was right. Their objections had included grammatical oddities and crude penmanship, suspicious word-for-word parallels to the language of an already-published and well-known ancient Gnostic text, *The Gospel of Thomas*, also written in Coptic, an ancient Egyptian language, and the fact that carbon-dating test results released in 2014 revealed that the papyrus on which the writing appeared dated to the mid-8th century, hundreds of years after Gnosticism had disappeared from Egypt.

King had bucked all this criticism and maintained until just a few days ago that the fragment was authentic. In 2003

she had published a book, *The Gospel of Mary of Magdala: Jesus and the First Woman Apostle*, a study of a Gnostic text that asserted that the Magdalene enjoyed a higher status in the eyes of Jesus than his male disciples. The tiny papyrus fragment that she released to scholars and the public in 2012, which she dubbed "The Gospel of Jesus's Wife," not only seemed to support this assertion but fit with *Mary of Magdala's* larger underlying theme: that early Christianity was a hodgepodge of conflicting beliefs about Jesus, including beliefs quite congenial to present-day feminism, and that the Christian teachings we now call "orthodox," with their pride of place for Jesus' male apostles, were no more than the theology of the victors in a prolonged political struggle for control of the early church.

On June 15 the *Atlantic* published online a masterly piece of investigative reporting, "The Unbelievable Tale of Jesus's Wife," scheduled to appear in the magazine's July-August issue, in which writer Ariel Sabar revealed that he had managed to track down the owner of the "Jesus' wife" papyrus, whose identity King had promised to keep secret. That man, a 50-ish Bavarian-born immigrant named Walter Fritz who lives near Sarasota, Florida, admitted his ownership of the papyrus after Sabar confronted him with the overwhelming evidence he had dug up. Fritz did vigorously deny that he had forged the fragment and continued to maintain, as he had maintained to King, that he had bought it in 1999 from its previous owner, a now-deceased German auto-parts executive, Hans-Ulrich Laukamp.

Fritz, according to Sabar's reporting, was quite the character. During the late 1980s he had studied Egyptology at the Free University in West Berlin, where he had learned Coptic (facts he concealed from King) and where the two scholars who had supposedly authenticated the fragment and a companion papyrus (according to photocopies of apparent correspondence that Fritz gave King), now also conveniently deceased, happened to teach. After the fall of the Berlin Wall, he headed a museum of East German history in the former East Berlin but resigned that position abruptly in 1992. He subsequently talked himself into key positions in two ultimately failed auto-parts businesses during the mid-1990s. One of his partners was Laukamp, who had, according to Fritz, supposedly sneaked into East Germany in 1963, bought six papyri there, and then smuggled them back to

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Charlotte Allen, a frequent contributor to THE WEEKLY STANDARD, last wrote on the "Jesus' wife" controversy in our December 8, 2014, issue ("She's Back").

the West before eventually selling them to Fritz. Sabar discovered a host of problems with all this proffered paperwork, including dates and even basic facts that didn't jibe. Furthermore, Laukamp's stepson and former business partners described him as a minimally educated toolmaker whose main hobby was drinking beer and who had never collected anything in his life, much less antiquities. Besides hustling auto parts, Fritz also got into the art-photography business during the mid-1990s, creating an online "gallery" that included some dubious-looking purported ancient objects.

To top it all off, from 2003 through 2015 Fritz oversaw a slew of Internet-porn sites starring his wife having sex with other men. The year 2003 was, perhaps coincidentally, the year that Dan Brown published his runaway fiction bestseller *The Da Vinci Code*, whose main theme, like that of the "Jesus' wife" fragment, was a wedded Jesus who promoted a spiritual dimension to sex. Fritz's wife, according to Sabar, had her own spiritual side. She claimed to channel the archangel Michael, and in 2015 she self-published a book of "universal truths" in which she claimed, somewhat in the fashion of the ancient Gnostics and also Dan Brown, that churches and the Bible were inferior sources of religious inspiration compared with "what you can give yourself."



Karen L. King with the fragment in 2012

**I**n short, it appears that Karen King got rolled. And most humiliatingly, rolled in a plotline that could have come straight out of a Flannery O'Connor short story: by a silver-tongued huckster of schlock art and fetish-themed pornography with a New Age ditz of a wife. Fritz's technique had followed Rule No. 1 of the grifter's handbook: Find a mark whose self-interest you can put to work for you. Fritz's first email to King in July 2010, according to Sabar, was *Mary of Magdala* chum: a tantalizing reference to an ancient manuscript in his possession that looked as though it contained an "argument" about the Magdalene between Jesus and one of his disciples—and wouldn't King like to take a look? It's a sad story, because King is widely respected, even among theologically conservative scholars, for her capacious knowledge of ancient Coptic and Greek Christian texts. Her downfall, if it was such, can be attributed to several factors that ultimately betrayed her: an ideological commitment to those theories about suppressed early Christian voices that clearly trumped objective assessment of the "Jesus' wife" fragment; and once the fragment's authenticity was questioned, a wagon-circling by feminist scholars who shielded her from criticism by accusing the critics of sexism.

In addition, although it's impossible to read her mind (she has never responded to my requests for interviews or those of most other journalists), King might feel betrayed by Ariel Sabar himself. In an apparent orchestration by the Harvard Divinity School to ensure maximum publicity for King's 2012 release of the fragment at a conference in Rome, she had shown the papyrus to only two other scholars, one of whom, AnneMarie Luijendijk of Princeton, had been her doctoral student at Harvard (the other was Roger Bagnall, head of New York University's Institute for the Study of the Ancient World). In addition, the *Harvard Theological Review*, slated to publish a lengthy article by King about the papyrus right after the conference, had passed around photographs of the scrap to three anonymous academic "reviewers,"

two of whom expressed reservations about the scrap's legitimacy, plus a Coptic linguist, Ariel Shisha-Halevy of the Hebrew University in Jerusalem, who vouched for the Coptic while pointing out some grammatical irregularities.

In addition, King gave extensive pre-release interviews to three handpicked outside journalists. One of those three was Sabar, writing for the *Smithsonian* magazine (the other two were religion reporters for the *Boston Globe* and the *New York Times*). The Smithsonian Institution had been in on the fragment's existence for some time. Its Smithsonian Channel had already produced a television documentary starring King that was set to air on September 30, 2012.

Sabar followed King around at Harvard and interviewed her extensively, producing an anodyne and pleasantly informative article for the *Smithsonian* that largely reflected King's own point of view. After scholarly controversy over the fragment erupted at the Rome conference, both the *Harvard Theological Review* and the Smithsonian Channel postponed their offerings. Sabar then published a far more critical article about the papyrus in the *Smithsonian* in November 2012 that probably started him down the investigative trail. By this time, he was already in possession of copies King had given him in September of her email correspondence with Fritz (along with the purported provenance documents), whose name and other identifying information she had redacted in order to protect Fritz's anonymity.

The Harvard Divinity School is known in academic circles as a redoubt of the theories of Walter Bauer, a German scholar whose 1934 book, *Orthodoxy and Heresy in Earliest Christianity*, pioneered the idea that there was no such thing as "orthodoxy" or "heresy" in earliest Christianity but merely a diverse collection of

often-conflicting local “Christianities,” as Bauer’s disciples call them. (Gnosticism was supposed to be the local Christianity of Egypt, for example.) The book was enormously influential, especially after a large trove of Gnostic and related texts surfaced at Nag Hammadi in Egypt in 1945. One of its promoters was the German-born New Testament scholar Helmut Koester, a towering figure at the Harvard Divinity School from 1958 until his death earlier this year. Koester supervised the doctoral dissertation of Elaine Pagels, who popularized early Christian “diversity” and its suppression by those who became the orthodox in her bestselling *The Gnostic Gospels* (1979).

Bauer’s theories influenced the controversial Jesus Seminar of the 1980s and 1990s, whose members elevated *The Gospel of Thomas*, a collection of Jesus’ sayings with Gnostic overtones, to canonical status alongside Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John. Karen King was a long-time member of the Jesus Seminar, and she remains a fellow of its parent Westar Institute. Westar’s Polebridge Press published King’s *Mary of Magdala*. In 2007 King and Pagels collaborated on another bestseller, *Reading Judas: The Gospel of Judas and the Shaping of Christianity*. King had made her own translation from the Coptic of that Gnostic text, which had been recently bought from a private collector by the National Geographic Society—a translation that was criticized by other Coptologists for attempting to turn Judas into a good guy so as to accord with her ideas about early Christian diversity. It could be said of King that when she saw the words “Jesus said to them, ‘My wife’” on Fritz’s papyrus, she wanted to believe. She was tailor-made for him.

One of the first Coptologists to raise objections—on the day after King’s presentation of the papyrus in Rome—was Christian Askeland (now a professor at Indiana Wesleyan), who attended the conference. He quickly posted a video on YouTube in which he pointed out problems with the writing (it was too crude for a formal gospel). As he explained in a phone interview, he had noted that the letters appeared to have been applied by a paintbrush, which ancient Coptic scribes never used for writing, and the ink, although made of the water and soot that ancient scribes used, looked as though it had been runny, because it hadn’t been stabilized with the gum Arabic that the ancients usually added. Over that weekend and during the weeks that followed, other Coptic experts discovered the word-for-word correspondences, including line breaks, with material from *The Gospel of Thomas*. Indeed, Andrew Bernhard, an independent scholar in

Oregon, maintained in October 2012 that the forger, whose Coptic wasn’t very good, had used a Coptic-English translation of *Thomas* that appeared online in 2002 to con-fect his text, even replicating a typographical error from that particular edition of the translation.

In 2014 Askeland found a smoking gun. After the carbon-dating tests confirmed that the papyrus was indeed ancient—if the 8th century counts as ancient—the *Harvard Theological Review* finally published a shorter and much-toned-down version of King’s original article. She had decided not to call the fragment a “gospel” after all, and she removed references to her previous speculation that some early Christians might have thought Jesus was married to Mary Magdalene. (The Smithsonian Channel also aired a modified version of its documentary around that time.) Askeland came across an online draft version of the article

with photos of another papyrus fragment from Fritz containing lines from a Coptic version of the Gospel of John that had also been carbon-dated as a control for the “Jesus’ wife” fragment (it was also dated from the 8th century). It happened to be the very companion papyrus that Fritz’s documents said one of the Free University scholars had authenticated. But those photos did not appear in the final version of King’s article and

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**With the ‘Jesus’ wife’ fragment, it appears that Karen King got rolled. And most humiliatingly, rolled in a plotline that could have come straight out of a Flannery O’Connor short story.**

to date have never been officially published. “I found them by pure accident,” Askeland said. “They didn’t know what they had.” Askeland had written his doctoral dissertation at Cambridge on Coptic translations of John, and he recognized the text as an obvious fake: The lines mirrored every other line in a published edition of a codex of the gospel written in a Coptic dialect that had died out two centuries before the papyrus was made. “And it was in the same hand” as the “Jesus’ wife” fragment, Askeland said.

But Askeland made the political blunder of titling a blog post about his findings “Jesus Had an Ugly Sister-in-Law.” Eva Mroczek, an assistant professor of religious studies at the University of California Davis, wrote a lengthy article for the website *Religion Dispatches* contending that the title of the post constituted a misogynist attack on Karen King herself. “This isn’t the first time Karen King’s objectivity and motives have been questioned,” Mroczek wrote—after Askeland removed the word “ugly” at her request. “Top papyrologist Roger Bagnall was also convinced that the fragment was real, but though their conclusions were identical only the female scholar came in for harsh criticism,” she wrote. Feminist New Testament scholars all over America took to social media to give her

shout-outs and construct a protective wall around King.

Mroczek's article highlighted another factor that might have played a part in why it took so long for many academics and journalists to see what most Coptic specialists immediately recognized as a hoax: Askeland and several of the other longtime skeptics of the "Jesus' wife" fragment—although by no means all—are believing Christians. Mroczek took pains to point out that Askeland is associated with the Green Collection of biblical manuscripts and artifacts. That collection was put together by Steve Green, the evangelical CEO of Hobby Lobby, the crafts-store chain that won a Supreme Court ruling in June 2014 that it didn't have to pay for abortion-inducing contraceptives under Obamacare. Mroczek's article appeared on May 6, 2014, while the Hobby Lobby case was awaiting decision, and the very words "Hobby Lobby" were like garlic to a vampire for secular intellectuals. Mroczek complained in her article that the Green Collection was "dedicated to proving the historical authenticity of the Bible."

By 2014 at least one reporter, Owen Jarus of *LiveScience*, had pieced together and published some of the problems with the Laukamp narrative on which King had relied. And in July 2015 *New Testament Studies*, a prestigious journal published (like the *Harvard Theological Review*) by Cambridge University Press, carried six articles by an array of scholars,

including Askeland, laying out the case against the authenticity of the fragment itself. The Harvard Divinity School remained unmoved. In May 2015 it had signed an agreement with Fritz to keep the papyrus, along with the John papyrus, on loan at the Harvard campus for 10 years "for purposes of study and research." It continues to maintain (as of this writing) an elaborate website titled "The Gospel of Jesus's Wife." Neither the Harvard Divinity School nor the *Harvard Theological Review* has yet published any of the documents Fritz used to persuade King that his papyrus had been sold to him by Laukamp and vetted by two distinguished German professors of Egyptology.

Well, not quite. On June 20, the website included a statement from Harvard Divinity School dean David N. Hempton regarding Sabar's *Atlantic* article. It pinpointed the subsequent interview with Sabar "in which Professor King stated that the *Atlantic's* investigation 'tips the balance towards forgery' and that the preponderance of the evidence now presses in that direction." Hempton continued: "HDS is therefore grateful to the many scholars, scientists, technicians, and journalists who have devoted their expertise to understanding the background and meaning of the papyrus fragment."

So perhaps the immovable object encountered an irresistible force after all. ♦

## Attacks on Capital Markets Undermine Economic Growth

By **Thomas J. Donohue**

President and CEO  
U.S. Chamber of Commerce

America's financial services industry has become a favorite punching bag on the campaign trail, on Capitol Hill, in the administration, and from politicians on the left and right. It seems like banks and other financial institutions have been blamed for everything from income inequality to the common cold. If we're to believe some of the rhetoric, our capital markets are little more than a system of tricks and traps. Banks and financial services providers are often, and unfairly, cast as bad actors that need to be shut down, broken up, or regulated into submission.

But the truth is that our financial services industry isn't a problem to be solved, limited, and controlled—it's a key ingredient to boosting the economy. If we foster strong capital markets, we can accelerate growth, create jobs, and spur

investment. We can ensure that Main Street businesses have the capital and credit they need to operate and grow. We can provide the financing consumers need to buy cars, homes, and education, while planning for their long-term financial security. Capital fuels our economic engine—and that engine will continue to sputter if we cut off the supply.

Unfortunately, lawmakers and regulators have not considered growth a primary goal when regulating our capital markets. The last eight years of restrictive, punitive, and overlapping regulations have undermined our system's ability to drive a growing economy and a rising standard of living. That's one of the primary reasons we're stuck with 2% growth, have the lowest worker participation rate ever recorded, and have less than half the number of public companies that we did in 1996.

To get back on track, we must adopt a modern regulatory system that allows reasonable risk taking; protects consumers

while preserving consumer choice; fosters diversity of institutions, products, and services; promotes capital formation; and enables innovation. With smart reforms, we can take steps to achieve that system.

However, we must reject the wrong-headed proposals being put forward by Wall Street critics. They will trap us in this anemic economy, strangle Main Street businesses, and destroy our ability to finance America's economic growth. And we must push back against the assault on our financial services industry—it is far from perfect, but much of today's rhetoric is ill-informed or just plain wrong.

When politicians and others attack our capital markets, they are really attacking the very foundation on which a growing and prosperous economy is built. Let's work together to strengthen it, not tear it down.



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# The Somme, 1916

*Funeral of a great myth*

By JOSEPH LOCONTE

At 7 A.M. on July 1, 1916, the British Army unleashed a hellish assault against German positions on the Western Front in France, along the River Somme. The roar was so loud that it was heard in London, nearly 200 miles away. The barrage—about 3,500 shells a minute—was designed to obliterate the deepest dugouts and severely compromise German artillery and machine-gun power. Crossing No Man's Land, that dreadful death zone stretching between opposing enemy trenches, would be a song.

Thus, at 7:30 A.M., nearly a hundred thousand British troops—to the sound of whistles, drums, and bagpipes—climbed out of their trenches and attacked. Like other great battles, this one was supposed to break the back of the German Army and hasten the end of the war. But the Germans had endured the pounding and were waiting, guns poised, for the British infantry. “We didn’t have to aim,” said a German machine-gunner. “We just fired into them.” Before the day was over, 19,240 British soldiers lay dead, nearly twice that number wounded. Most were killed in the first hour of the attack, many within the first minutes.

July 1, 1916, marks the deadliest single day in British military history. Sir Frank Fox, a regimental historian, summarized the scene this way: “In that field of fire nothing could live.” The Battle of the Somme would rage on, inconclusively, until November 18, dragging over a million men into its vortex of suffering and death.

Twenty-four-year-old J.R.R. Tolkien, a second lieutenant in the British Expeditionary Force, was among

their number—an experience that would shape the course of his life and literary career. Tolkien spent nearly four months in the trenches of the Somme valley, often under intense enemy fire. As he recalled years later: “One has indeed personally to come under the shadow of war to feel its full oppression.” A hundred years hence and the Somme offensive still casts its oppressive shadow across the landscape of the West. It symbolizes not only the human tragedy of an ill-conceived war but the fearsome cost of a mistaken idea: the notion of human perfectibility.



*British soldiers on the first day of the Battle of the Somme, July 1, 1916*

## THE DOGMA OF HUMAN PROGRESS

By the start of the 20th century, attitudes about war and what it could accomplish were bound up with a singular, overarching idea: the myth of progress. Perhaps the most deeply held view in the years leading up to the First World War was that Western civilization was marching inexorably forward, that human nature was evolving

and improving—that new vistas of political, cultural, and spiritual achievement were within reach.

Herbert Spencer, who converted Darwin’s theory of evolution into a social doctrine, had much to do with this. So did the success of the scientific and industrial revolutions. “Between 1900 and 1914, technological, social and political advances swept Europe and America on a scale unknown in any such previous timespan,” writes British historian Max Hastings, “the blink of an eye in human experience.”

Confidence in human progress led some to believe that, with the help of modern technologies, wars could be fought with minimal cost in life and treasure. Others argued that rational Europeans would soon dispense with war altogether. In *The Great Illusion*, British writer Norman Angell claimed that the Industrial Revolution—by creating economic growth and interdependence—had changed the dynamic among nation-states. The great industrial nations of Britain, France, Germany, and the United States were

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“losing the psychological impulse to war,” he wrote, just as they abandoned the impulse to kill their neighbors over religion. “The least informed of us realizes that the whole trend of history is against the tendency for men to attack the ideals and the beliefs of other men.”

First published in 1909, *The Great Illusion* became a runaway bestseller. The book seemed to speak to a deep and widely shared aspiration: the “perpetual peace” imagined by philosophers such as Immanuel Kant. Novelist H.G. Wells recalled the mood: “I think that in the decades before 1914 not only I but most of my generation—in the British Empire, America, France and indeed throughout most of the civilized world—thought that war was dying out. So it seemed to us.”

Such a view was congenial to religious leaders, especially those uncomfortable with Christianity’s doctrine of the fall from grace. On the eve of the outbreak of the war, Britain’s National Peace Council, a coalition of religious and secular peace organizations, foresaw an era of international harmony. The 1914 edition of its *Peace Yearbook* offered this astonishing prediction:

Peace, the babe of the nineteenth century, is the strong youth of the twentieth century; for War, the product of anarchy and fear, is passing away under the growing and persistent pressure of world organization, economic necessity, human intercourse, and that change of spirit, that social sense and newer aspect of worldwide life which is the insistent note, the *Zeitgeist* of the age.

This “change of spirit” was heralded from virtually every sector of society. Scientists, educators, industrialists, salesmen, politicians, preachers—all agreed on the upward flight of humankind. Each breakthrough in medicine, science, and technology confirmed it. Every invention and innovation was offered up as evidence, from Marconi’s radio transmissions to the Maxim machine gun. Darwin’s theory about biological change had ripened into a social assumption—a dogma—about human *improvement*, even perfection.

Or so it seemed to Tolkien and to his Oxford friend, C. S. Lewis, also a war veteran. “I grew up believing in this Myth and I have felt—I still feel—its almost perfect grandeur,” Lewis confessed. “It is one of the most moving and satisfying world dramas which have ever been imagined.” Importantly, the triumph of science and technology left no meaningful role for faith. Science, not religion, was driving human achievement. “Man was responsible for his own earthly destiny,” writes historian Richard Tarnas in *The Passion of the Western Mind*. “His own wits and will could change his world. Science gave man a new faith—not only in scientific knowledge, but in himself.”

## A GLIMPSE OF MORDOR

**I**ronically, the tools of science that produced such optimism created the conditions that would smash it to pieces. Mortars, machine guns, poison gas, the mass production of artillery, the mechanized transport of troops and armaments: In the hands of military planners and politicians, science increased exponentially the destructive power of war.

The result was an assault on man and nature on a scale never before experienced in the West. When the Battle of the Somme was finally called off in November 1916, much of the Somme valley—a verdant mix of farms and forests—was desolate. Trees had been reduced to blackened sticks. Fields and crops were swallowed up by waves of mud and massive craters, filled with water. The stench of explosives and unburied corpses hung in the air.

Tolkien served as a battalion signals officer with the 11th



J.R.R. Tolkien in WWI

Lancashire Fusiliers until trench fever took him out of the war. It was during this period that he laid the foundation for his mythology about an epic struggle for Middle-earth. Writing from his hospital bed, Tolkien produced a series of stories (later published as *The Book of Lost Tales*), which would inform his major works: *The Silmarillion*, *The Hobbit*, and *The Lord of the Rings*. Each involves a violent contest between good and evil—and in each there are hints of the horrors of the Somme.

In *The Lord of the Rings*, Middle-earth is threatened by Sauron, the dark lord of Mordor, who seeks to possess the Ring of Power. The story centers on Frodo Baggins and Samwise Gamgee, hobbits from the Shire, and their quest to destroy the ring and save Middle-earth. As they approach Mordor, they encounter a brooding and lifeless wasteland. “The gasping pits and poisonous mounds grew hideously clear,” Tolkien wrote. “The sun was up, walking among clouds and long flags of smoke, but even the sunlight was defiled.” Passing through the marshes, Sam catches his foot and falls on his knees, “so that his face was brought close to the surface of the dark mire.” Looking intently into the muck, he is startled. “There are dead things,” he exclaims, “dead faces in the water!”

Historian Sir Martin Gilbert, author of a definitive account of the Somme offensive, interviewed Tolkien in the 1960s about his life as a soldier. He notes that Tolkien’s description of the dead marshes matches precisely the macabre experience of soldiers at the Somme: “Many soldiers on the Somme had been confronted by corpses, often decaying in the mud, that had lain undisturbed, except by bombardment, for days, weeks and even months.” In a letter to L. W. Forster written on December 31, 1960, Tolkien confirmed the connection: “The Dead Marshes and

the approaches to Morannon [Mordor] owe something to Northern France after the Battle of the Somme.”

Although Tolkien never intended to write a trench memoir, we may suspect that memories of combat informed his description of the “Siege of Gondor” in *The Lord of the Rings*:

Yet their Captain cared not greatly what they did or how many might be slain: their purpose was only to test the strength of the defense and to keep the men of Gondor busy in many places. All before the walls on either side of the Gate the ground was choked with wreck and with bodies of the slain; yet still driven as by a madness more and more came up.

Hundreds of antiwar novels, memoirs, and works of poetry were published in the 1920s and 1930s, helping to create an image of war as inherently futile and irrational. The poems of Wilfred Owen, who was wounded three times before being killed in battle, offered no place for heroism: “What passing-bells for these who die as cattle? / Only the monstrous anger of the guns.” T.S. Eliot, in his epic 1922 poem, *The Waste Land*, seemed to speak for many in the post-war generation: “I think we are in rats’ alley / where the dead men lost their bones.”

For these authors, the First World War exposed the myth of progress for what it was—a monstrous illusion about the “civilized” West. The advanced “Christian” nations of Europe had engaged in a mutual suicide pact, leaving nearly 10 million soldiers dead and millions more grievously wounded. A frightening share of young men were emotionally debilitated by trench warfare and committed to asylums. “When at last it was over, the war had many diverse results,” wrote Barbara Tuchman in *The Guns of August*, “and one dominant one transcending all others: disillusion.”

The disillusionment of the postwar generation found an outlet—in literature, the arts, philosophy, religion, and politics. Just consider some of the books published in the first years after the conflict: *The End of a World* (1920), *Social Decay and Degeneration* (1921), *The Decay of Capitalist Civilization* (1923), *The Twilight of the White Races* (1926), and Oswald Spengler’s sweeping work, *The Decline of the West* (1918). “We cannot help it if we are born as men of the early winter of full Civilization,” Spengler wrote, “instead of on the golden summit of a ripe Culture.”

The Great War seemed to confirm a fatal weakness in liberal democracy, creating an openness to all kinds of utopian and illiberal schemes. When the Communist International held its first World Congress in 1919, for example, it drew delegates from 26 countries, including the United States. Meanwhile, European fascism emerged first in Italy, a society in tatters. A huge number of Mussolini’s “Blackshirts”—his 40,000-strong militia that marched on Rome and seized power in 1922—were disenchanting veterans. Within a decade, fascist parties and regimes took root all over Europe.

One of the most striking effects of the myth of progress was that, at the outbreak of war in 1914, many expected social and spiritual regeneration. Church leaders preached that war would advance the ideals of Christianity and democracy, that it would give birth to an epoch of peace and righteousness. Just as the earlier crusaders had unified Europe, wrote London minister Joseph Fort Newton, “so this, the greatest humanitarian crusade in history, will unify the world.” The progressive vision, rooted in secular idealism, had infiltrated European (and American) Christianity.

The catastrophic failure of this worldview created a backlash—an animus against the old religious orthodoxies. Christian faith and morality became two more casualties of the war. When T.S. Eliot was baptized into the

Church of England in 1927, Virginia Woolf, a member of London’s literary set, was appalled. “I have had a most shameful and distressing interview with poor dear Tom Eliot, who may be called dead to us all from this day forward,” she wrote to a friend. “I mean, there’s something obscene in a living person sitting by the fire and believing in God.”

The door was thrust open to substitute religions—from fascism to Freudian psychology to Rudolph Steiner’s anthroposophy. Gilbert Murray, in his 1929 book *The Ordeal of This Generation*, bemoaned the “large and outspoken rejection” of Christianity. The false prophets of progress had discredited themselves and the values and institutions they claimed to defend. “The Age of Progress ends in a barbarism such as shocks a savage,” wrote Paul Bull, a former war chaplain. “The Age of Reason ends in a delirium of madness.”

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**Like no previous war, the Great War assaulted the concepts of heroism, valor, and virtue. The helplessness of the individual soldier, ravaged by the instruments of modernity, was a recurring motif in the postwar period. Tolkien rebelled against this outlook and sought to retrieve something of the medieval Christian tradition, the story of the great and noble quest.**

## TOLKIEN'S HEROIC VISION

All of this makes Tolkien's literary aims profoundly countercultural, even subversive. Like no previous war, the Great War assaulted the concepts of heroism, valor, and virtue. The helplessness of the individual soldier, ravaged by the instruments of modernity, was a recurring motif in the postwar period. Tolkien rebelled against this outlook. As a professor of Anglo-Saxon at Oxford, he was at home in the worlds of *Beowulf* and *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*. Tolkien sought to retrieve something of the medieval Christian tradition, the story of the great and noble quest.

Herein lies the signal achievement of his epic trilogy. In *The Lord of the Rings*, Tolkien recovers the mythic concept of the heroic struggle against evil—and reinvents it for the modern mind. “To say that in it heroic romance, gorgeous, eloquent, and unashamed, has suddenly returned at a period almost pathological in its anti-romanticism is inadequate,” wrote C.S. Lewis in an early review. “Nothing quite like it was ever done before.”

How did he accomplish it? Although Tolkien's work appears to lack a religious framework—there are no prayers or deities—its characters are conscious of a universal Moral Law to which they must give account. “How shall a man judge what to do in such times,” asks Éomer. “As he ever has judged,” replies Aragorn. “Good and ill have not changed since yesteryear; nor are they one thing among Elves and Dwarves and another among Men. It is a man's part to discern them.” Lewis declared this to be “the basis of the whole Tolkienian world.”

In the conflict between Mordor and Middle-earth, every soul is tested. Every creature must choose sides in a titanic struggle between darkness and light; moral indifference is never an option. In Tolkien's vision, heroic sacrifice for a just cause—even against terrible odds—carries its own transcendent meaning.

The vital thing is to remain faithful to the quest, regardless of the costs and perils. Frodo's mission is to carry the Ring of Power to the fires of Mount Doom and destroy it—before it can destroy him. “I am not made for perilous quests,” Frodo exclaims. “Why was I chosen?” Replies Gandalf: “You may be sure that it was not for any merit that others do not possess: not for power or wisdom, at any rate. But you have been chosen, and you must therefore use such strength and heart and wits as you have.”

Here again Tolkien's experience at the Somme worked

on his imagination. Where did Tolkien get the idea for his hobbits? From being in close company with the ordinary English soldier and witnessing his loyalty and determination under fire. War correspondent Philip Gibbs, a critic of the military leadership, confessed his astonishment at the discipline and valor of the British Expeditionary Force, praising “individual courage beyond the natural laws of human nature as I thought I knew them once.” Tolkien explained that he made his hobbits small in size to reflect the hidden virtues of his fellow soldiers. “My ‘Sam Gamgee’ is indeed a reflection of the English soldier, of the privates and batmen I knew in the 1914 war,” he wrote, “and recognized as so far superior to myself.”

The Somme offensive left about 1.5 million men dead and wounded among the Allied and Central Powers, making it one of the most lethal battles in history. And to what end? In military terms, the campaign achieved almost



Frodo, Sam, and Gollum (Elijah Wood, Sean Astin, and Andy Serkis) in the Dead Marshes in *The Two Towers*, 2002

nothing, since most of the British soldiers were killed on ground held by the British before the assault began. And yet the war continued for another two years, killing, maiming, and debilitating an entire generation. “Injuries were wrought to the structure of human society which a century will not efface,” wrote Winston Churchill, “and which may conceivably prove fatal to the present civilization.”

In this sense, the Somme represents the collision of facile dreams of human advancement with the loathsome limitations of human nature. For Tolkien, it marked the funeral of a great myth. Whatever illusions of human progress and perfectibility he may have nurtured in youth vanished into a storm of steel and death. Perhaps this helps explain the tragic dimension of Tolkien's story: the *failure* of Frodo to willingly destroy the Ring of Power. In the end, the hero is not indomitable. “But one must face the fact,” Tolkien explained, “the power of Evil in the world is *not* finally resistible by incarnate creatures.”

The hero, and his quest, must be redeemed by an act of grace. Here is an epic myth, an ancient story, which the modern world still longs to hear. ♦



'Fantasia' (1940)

# The Mouse That Roared

*Mickey Mouse, idea and image* BY AMY HENDERSON

Garry Apgar introduces his book by stating that Mickey Mouse “has been a part of our mental and emotional universe for over eight decades.” Walt Disney launched the phenomenon in 1928 with his revolutionary sound cartoon, *Steamboat Willie*, nurtured MM to stardom during Hollywood’s heyday in the 1930s, presented him to new generations of postwar Mouseketeers on television’s “Mickey Mouse Club,” and enlisted him as the official greeter at the ever-growing global Disney empire.

All along the way, the Disney vision was fueled by a dedication to mass-marketing that exemplifies America’s

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**Mickey Mouse**  
*Emblem of the American Spirit*  
by Garry Apgar  
Disney Family Foundation, 336 pp., \$40

commitment to a box-office culture based on personality—in this case, even if it has mouse ears.

Along with such earlier chroniclers as Richard Schickel (*The Disney Version*, 1968) and Neal Gabler (*Walt Disney: The Triumph of the American Imagination*, 2006), Apgar views Mickey Mouse as “the fictional extension of Walt Disney” and “a protean expression of the qualities, values, and dreams of the man and country that spawned him.” Disney himself admitted that “the life and ventures of Mickey Mouse have been closely bound up with my own personal

and professional life.” Until 1946, Disney himself was Mickey’s screen voice, and Walt’s wife Lillian once said that “Walt and Mickey were so ‘simpatico,’ they seemed almost like the same identity.” So, in many ways, this narrative about Mickey Mouse’s cultural journey is also a portrait of Walt Disney; but Apgar’s larger story is told within the framework of American popular culture rather than as a traditional life-and-times biography.

His central objective is to assay how and why this invented figure became one of the most important pop icons of the 20th century. Why does Mickey Mouse share that spotlight with Charlie Chaplin, Marilyn Monroe, Elvis Presley, and a can of Coke? As a cultural historian, Apgar views Mickey Mouse’s rise to eminence through the

WALT DISNEY PICTURES / EVERETT COLLECTION

prism of three successive phases of America's media culture.

To begin with, Mickey was born as a Jazz Age baby—in an era when, as Gilbert Seldes wrote in *The 7 Lively Arts* (1924), a unique American (that is to say, non-European) culture emerged from the cartoons, jazz, musical comedy, and movies invented by mass media. Fifty years later, Christopher Lasch argued in *The Culture of Narcissism* (1979) that the media, “with their cult of celebrity and their attempt to surround it with glamour and excitement, have made Americans a nation of fans.” At the end of the century, Neal Gabler described in *Life the Movie: How Entertainment Conquered Reality* (1998) how mass entertainment had become “the most pervasive, powerful, and ineluctable force of our time.” A generation before Instagram, Gabler understood that we had come to see ourselves as the stars of our own life movies.

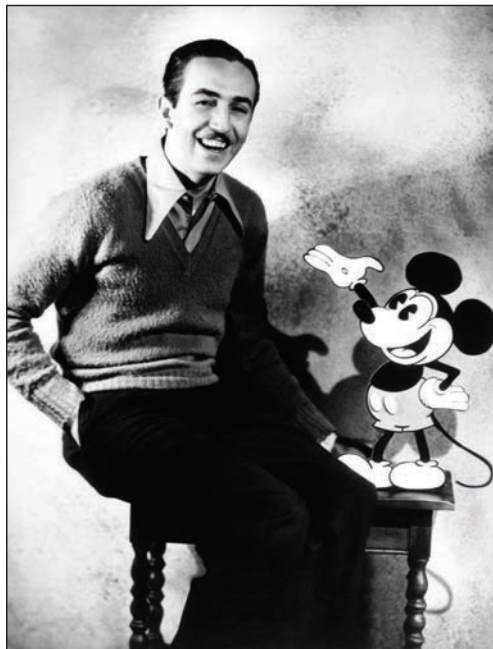
The chief link to Mickey's emblematic significance is that he has always been associated with the American Dream. Apgar connects Mickey to the national idea of an American Dream—first described in 1931 by James Truslow Adams in *The Epic of America*—and establishes how, even in the bleak years of the Depression, movie audiences associated Mickey Mouse with the dream “of a better, richer, and happier life for all our citizens of every rank.” From his earliest appearance in *Steamboat Willie*, Mickey-the-dreamer was projected as a heroic figure who overcame impossible obstacles with irrepressible humor.

The formative years of Mickey's invention as a cultural icon lasted from the 1928 release of *Steamboat Willie* to *Fantasia* (1940). As Apgar smartly argues, it wasn't simply the artfulness of Disney's cartooning that drew people to the box office; it was the music that animated these cartoons. *Time* noted that what was novel about the early Disney cartoons was music: “It hopped, it jangled, it twitched, it plankety-planked.” A music critic wrote in 1931 that the important discovery made by Walt

Disney was the relationship between “visual and aural phenomena.”

For instance, when a stream of bubbles appears on the screen, Mickey will almost certainly prick them with a pin, and as they explode they will play a tune in which the frequency of the wave-vibration of each note will be inversely proportional to the size of the bubbles.

Jerome Kern celebrated Disney for using “music as language.” Disney car-



Walt Disney (1928)

toons embraced the music of the times, always incorporating a cross-section of American popular music, jazz, even classical music. *Mickey's Follies* (1929) has various characters sing Stephen Foster's “Old Folks at Home” and “O Sole Mio.” In *The Birthday Party* (1931), Mickey and Minnie perform a dueling piano version of “I Can't Give You Anything But Love.” Disney's masterful, full-length feature *Fantasia* was entirely pegged to classical music, including the *Nutcracker Suite*, Beethoven's *Pastoral Symphony*, and Ponchielli's *Dance of the Hours*.

In addition to chronicling how Mickey rose to cultural eminence, Apgar is intrigued by how he “was received by the intellectual and artistic elite, and by the public at large, en route to becoming a ubiquitous plan-

etary presence and a charged expression of the American spirit.” With exhaustive documentation and lengthy endnotes, Apgar makes his case by presenting a veritable who's who of American art and culture that have incorporated MM into their work: Notable examples include the films of Howard Hawks, Stanley Kubrick, and Steven Spielberg; the writings of Rex Stout, Carson McCullers, and John Updike; the artwork of Thomas Hart Benton, Roy Lichtenstein, and Andy Warhol.

Apgar also deals with how America's changing values in the 1960s and beyond transformed the symbol of “Mickey Mouse” from admiration to ridicule and scorn:

Walt Disney's cartoon creation has become a universal sign of guileless, childlike bliss and virtue, and the emblem of a people with a passion—all too often vulgar and self-indulgent—for personal fulfillment, individuality, and material as well as spiritual happiness.

Yet he remained a “protean expression of the qualities, values, and dreams of the man and country that spawned him.” Like Mom's apple pie, Mickey invented a shared experience that extends around the globe. Apgar concludes that Mickey's lasting significance is that “an urge to remain young and to live in the moment is not a solely American impulse, it is inherently human.”

This well-written cultural study is researched with academic rigor but deserves a wider audience because of Apgar's ability to illuminate the ongoing relationship between media and a culture of personality. It is also a gorgeous book: After being unable to find a publisher, Apgar was rescued by the Walt Disney Family Museum, and particularly Diane Disney Miller, who provided sufficient funding and no interference; he was told, “It's your book.”

In his acknowledgments, by the way, Apgar notes an early article—“Mickey at Seventy-Five” (2003)—appeared in *THE WEEKLY STANDARD* and was part of “the collective germ that sprouted into the present volume.” ♦

# Writers by Trade

*Men (and women) of letters in England.*

BY DOMINIC GREEN

‘T ell me what you like,” John Ruskin wrote in 1860, “and I’ll tell you what you are.” By his tastes, D.J. Taylor is that white rhino in the taxonomy of professional writers, the man of letters. Early fossils of this species have been excavated from Grub Street in 18th-century London, where the mighty Doctor Johnson roamed the plains of literature, attended by his Boswell as the rhino is attended by its waspish parasite, the Gyrostigma fly.

The survival of the species was never certain. The first men of letters, lacking copyrights and a large audience, simply starved to death. Even in the heyday of late Victorian literacy, the fittest specimens tended to resemble less Thomas Carlyle (who had mused on “The Hero as Man of Letters”) than Jasper Milvain, the thrusting hustler of George Gissing’s *New Grub Street* (1891). As early as 1914, French publishers noticed that the movies were eating into their sales figures. By 1969, the year of John Gross’s *Rise and Fall of the Man of Letters*, extinction loomed. Then came the Internet, which was as welcome in the publishing industry as a meteor shower among the dinosaurs.

Still, *The Prose Factory*, as befits thirsty work, presents the glass half-full. The contents may often be bitter, but they also intoxicate. The Greeks believed that he who drank from the Hippocrene, the sacred spring on Mount Helicon, would always file his copy on time. Here, amid the drudgery, backscratching, and bouncing checks, the joy of a life with books shines through.

The working man of letters may

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**The Prose Factory**  
*Literary Life in England Since 1918*  
by D.J. Taylor  
Chatto & Windus, 448 pp., \$30



*Alec Waugh, Evelyn Waugh (c. 1950)*

resemble the hack of George Orwell’s “Confessions of a Book Reviewer” (1946), shuffling around the teacups and ashtrays in his dressing gown, “pouring his immortal spirit down the drain, half a pint at a time.” But having somewhere to pour your immortal spirit is no mean thing, especially if you can wear your pajamas to the office. Taylor reports that when the octogenarian critic George Saintsbury opened a package of books for review, his fingers “still twitched in anticipation fifty years into a reviewing career that had begun in the days of Matthew Arnold.”

Taylor is an accomplished twitcher of the finger: the author of a stack of novels, several acclaimed biographies, and, he confesses, enough journalism to paper Lord’s Cricket Ground. His theme here is taste, critical and popular, his counterpoint how the business of writing shapes

the work of writers. This being an English history, the story of taste is a history of class. The Balkanization of literary taste is not a recent invention, and neither is the difficulty of making a living as a full-time writer. For, this being an English history, things have never been the same since 1914, and even more so since 1945.

Taylor’s “chronicle of dissolution” begins in 1918. Taste is still Edwardian. G.K. Chesterton and Hilaire Belloc for the pessimists, George Bernard Shaw and H.G. Wells for the optimists, and Everyman’s Library (1906) for self-improvers, like Leonard Bast in E.M.

Forster’s *Howards End* (1910). The light essay is called a “middle” because of its location in the magazine. In fiction, the public remains traditional: William Thackeray, Charles Dickens, and Mrs. Humphry Ward. In poetry, the whimsical, rural Georgians are critically acclaimed and—a last moment of consensus—popular, too. The nascent field of academic English is an antiquarian club. In these innocent days, literary theory has yet to be invented.

By the mid-twenties, the republic of letters has shattered into warring kingdoms. As in the days of Grub Street, it is a battle of Ancients and Moderns. The patriarch of the old ways is J.C. Squire of the *London Mercury*, who directs his squadrons of allies like ink-spattered cavalry in the pages of the major newspapers. Against the “Squirearchy,” the Modernist factions: the swinging snobs of Bloomsbury; the Sitwell gang, a trio of plummy self-publicists; and the circle of traditionalists around T.S. Eliot, editor of the *Criterion*. Even Oxford and Cambridge are at odds. Cambridge goes modern and critical, but Oxford, driven by J.R.R. Tolkien, turns towards medieval philology. Evelyn Waugh succeeds by splitting the difference, merging Dickensian caricature with the speech experiments of Ronald Firbank.

Waugh shows the roots of the schism in taste. In its expansive Victorian phase, the republic of letters had been large and prosperous enough to indulge its antagonists and even, in the Naughty Nineties, to support their experiments. Now, as English society changed, the

avant-garde pulled away from the belles-lettrists, forming coteries around its “little magazines” and great salons.

In the 1930s, this division of taste was crosscut by political divisions; as Orwell tartly remarked, the “nancy poets” had discovered the fraternal joys of socialism. But socially, smart literature still belongs to the smart people. Though Virginia Woolf’s “common reader” may never have existed, she knew common people when she saw them—and wanted them out of Bloomsbury. Almost every significant interwar writer was privately educated. Eton alone produced the best critics of the thirties and forties, Orwell and Cyril Connolly; the novelists Anthony Powell and Henry Green; the aesthetes Harold Acton and Brian Howard; and the travel writers Robert Byron and Peter Fleming.

Meanwhile in a country where “intellectual” is an insult, public taste remained impervious to the glittering experiments. The reading public preferred traditional entertainers like J.B. Priestley, Somerset Maugham, P.G. Wodehouse, and Hugh Walpole. The solid storyteller Alec Waugh appealed to a far wider audience than his acerbic brother Evelyn, just as Peter Fleming would ultimately be outsold by his brother Ian. If Orwell briefly reunified literary taste, it was not because of his socialist politics but because of his sedulous traditionalism. The Orwell who rejected Dali’s “perverse cult of Edwardian things” built a wholesome bulwark of English things. His novels are Wells for the thirties; his literary essays are exercises in English social history. His now-exalted “As I Please” essays for *Tribune* are “middles” endowed with moral grandeur by war. “A Nice Cup of Tea” (1946), with its claim that the weekly ration can produce the necessary “twenty good, strong cups,” is a plea for patience amid postwar reconstruction.

The postwar settlement undid the aristocracy, in wealth, government, and letters. The fifties and sixties belonged to middle-class provincials: the terrible twins Kingsley Amis and Philip Larkin; the rivalrous siblings A.S. Byatt and Margaret Drabble; the pompous critics of Cambridge, F.R. and Queenie Leavis; and the prose factory himself,

Anthony Burgess. It was the age of Harold Macmillan’s managed decline and Harold Wilson’s style over content. Alec Waugh prospered in Hollywood and Evelyn fumed in Gloucestershire. As the economy of highbrow letters narrowed, and the media became more powerful, the novelists and poets sheltered in the ivory tower and the academics cashed in as talking heads. This pattern continued through the disastrous seventies and the exuberant eighties and nineties, the age of the overrated “literary novel.”

Changes in format and marketing had always shaped the business. The Victorian triple-decker had been corseted in a single volume to suit the lending libraries. The pocket paperback had increased sales, but lowered the tone in pursuit of readers. The Internet killed the golden goose, publishing’s Victorian infrastructure of copyright laws and distribution systems. The tenements of Grub Street, always rackety, are increasingly boarded up.

Taylor ends on a defiantly dispirited note. Literary culture is now so fractionated as to render the term meaningless;

but reading and writing, and the capillary action of reviewing and criticism, continue. For Taylor, the modern writer’s “enemy of promise” is not Connolly’s “pram in the hall,” or its traditional companions of drink, journalism, and procrastination, or even novel diversions such as online gambling and placing pseudonymous negative reviews of one’s rivals on Amazon. It is institutionalization in the university: the erosion of promise in committees; political correctness; paper-clip-counting and “Creative Writing.” A writer mates with the Muse with the frequency of a panda—and not in captivity or under the observation of a tenure committee.

*The Prose Factory* is partial and personal, as taste should be. Taylor has a novelist’s eye for characters, a biographer’s talent for narrative, and a critic’s discernment for the vintages of the Hippocrene. There has been no better history of English letters since Gross’s *Rise and Fall* or, substituting comic fiction for historical tragedy, Burgess’s *Earthly Powers* (1980). The man of letters is not dead, just hungry and thirsty. ♦

BCA

# Unbeautiful Minds

*Famous, yes, but all too human.*

BY TEMMA EHRENFELD

**D**iagnosing the illnesses of historical figures is a strange activity. I’m not really sure I approve of picturing the dead in the blue light of a science unknown in their own times, as if they were wearing hospital robes and sitting on examining tables, legs dangling like small children in an adult chair.

But I do know that reading *Andy Warhol Was a Hoarder*, Claudia Kalb’s unpretentious collection of 12 profiles, is a pleasure. In good hands, the goal of embarrassing biographies is literary: to teach compassion with stories of heroes

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## Andy Warhol Was a Hoarder

*Inside the Minds of  
History’s Great Personalities*  
by Claudia Kalb  
National Geographic, 320 pp., \$24

and their tragic flaws. Kalb lives up to her enjoyably grabby title and transcends it. In some 300 pages, roughly divided between biography and medical reporting, she succeeds because of her literary touches and compassionate voice. Moreover, the science is insightful and up-to-the-minute as well.

Kalb, who covered health for many years at *Newsweek*, supplies a thorough

review of—spoiler alert!—borderline personality disorder (Marilyn Monroe), obsessive compulsive disorder (Howard Hughes), hoarding and intimacy issues (Andy Warhol), eating disorders (Princess Diana), depression (Abraham Lincoln), gender dysphoria (Christine Jorgensen), narcissistic personality disorder (Frank Lloyd Wright), addiction (Betty Ford), anxiety (Charles Darwin), attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (George Gershwin), gambling (Fyodor Dostoyevsky), and autism spectrum disorder (Albert Einstein).

The medical details help give us a sense of intimacy with our betters—even as we learn how profoundly their quirks isolated them from their contemporaries and actual intimates. Darwin, for example, was so crippled by anxiety it's astonishing he accomplished anything at all: He cried hysterically and complained of “fatigue, dizziness, eczema, boils, muscle weakness, cold fingers and toes, dizziness, black spots,” and, most often, abdominal distress. Unable to attend conferences to discuss his own work, the great naturalist hid at home with his wife (in this book, we learn about more than one devoted, and now-unknown, spouse). Visits from his neighbors triggered bouts of shivering and vomiting. Kalb lists nearly 30 proposed diagnoses before she makes her case for anxiety.

This sort of looking backward, though not exactly medicine—beyond conferences and journals, medical professionals are not supposed to diagnose illnesses in people they never met—seems only as treacherous as other uses of biography. At its best, biography may help us avoid projecting our biases into the past. A contemporary college student might, for example, see nothing more than depression in Milton's famous lament, “When I Consider How My Light Is Spent”—after all, lots of poets commit suicide, right? It makes a big difference if you know that the poet had gone blind a few years earlier.

How might Einstein have responded to the idea that he was on the “autism spectrum”? A snort or a blank stare? I'm guessing he'd want proof beyond a checklist of symptoms. Darwin, I imagine, would be saddened to hear that we haven't advanced much in treating debilitating anxiety, although we talk continually about our low-grade anxieties. As a clinical-level narcissist, Frank Lloyd Wright would have been proud of the label and changed his behavior not at all.

Kalb's chapter on Dostoyevsky



Frank Lloyd Wright (1952)

and his gambling problem covers the arguments for labeling compulsive behavior an addiction. Many of us still believe, or want to believe, that love, insight, self-discipline—perhaps necessarily coupled with imminent disaster—are the cure for addiction, even as researchers increasingly establish its biochemical causes, and Dostoyevsky's story illustrates why. The author of *The Gambler* cured himself.

Dostoyevsky began overspending in his twenties, when he rented a huge apartment that he couldn't furnish and lived largely on bread and milk bought on credit from a grocer. Despite early success, he was already so in debt that he couldn't catch up. At the age of 40, he gambled for the first time, in a German casino where he won the equivalent of \$2,000 at roulette. Although roulette is a game of pure chance, Dostoyevsky

persuaded himself, as many compulsive gamblers do, that he had a “foolproof betting system.”

Ironically, he met his second wife, Anna, with whom he was famously happy, when she came to take dictation for his novel describing how self-deceptive gamblers can be. Yet he continued deluding himself that he had the secret to roulette. Kalb writes: “Despite his ongoing losses (he pawned the couple's wedding rings, his wife's earrings and brooch, his coat, and her shawl), Anna stood by his side. ‘One had to come to terms with it,’ she later wrote, ‘to look at his gambling passion as a disease for which there was no cure.’” Yet somehow, Dostoyevsky emerged from his delusion, after a bout of nightmares, amid fear that he'd lose her. Great love and great insight surely helped. His nine-year gambling spree came to an end, and he lived another decade without a relapse.

Kalb doesn't lean towards psychoanalysis, but she doesn't neglect family history, and her details are telling. At a visit to Wright's famous Falling Water, near Pittsburgh, our tour guides stressed how little he cared about his clients' comfort; no surprise, then, to read that he meets the definition for narcissistic personality disorder. (I'm surprised the docents didn't tell us that his over-involved mother decided that Wright would be an architect—before he was *born*.) I'd read that Abraham Lincoln could be considered depressed, but how sad to learn about a childhood so miserable he stayed away from his father's deathbed and funeral.

*Andy Warhol Was a Hoarder* reminds us to be grateful for more benign families and the steady advance of medicine. Should you feel that you or your child or spouse can't achieve much because of a mental illness, or can't recover from one, you may take special comfort here. For all of us, medical biographies are a way to revisit the difficult thought that the dead once lived. ♦

FRED STEIN ARCHIVE / ARCHIVE PHOTOS / GETTY

# Cleansing Effect

*A novel of the siege of Sarajevo.*

BY DIANE SCHARPER

This is 85-year-old Edna O'Brien's first novel in 10 years, and in interviews, she has said that she found it difficult to write. One could argue that the violent history behind the novel added to her difficulty. For as she explains in a brief preface, the chairs of the title refer to the siege of Sarajevo, the capital city of Bosnia: The 11,541 red chairs were part of an art installation set up there in 2012 to commemorate the 20th anniversary of the siege. Each empty chair stood for one Sarajevan killed, with red representing the blood that was shed.

O'Brien's story features Fidelma, an Irish woman who falls in love with a notorious war criminal. But she doesn't know who he really is until he's ruined her life. He comes as a stranger into the small, claustrophobic Irish town of Cloonoila. The villagers are impressed with the depth and breadth of his knowledge, especially of plants and their health benefits; he's also steeped in Celtic folklore and symbolism from the pre-Christian era. Women, especially, are attracted to him and don't seem to realize that there is something sinister about him. Readers, however, are aware because O'Brien deftly adds dramatic irony as she drops hints about his identity.

O'Brien adds resonance to her main story by including the voices of Cloonoila's townspeople, who act like a Greek chorus, offering different perspectives on tragedies they've encountered—mostly in Eastern Europe. The historical basis for the novel, which is

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## The Little Red Chairs

by Edna O'Brien  
Little, Brown, 320 pp., \$27



*Sarajevo Red Line (2012)*

revealed gradually as the plot unfolds, concerns the war in the former Yugoslavia and the ethnic cleansing to rid Serbia of Muslims and Croats. O'Brien uses this as the backdrop for a story of love and betrayal set in a contemporary Ireland with a strong Roman Catholic influence.

Lasting from 1992 until 1996, the siege of Sarajevo was especially brutal. It left thousands, mostly Muslims and Croats, dead. Civilians were detained, brutalized, and murdered. Men, women, and children were herded into trucks,

slaughtered, and tossed onto the street, where (as one of the characters describes it) army trucks ran over the bodies of the dead and nearly dead. The lucky ones were taken to camps.

At the end of the Bosnian war, the perpetrators were indicted for war crimes and genocide by the International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia in The Hague. One of the perpetrators, Radovan Karadzic, escaped and wasn't found until 2008. (This past March, he was found guilty of war crimes, crimes against humanity, and genocide.) Here, a fictionalized Karadzic is the fulcrum on which O'Brien rests her story. Called Dr. Vlad Dragan, he is a poet, holistic healer, and sex therapist—and in a none-too-subtle dig at the Catholic church, O'Brien creates a bishop who objects to the notion of a sex therapist while having nothing to say about Dragan's war-criminal past.

Vlad's story is told primarily through the perspective of Fidelma, the town beauty and the woman with whom he has an affair. Divided into three parts, *The Little Red Chairs* first brings Vlad and Fidelma together; Vlad is arrested; then his enemies torture Fidelma and reveal Vlad's identity as the Butcher of Bosnia. In the most compelling segment, Vlad is put on trial for initiating the siege, as commander of Bosnian Serb forces, and held responsible for the deaths of more than 7,500 Muslims. Vlad shows no remorse, justifying his actions as the nature of war. Meeting with Vlad after his trial, and hearing about his war crimes, Fidelma ponders the character of a man who could commit such evil acts and live with himself—yet she still finds him attractive. Now she must choose between her infatuation with the man and the reality of the evil he embodies.

If Vlad had been any other thug, O'Brien's story might have been easier to write and more satisfying to read. But the savage history behind *The Little Red Chairs* makes the fiction seem almost insignificant. If any novel brings to mind the adage that truth is stranger than fiction, it is this one. ♦

# Pilgrim's Progress

*The middle-aged version of a voyage of discovery.*

BY THOMAS SWICK



Watts Towers

In the first sentence of the first essay in this collection, Geoff Dyer confesses that on his way to French Polynesia to write about Gauguin he somehow lost his copy of David Sweetman's biography of the artist. As travel writer failings go, it pales in comparison to Karl Ove Knausgaard's arriving in Newfoundland for a road trip through North America without a driver's license. We know of the Norwegian's lapse because he wrote about it at length in the *New York Times Magazine*, the publication that had paid to bring him to the continent.

Admissions of ineptitude seem to be fashionable in contemporary travel writing. Perhaps it's a response to centuries of travel writers coming off as the heroes of their own stories: savvy, dauntless, omniscient guides to the world. Perhaps it's an attempt to stave off, or at least soften, accusations of elevated priv-

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## White Sands

*Experiences from the Outside World*  
by Geoff Dyer  
Pantheon, 256 pp., \$25

ilege: Look, I'm just as bumbling as you tourists are. Or, like the conversational, blog-like writing that occasionally turns into trenchant analysis online, it may be a ploy to catch readers off-guard, to give them a mix of low and high or, in this case, dumb and clever.

Apologies for the digression, but readers of Dyer will be familiar with the practice. My favorite instance occurs in his novel *Jeff in Venice, Death in Varanasi*, when the title character ponders, as he slowly goes mad in India, Roger Federer's fateful decision in 2006 to wear a cream-colored blazer onto Centre Court Wimbledon. Jeff clearly has never been able to reconcile, not even in one of the world's holiest cities, the unconscionable pairing of formal wear with tennis shorts.

This first essay is titled "Where?

What? Where?" and in it Dyer reflects not only on the art and flawed humanity of Gauguin but on tourism rituals in the South Pacific, luxury hotels, imperialism, disappointment in travel (which reveals to him the attraction of Islam; no pilgrim to Mecca ever left feeling let down), the nature of embarrassment, the definition of paradise, the offspring of luminaries, and the redoubtable girth of Tahitian women and men. "It's like some calorific battle of the sexes" is just one memorable line in a riff that is so funny and insensitive that, checking to see where the essay first appeared, you are not at all surprised to find that it was in a British, not an American, publication.

Toward the end of the essay, Dyer comes upon an empty soccer field, which he imagines being discovered a hundred years hence. The empty goalpost reminds him of a photograph of an empty goalpost (by Luigi Ghirri) that has long fascinated him. Sitting at the end of the field, so that one empty goalpost contains the other, Dyer considers "the all-engulfing purposelessness" of his visit—"framed not by the lack of a larger goal but by a larger lack of goals"—as well as the impermanence of human life. Both of which, it goes without saying (and it does in this essay), provide an impetus for writing: Putting experience into words can give meaning to what otherwise might be meaningless, and putting those words into a book is a bulwark against personal extinction.

The author of *White Sands* is an older, more thoughtful writer than the one who gave us *Yoga for People Who Can't Be Bothered to Do It*, Dyer's earlier collection of travel essays. (In the author photo he has exchanged his T-shirt for a collared shirt and sport jacket.) Middle-aged travel writers are more reflective by nature but also out of necessity: They don't, as a rule, enjoy the multitude of lush experiences that younger, more thrill-seeking travelers do, so to fill the pages they resort to rumination. Travel writing as a whole has become more analytical over the decades, in response to an exhaustively photographed world that has obviated the need for endless descriptions. And Dyer, though not a travel writer by definition, brilliantly

and often hilariously enriches the genre.

A few of the pieces here hark back to his *Yoga* days, being what Graham Greene would have labeled “entertainments.” The essay entitled “Forbidden City” does little more than tell of a tourist’s (i.e., Dyer’s) attraction to his tour guide (who is not really a tour guide but is very attractive). Though it does illuminate a rarely addressed travel phenomenon, which is that sometimes the moments of interest and promise that one hopes for on a trip arrive infuriatingly on the last night.

The title essay, which reads like a short story, shows the author and his wife driving past a sign cautioning motorists not to pick up hitchhikers—in a part of New Mexico with several detention facilities—shortly after they picked up a hitchhiker. But even this slight tale is rife with tense humor and Dyer’s deft mind-eye coordination: “In the intensity and single-mindedness of their desire to contain menace,” he writes of the facilities, “they exuded it.”

The best pieces here, like many of the best trips, are based on quests. Though “Northern Dark,” in which the author and his wife travel to wintry Norway to see the Northern Lights, is more of a standard travel story, albeit with Dyer’s trademark disappointment and gleefully accurate detail. As a former travel editor, I’ve read countless stories about dog sledding, and this is the first one that noted “the urine-stained and poo-smearred ice of the compound.” Dyer is much better when following his passions (it was his wife who wanted to see the Northern Lights) in less brutal conditions. His interest in art, especially of the eccentric, monumental type, leads him to Walter De Maria’s *The Lightning Field* near Quemado, New Mexico, and then to Robert Smithson’s *Spiral Jetty* at the Great Salt Lake, which, two years after its creation, was completely underwater. Not long afterwards, Smithson was killed in a plane crash: “After the *Jetty* sank and his plane crashed, Smithson’s reputation soared.”

But Dyer is as keen on educating as he is on entertaining, and we learn here about the Land Art movement, of which Smithson was one of the leading proponents, and we’re given D.H.

Lawrence’s thoughts on the power that certain places, like Taos Pueblo, exert—what the novelist called nodality. Smithson and De Maria, Dyer posits, “were attempting to *create* nodality.” As was, in his own way, Sabato Rodia, the man who built Watts Towers, which Dyer first saw pictured on the cover of an album by jazz trumpeter Don Cherry. This connection allows Dyer to weave his knowledge of jazz into the story of his visit to the towers, including his regret at his failure to write a biography of Jimmy Garrison, so that the essay (“The Ballad of Jimmy Garrison”) becomes a meditation, with references to Camus and Hannah Arendt, on ambition and resignation, unremitting labors and unfulfilled dreams. Read this chapter and the next time you’re in Los Angeles, you’ll probably visit the towers.

Another place worthy of a pilgrimage (at least for Dyer) is 316 South Kenter Avenue in Brentwood, the former home of the philosopher Theodor Adorno (here referred to as “Teddy”), a musical adviser to Thomas Mann—a fellow

emigré from Nazi Germany—and the author of *Minima Moralia: Reflections from Damaged Life*. Dyer, who moved to Los Angeles two years ago, demonstrates his intellectual bona fides while simultaneously making fun of them, noting that (like Knausgaard) he takes pleasure in the idea that he is the type of person who reads Adorno. He is also fascinated by the fact that “all these European super-heavyweights, the gods of high culture,” landed, as he did, in Southern California. In a typically wide-ranging essay that includes (I’m almost tempted to say “inevitably”) a trip to Muscle Beach (brains and brawn), Dyer is able to add something new to the growing corpus of literature on the City of Angels.

The last chapter is the most personal, as Dyer tells of suffering an ischemic stroke. The misfiring in his brain manifested itself first in his eyes—the two most important tools in any writer’s kit. Though Dyer does more with them than most of us do, and one hopes that he will continue to dazzle for many years to come. ♦

BCA

## Paths Not Taken

*Dana Gioia’s poetry from memory.*

BY ELI LEHRER

If angst, lovesickness, and ennui alone made for half-decent poetry, just about every moody high school student would be in the running for the Pulitzer Prize. Although strong emotion has been vital to many artistic movements, from Romanticism on, simply placing emotions on a page almost never produces poetry that’s worthwhile. Indeed, Oscar Wilde was on to something when he remarked that “all bad poetry springs from genuine feeling”—or as it is often paraphrased, “all bad poetry is sincere.” Even if Wilde is right (and he probably is), there is also a case to be

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**99 Poems**  
*New & Selected*  
by Dana Gioia  
Graywolf Press, 208 pp., \$24

made that good poetry *can* be sincere. Dana Gioia proves it with this funny, insightful, and wise collection.

As befits an artist largely devoid of artifice, Gioia’s collection contains exactly what the cover promises: 99 poems (15 of them never before collected) by the chairman of the National Endowment for the Arts in the Bush II administration and recently named poet laureate of California. As Gioia says in his very brief

notes, the collection is “arranged by theme, not by chronology, because it is designed for the reader rather than the scholar.” This organization is commendable: It lets readers see Gioia’s artistic development and development of ideas in ways that the more common strict chronological order wouldn’t.

The poems that launch from Gioia’s own emotions work well, in part, because they offer intellectual insight coupled with a becoming sincerity. What might be the most personal poem here, “Pentecost” (subtitled “After the death of our son”), does not just capture his feelings of loss for a son but also explores them in a way that universalizes them. Gioia opens with an arresting intellectual image:

*Neither the sorrows of afternoon, waiting  
in the silent house,  
Nor the night no sleep relieves, when  
memory  
Repeats its prosecution.*

The phrase “repeats its prosecution” is particularly insightful: Memory of love lost can be an oppressive thing that feels almost like a prosecutor. Gioia continues with the theme, saying that no “prayers / improvised to an unknowable god / Can extinguish the flame.” He concludes with the realization that the pain will never go away: “I offer you this scarred and guilty hand / Until others mix our ashes.” Not uplifting at all, but honest and telling nonetheless.

But if Gioia is eloquent with his own emotions, he does just as well with characters summoned out of his imagination. One of the three longer narrative poems here, “Homecoming,” aims to get inside the mind of a murderer who, rejected by his birth parents and taught a twisted hyper-Calvinism by a cruel foster mother, rejects God and embraces darkness. On deciding his path to evil, the killer muses:

*That night I knew I would go to Hell,  
and it would be a place just like my  
room—  
dark, suffocating, with its door shut tight,  
and even if my mother were there too,  
she wouldn’t find me. I’d always be  
alone.*

This leads to a life torturing ani-

mals, “pulling petty robberies,” and eventually spending time in prison, where his beliefs harden. The narrator escapes from prison, killing more on the way, and returns to his home to kill his stepmother.



Dana Gioia

*Poems that launch from Gioia’s own emotions offer intellectual insight coupled with a becoming sincerity. ‘Pentecost’ (subtitled ‘After the death of our son’) does not just capture his feelings of loss but also explores them in a way that universalizes them.*

But he soon realizes that the thrills he got from committing crimes were only “the phony high / that violence unleashes in your blood” and concludes that when he saw his stepmother’s “body lying on the floor” he “knew that we would always be together”—with her rejection of God’s love and his bringing them to a rough equality in death. This poem and several others might fairly be accused of lapsing into cliché at times, but when it comes to Gioia’s fundamental poetic purpose, it’s still a success.

Not every poem needs to delve into

theology to show insight. His deceptively simple “Summer Storm,” written in rhyming couplets, tells a brief story of a onetime connection during a storm at a party—“To my surprise, you took my arm, a gesture you didn’t explain”—that leads the narrator to muse, 20 years later:

*There are so many might-have-beens,  
What ifs that won’t stay buried,  
Other cities, other jobs,  
Strangers we might have married.*

*And memory insists on pining  
For places it never went,  
As if life would be happier  
Just by being different.*

This is simple and clear but also a clever, even profound, observation about the nature of memory and the regrets for paths not taken that play a role in nearly every human life. Gioia plays with the same themes of brief connection and regret in the ironically titled “Being Happy,” which tells the story of a brief romantic fling that fizzled when the speaker’s newfound lover left town—which leads him to conclude that “Being happy is mostly like that. You don’t see it up close. / You recognize it later from the ache of memory.” Again, it’s clear, sincere, and telling.

None of this is to say that Gioia can’t be challenging. His “The Gods of Winter” (the title poem of a 1991 collection) is a lyrically beautiful reflection on memory, loss, and relationships. It rewards dozens of rereadings to untangle and decode. And when Gioia tries to be funny (which isn’t often), he’s a hoot. The best example here is probably “Title Index to my Next Book of Poems,” which includes “More Fun in Stalingrad” and “Envy as an Art Form.”

Dana Gioia is a very good poet but isn’t beyond criticism. In addition to occasional lapses into cliché, he’s a bit limited in his thematic content: A few big themes like memory, loss, and love dominate the collection to the exclusion of all others. And those looking for poetry to provide uplift won’t find it here: Almost none of his poems is outright happy or optimistic. But *99 Poems* is well worth reading, and if nothing else, proof positive that good poetry can also be sincere. ♦

RICARDO DEARATANHÁ / LOS ANGELES TIMES / GETTY

# The Fighting Admiral

*William F. Halsey in peace and war.*

BY JOSEPH F. CALLO

**W**here do we get such people? That's a question generally posed when we are witness to astonishing military skill and courage. The question is often intended to be rhetorical, and that's a mistake. With military heroism, we are dealing with emotionally charged, life-and-death matters, and they should not be treated superficially.

Which makes it imperative to get past the "what" of the story when examining our military heroes. The "what" of the narrative involves the drama and has to do with celebrity; in contrast, the "why" and the "how" involve the more weighty elements of military heroism, and that's where the intellectual wealth of the narrative lies.

Admiral William F. (Bull) Halsey (1882-1959) is a case in point. He was one of the best-known military leaders of the war against the Axis powers. He has been the subject of many books and newspaper and magazine articles, and he received countless civic honors. Many consider him to be one of the great heroes of World War II. On the other hand, there are skeptics quick to point out that they believe Halsey made serious mistakes in his signature actions at the Battle of Leyte Gulf.

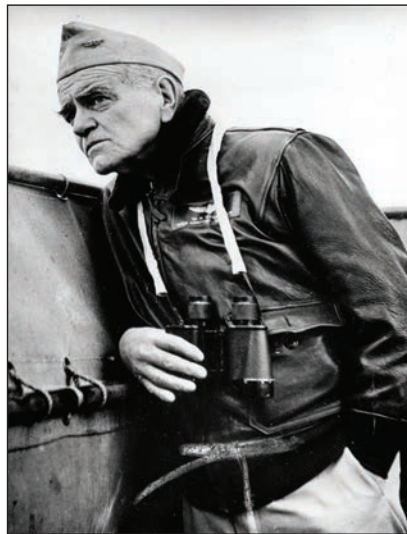
In this new biography, Thomas Alexander Hughes begins with adjectives such as "inspiring," "bold," "audacious," and "original" to describe his subject. But the words "debacle" and "blunder" eventually appear in his Halsey narrative, too. What happened between those favorable and unfavorable adjectives is a complex, thought-provoking, and profoundly

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## Admiral Bill Halsey

*A Naval Life*

by Thomas Alexander Hughes  
Harvard, 544 pp., \$35



*Halsey on the bridge (1943)*

illuminating story. What came between them involves the "how" and "why" of a career that challenges quick and shallow conclusions.

Halsey's father was a Naval Academy graduate who served in what was, in his time, a "naval aristocracy." His military record was honorable but not epic. He commanded ships' crews with skill, understood the concept of military honor, was a skilled mariner, and retired as a captain. His navy was relatively small and not particularly innovative. All of those things were part of Bull Halsey's cultural inheritance when he entered the Naval Academy in 1904.

Halsey was not a brilliant student, but he was a standout athlete. That latter interest was an early clue to a proactive personality. Hughes also points

out that Halsey's Annapolis yearbook identified him as "everyone's friend," a sobriquet that would have brought a wry smile to the faces of those who worked for, and with, him in the Pacific theater—and confusion to those who met him there as an enemy.

An important factor in the Navy in which Halsey first served was technological change, particularly the *rate* of that change. In specific terms, the rise of naval aviation as the premier force of war at sea was the most noteworthy of all the changes to naval warfare in the early and mid-20th century. When Halsey began his career, the battleship squadron with destroyer escorts was the ultimate naval force; when he retired, the aircraft carrier task force was pre-eminent. The destructive energy of big-gun slugging matches and hit-and-run torpedo actions was geometrically amplified by fast-moving and far-reaching carrier attacks on both maritime and land targets.

During the early stages of his career, however, Halsey's focus was on destroyers, and he became imbued with the destroyerman's mentality. Hughes refers to the permanence of that imprint: "in temperament and outlook, he never really left the tin cans." Thus it was in destroyers where Halsey became infused with the central element of his combat doctrine: *attack*.

It should be noted that the combat doctrine that became the overriding core of Halsey's persona wasn't linked, in any way, to reckless abandon. It was, in fact, a throwback to an essential part of Lord Nelson's combat doctrine, which Nelson articulated while on his way to the Battle of Copenhagen in 1801: "The boldest measures are the safest." Halsey's version of Nelson's attitude was "Arrive first with the most."

It was relatively late in his career when Halsey established a direct link with naval aviation. In 1935 he took command of the USS *Saratoga*, one of the Navy's earliest, hardest-working, most storied aircraft carriers. There was a problem, however. The Navy's aircraft carriers had been commanded by naval aviators, but Halsey was at an advanced age for flight training—and it had been determined earlier in his

career that his eyesight was not up to flight-school standards. Through masterful administrative choreography, however, Halsey achieved the status of “flight observer”—at age 51.

Hughes handles Halsey’s credentials as an aviator with a wry smile and records one of the more lurid details of his entrance into aviation: “He won the Flying Jackass award . . . when in the spring of 1935 he jumped a plane across a taxiway . . . destroying runway lights and wreaking havoc.” But if Halsey’s eyesight and age limited his basic flying skills, they had no negative impact on his understanding of how carrier strike forces could be used against the Japanese in the Pacific, and as the tide of war was turning at Guadalcanal (1942), he came into his own.

Halsey’s carrier strikes during the naval actions moving ever closer to Japan were masterful applications of his forward-leaning combat doctrine. And Hughes does not hold back on the public view of the results of Halsey’s combat doctrine:

*A Detroit Free Press* article proclaimed Halsey “the country’s new naval hero, whose name will be remembered in naval annals along with those of John Paul Jones, David Farragut, and George Dewey.” . . . Halsey was eclipsed only by Douglas MacArthur as *the* commander at the fighting front, at sea or in the field.

Notwithstanding General MacArthur’s skill in absorbing the lime-light, there was a Halsey intangible that seemed to put him somewhere ahead of other senior naval officers—until the Battle of Leyte Gulf in October 1944.

The Battle of Leyte Gulf involved multiple fleets on both sides and has been described as the largest naval action in history. It was also marked by confusion on both sides. At a key point, Halsey took a major portion of U.S. forces to attack a Japanese carrier strike group, north of the action, led by Vice-Admiral Jisaburo Ozawa. Halsey wiped out the Ozawa force, but the landing beaches at Luzon in the Philippines were left with dangerously limited naval protection, and in the battle’s aftermath, Halsey was criti-

cized for leaving the landing beaches exposed. More than a few called him a glory-hunter.

Hughes helps to clarify matters by illuminating Halsey’s mindset as the battle approached: “There was a battle over the horizon, and we went to meet it,” Halsey recalled. That blunt statement reflected the quintessential Halsey. Indeed, given his deeply embedded instincts as a combat leader, Halsey’s decision to attack the Ozawa carrier strike force was preordained. And in the long view, it should be

noted that Halsey, by going north to engage Ozawa, succeeded in destroying what Hughes describes as “the one remaining Japanese fleet between the American Navy and Tokyo Bay”—and as it turned out, the amphibious landing at Luzon was virtually unopposed by the Japanese Navy.

William F. Halsey proved to be an authentic military hero, and based on the “why” and “how” of his actions, the most important factor in achieving that status was his brilliantly prosecuted, one-word combat doctrine: *attack*. ♦

BCA

# Hungry for Love

*A life as dramatic as the novelist’s inventions.*

BY MALCOLM FORBES

**T**his is the bicentenary of the birth of Charlotte Brontë, and to celebrate it comes a biography by the British writer Claire Harman. *Charlotte Brontë: A Fiery Heart* isn’t the first literary life she has penned: Her biographies of Fanny Burney and Robert Louis Stevenson appeared to critical acclaim in 2001 and 2005, respectively. And of course this isn’t the first Brontë biography to be published. In 1857, two years after Brontë’s death, Elizabeth Gaskell produced *The Life of Charlotte Brontë*, a seminal work but one whose biases and flaws have since been revealed, chief among them Gaskell’s toning-down of Brontë’s love for a married man. In the mid-1990s, Juliet Barker’s monumental *The Brontës* took the form of a kind of grand literary salvage operation by debunking the many myths and prejudices that had hardened around the family and replacing previous biographers’ spurious supposition with hard fact.

While Harman draws on letters that were unavailable to her predecessors, we don’t come away with a fresh

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**Charlotte Brontë**  
*A Fiery Heart*  
by Claire Harman  
Knopf, 480 pp., \$30

understanding of her subject. Unlike Barker’s book at double the length, Harman provides more of a neat retelling and distilling rather than a radical overhaul. However, for readers looking for a comprehensive study of the most successful Brontë—as opposed to an exhaustive history of the whole beleaguered family—Harman’s book will prove deeply rewarding.

Many will already be familiar with at least the bare bones of this tragic saga. At least half of Harman’s book serves as both an illuminating recap for the initiated and a fact-filled tale for the Brontë beginner. In the opening chapters we learn, or are reacquainted with, Brontë’s childhood. She was raised in a windswept stone parsonage in the village of Haworth—“a strange uncivilized little place,” according to Brontë—which offered views of graves on one side and the bleak Yorkshire moors on the other. Her mother died when she was 5, leaving her and five

siblings in the care of their eccentric and melancholic clergyman-father.

Disaster strikes again when Brontë's oldest sisters, Elizabeth and Maria, die aged 10 and 11, partly as a result of their school's unhygienic conditions and neglectful staff. The four remaining children—Charlotte, Anne, Emily, and brother Branwell—are brought home and educated by their erudite father. Away from lessons, each member of the household spends considerable time alone: The patriarch is a "solitary egotist," the children make no friends from the village and lose themselves in books. Eventually, though, the children also come to lose themselves in writing, concocting imaginary otherworlds and chronicling fantastical adventures in booklet form—"little works of fiction, they call'd miniature novels," their father explained to Gaskell.

When Brontë attends a new school in 1831, she shoots to the top of the class and makes a friend for life in Ellen Nussey and, in doing so, finds "for the first and last time, happiness similar to that of home." (One of the reasons we know so much about Brontë's life is due to Nussey's preservation of more than 600 letters from her, written over 24 years.) In 1835, Brontë starts work at the school but quickly loathes it. The once-polite and compliant pupil transforms into an impatient and uncooperative teacher. An extract from her journal attests to a newborn inner turbulence but also an ingrained sadness:

[A]m I to spend all the best part of my life in this wretched bondage, forcibly suppressing my rage at the idleness, the apathy and the hyperbolic & most asinine stupidity of those fat-headed oafs?

After a later stint as a governess proves equally unfulfilling, Brontë leaves Haworth for Brussels, again to study and then teach at a boarding school. There she falls hopelessly in love with the charismatic (and married) owner, Constantin Héger. Har-

man rightly treats this episode as the single most important experience of Brontë's life. She describes the letters Brontë wrote to Héger back at Haworth between 1844-45 as "heart-breaking documents," possibly "the most wrenching examples of unsolicited, unrequited love laments in our whole literature." In some of the most lyrical flourishes in the book, Harman notes how Brontë desperately craved



Charlotte Brontë (right) and her sisters, by Branwell Brontë (ca. 1834)

a union that "was one of souls; a possession, a haunting, a living-through, a sharing of ideas, intensely verbal, profoundly silent, an enveloping warmth of love and shared awareness of power." However, in her obsession, she behaves "more like an incubus than a friend" and waits in vain for Héger's replies.

The deaths of Branwell, Emily, and Anne in the space of eight awful months add further, unimaginable heartache: "Life has become very void," she writes, "and hope has proved a strange traitor." The only silver lining to this catalogue of horror is the emergence of some of the most intensely moving and hauntingly original novels in the English language. Harman tracks a short but illustrious writing career, from false starts to big

successes, expertly charting the composition and reception of each book by the pseudonymous and androgynous "Currer Bell," assessing their merit and following their creator's reluctant progress out of her shell and into London literary circles.

But where Harman truly excels is in showing how art imitated life. Brontë's heroines are all "motherless, adrift and starving for parental love." Héger, a "difficult, mercurial character," was the inspiration for Rochester in *Jane Eyre*, Louis Moore in *Shirley*, and Paul Emanuel in *Villette*. The eponymous Shirley was "a fantasy version" of Emily—or as Brontë told Gaskell, what her sister "would have been, had she been placed in health and prosperity."

Although elegantly presented and meticulously researched, Harman's study suffers on occasion from both over- and under-emphasis. She claims that, with the publication of *Jane Eyre* in 1847, "No one had ever dramatized the injustices of childhood so vividly"—a sweeping assertion, given that *Oliver Twist* and *Nicholas Nickleby* appeared a decade earlier. And for all her thorough analysis of Brontë's oeuvre, Harman gives short shrift to the first novel she

worked on, *The Professor*, and declines to outline its many defects, which led to its achieving only posthumous publication.

But these are tiny specks on an otherwise finely composed portrait. Harman unveils many surprises: The young, plain, dutiful Brontë enjoyed reading the opium-induced reveries of Thomas De Quincey and the sensual excesses and bravado of Lord Byron; her juvenilia, some of it so sophisticated it belied her years, runs to volumes; Queen Victoria was an early fan of *Jane Eyre*; and far from being a lonely spinster with no suitors, Brontë received more than one offer of marriage but, every time, rejected it with explanatory and customary self-deprecation. "You do not know me," she told one spurned admirer. "I am not the serious, grave,

cool-headed individual you suppose.”

When Brontë did finally marry, it was the preamble to her life's last tragic act. In 1855, after only nine months of marriage to her father's curate and just three weeks shy of her 39th birthday, she died with her unborn child. Misfortune dogged

and thwarted Brontë and ultimately claimed her. Harman calls her “a poet of suffering,” a writer who inhabited it, understood it, and utilized it to supreme creative effect: “In life this propensity was a chronic burden; in her art, she let it speak to and comfort millions of others.” ♦



# First Among Equals

*How George Washington became George Washington.*

BY KEVIN R. KOSAR

To see it, you need to ascend to the second floor of the Metropolitan Museum of Art and wend your way to the northernmost corner. Here is the American art gallery. Slip through the long hall of bottles and vases, and past the earthy and sometimes gritty works of the Ashcan school. Stop in breathtaking ardor before John Singer Sargent's *Madame X*, then shuffle, goggle-eyed, past luminous mid-19th-century works by Francis William Edmonds and his ilk into Gallery 760. Then you can't miss it: *Washington Crossing the Delaware* is mammoth. More than 12 feet tall and 21 feet wide, it dominates the room, as does its subject: George Washington. The general is resplendent in his military attire and towers above the 11 other men in the boat, a motley crew of officers and ill-clad enlistees. Washington's face is resolute, his eyes focused on the shores of Trenton, where the enemy lie sleeping. He appears utterly fearless, despite the ice floes and icebergs that threaten to sink them and the American flag they bear. Emanuel Leutze's painting also captures the audacity of the 1776 Christmas night raid on the 1,500 Hessians camped in Trenton. It was bitterly cold, and Washington and his men had to haul themselves and their war matériel—cannons, horses, muskets, pow-

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**Washington's Revolution**  
*The Making of America's First Leader*  
by Robert Middlekauff  
Knopf, 384 pp., \$30

der—in shallow boats as wind and snow lashed them. Two of Washington's three raiding parties failed to make the crossing. Nonetheless, the general and his ragtag continentals routed the German mercenaries. How George Washington became that man—a leader of both the revolution and the nascent American nation—is the subject of *Washington's Revolution*, which features Leutze's masterpiece on its cover. Washington's rise is a fascinating story and a very American one. Washington, in short, made himself, and his rise was not quick nor easy nor inevitable.

George Washington was born to middling stock in Virginia in 1732. He was a “conventional Virginia provincial” whose world had a stable social order and agrarian political economy. A planter class led this stratified society. These gentlemen dressed, spoke, and behaved differently from others, and their mores owed much to the English motherland and to Europe. Young Washington aspired to enter this upper echelon, and “two qualities seem decisive in Washington's character,” observes author Robert Middlekauff. “They were his will and his judgment.”

Washington's ascent began at age

16. He was asked to join a surveying party led by George William Fairfax, a member of the leading class whose family was friendly with Washington's. A year later, the Fairfaxes helped get Washington appointed a surveyor for Culpeper County. The Fairfaxes were instrumental as well in starting Washington's military career. The Council of Virginia named him adjutant of the militia for the colony's southern district. He was a major at 20.

Washington's first military experience came in late 1753. Robert Dinwiddie, Virginia's governor, sent Washington and a small militia to the Ohio country to push out the French. It may have proven a disappointment to the young officer: There was no fight at Fort Le Boeuf, near present-day Waterford, Pennsylvania, and Capt. Jacques Legardeur de Saint-Pierre gently rebuffed his demands, explaining that France had claims to the area and that he was following orders from his headquarters in Canada. Empty-handed, Washington made the 450-mile trek from Lake Erie's shore back to Williamsburg.

It was an inauspicious beginning to a famous career. For many years afterward, Washington struggled to achieve military glory: He regularly found himself pleading with civilian authorities for better pay for his officers and soldiers, and he was often sent on expeditions with inadequate forces that struck Washington as fools' errands. His encounters with Indians and the French often went badly. Frustrated, the 22-year-old Colonel Washington resigned his commission in 1754 to life as a would-be planter.

The call of duty, however, soon lured him back into uniform. The newly appointed British commander in the colonies, Edward Braddock, asked Washington to help him battle the French. The first battle occurred in July 1755 at Fort Duquesne—and it was a disaster for the British, as was a subsequent clash just east of Pittsburgh. Braddock was killed and Washington felt humiliated. Returning to Virginia, he contemplated the fiascos and studied the means to professionalize the colonial forces. When Dinwiddie appointed him to a higher command, Washington put his ideas into action: Soldiers were



*'Washington Crossing the Delaware' by Emanuel Leutze (1851)*

drilled and lazy officers booted from service. His troops performed much better in subsequent battles with Indians.

Of course, Washington greatly bolstered his position by marrying the widowed Martha Custis in 1759, which brought him substantial landholdings. These he added to those he acquired during his early surveys and to the estate at Mount Vernon, which he began to farm after the death of his half-brother Lawrence. During his spells away from military service, Washington threw himself into the management of his properties, developing them as profitable enterprises. He had not been trained to do this—nor, for that matter, to lead an army. So he figured it out himself.

The burdens on Washington were immense and unabating, and exacerbated further by others. Friends, soldiers who formerly served under him, and even strangers habitually called upon him for assistance and advice. Robert Cary, the London merchant who received and sold Washington's tobacco crops at a poor price, drove him to distraction; his stepson, John Parke Custis, had more than his share of misadven-

tures and was a constant source of duress and anguish. Patsy, his stepdaughter, suffered seizures from which she died at only 17. The trials were unrelenting.

But Washington cemented his spot in Virginia's upper crust by winning election to the House of Burgesses in 1758, where he served until 1775. There he worked regularly with Virginia's leading lights and deepened his understanding of governance. It was never an easy life, with the competing demands of politics and managing his properties; but these years paled in comparison to the challenges to come. The colonies' relations with Britain frayed, starting in the late 1760s, and Washington joined others who peaceably contested the new taxes. He joined the Virginia committee advocating the nonimportation of English goods. He did not like the harassment and tarring of tax collectors and was appalled by the Boston Tea Party. (He thought the colonies should offer to reimburse for the damage; it was the honorable thing to do.)

That the Second Continental Congress chose Washington in 1775 to lead its army seems almost foretold: He was

renowned as a man of wealth, character, and soldiering experience; over six feet tall, he radiated strength and poise, and wearing soldierly garb to congressional sessions undoubtedly helped. But Washington faced immense odds. The British were a professional army and his force was exceedingly amateur. The Continentals were chronically short on uniforms, weapons, and food. Many troops quit before their enlistments were up. The war began badly; the army was driven from Brooklyn and chased through New Jersey and into Pennsylvania. Yet General Washington made something out of nothing, and six brutal years later, the British surrendered at Yorktown.

George Washington, as Robert Middlekauff shows, became who he was through self-directed effort, experience, and by bravely suffering life's challenges. He set out to become a member of his colony's planter class. He pursued this goal through land ownership and serving as a soldier and legislator. He exceeded his initial objective—and exceeded it spectacularly, becoming the great man in Leutze's painting and the father of his country. ♦

# Fathers in Chief

*A revealing look at presidents as parents.*

BY TEVI TROY

Vice President Henry Wallace once observed of his boss, Franklin Delano Roosevelt, “He doesn’t know any man and no man knows him. Even his own family doesn’t know anything about him.” It’s not surprising that Wallace would think ill of a man who dumped him from the ticket while seeking a fourth term—a move that enabled Harry Truman, rather than Wallace, to ascend to the presidency. But given Roosevelt’s relationship with his own children, Wallace’s comment was probably a product of insight, not just bitterness.

In this new book on presidents and their families, Joshua Kendall does not just confirm Wallace’s observation, he contends that presidents’ relationships with their families provide a fuller picture of the men and their lives inside and outside the White House. And Kendall makes this compelling case with an effective (and wide-ranging) series of stories.

For instance, FDR not only did not appear to know his kids that well, but he outsourced parenting to some very problematic characters. Kendall tell the story of “Old Battleax,” a cruel nanny for the Roosevelt children hired by their grandmother (FDR’s mother) Sara. Old Battleax physically abused the kids, locked one in a closet for hours, and once punished young James by forcing him to wear his sister’s clothing and

*Tevi Troy, presidential historian and former White House aide, is the author of the forthcoming Shall We Wake the President?*

**First Dads**  
*Parenting and Politics from George Washington to Barack Obama*  
 by Joshua Kendall  
 Grand Central, 400 pp., \$27



*Lyndon Johnson and his daughters (1964)*

march along East 65th Street in Manhattan. To FDR’s credit, James recalled that “Father was as happy as any of us kids” when Old Battleax finally left—as a result of Eleanor discovering the nanny’s liquor stash. Franklin Roosevelt, it would seem, could manage the country through World War II but couldn’t handle his own household staff.

FDR’s parenting techniques, such as they were, may come as a surprise, but no one would be shocked to know that Lyndon B. Johnson was somewhat inattentive to his children. In fact, Lynda used to read the *Congressional Record* in depth just so she could have a conversation with her dad. As for Luci, she also found LBJ hard to reach except when she returned from what she called “daddy duty”—working in Johnson’s campaign, speaking on behalf of her father against Barry Goldwater in 1964.

After those trips, Kendall writes, “LBJ gave her his undivided attention.”

Jimmy Carter appeared to have the opposite problem from Johnson and Roosevelt: He was so solicitous of his daughter Amy that he became a national laughingstock after saying, in a debate with Ronald Reagan in 1980, that he consulted with Amy about nuclear weapons policy. Carter’s foolish comment—not to mention the shameless politicization of his own daughter—hurt him in the campaign. A few days after the debate, Reagan joked to a crowd in Milwaukee that “I remember when Patti and Ron were tiny kids; we used to talk about nuclear power.” Johnny Carson ribbed Carter about the incident as well, saying that “this will be a significant monologue because I asked Amy Carter what she thought were the most important issues to make jokes about.”

Yet with all the abuse he took for such seeming solicitude, Carter still had major deficiencies as a father. Years after leaving the White House, one of his sons, Jack, told the former president on a hunting trip: “Daddy, I’ve been wanting to tell you for years. I think the way you treated me as a child almost ruined my life.” And once again, Carter proved that he listened to his children, even to his detriment. After his initial anger subsided, he recalled that “I went home and told my wife about it, and it took us a long time to realize that we were not good parents.” Obviously, we are not privy to all the particulars of Jimmy Carter’s parenting, but this seems like an astounding reaction: If every parent who heard their kids say something along the lines of “You ruined my life!” determined that they had failed as parents, the roster of self-described good parents would probably be a null set.

At times, Kendall’s approach can lead to a very different impression of a president than the one handed down by history. Ulysses S. Grant’s

reputation, derived largely from his tenure as a Civil War general, is that of a battlefield butcher who drank too much. With his family, however, he was a different person: He missed his children terribly when traveling, so much so that he dreamed about them and pleaded with his wife for updates on their activities. And when he was with them, he was even more attentive, making paper boats and reading to them from the novels of Charles Dickens. (*Little Dorrit*, it seems, was quite popular in the Grant house.)

Kendall does not just look at presidents and their children, but how these commanders in chief treated their wives as well. This is somewhat well-trod ground, although it is amusing to learn that Mamie Eisenhower stopped playing tennis with the temperamental Ike in order to preserve their marriage. Kendall also delves into marital infidelities, such as Warren G. Harding's, while largely ignoring the many affairs of John F. Kennedy, the office liaisons of Lyndon Johnson, and the well- and not-so-well-known trysts of Bill Clinton. The informed reader is left wondering whether some kind of political filter determined Kendall's approach and selections.

Of course, the big question in a book such as this is whether the subject being examined—the family lives of presidents—illuminates history's judgments on the presidents in question and their legacies to the nation. On this point I would have to say: probably not. Character is important, but family circumstances are so private and unique that they are not always the best portal through which to make these evaluations. If told that a divorced man with few intimate friends and standoffish relations with his children would be a president who would cut taxes, bolster the military, reform the tax code, win a major conflict, and improve America's reputation around the world, I suspect that most Americans would vote for such a man, regardless of his personal circumstances. We know this because the American people have already done so, and the man's name was Ronald Reagan. ♦

BCA

# Room for Murder

*Mayhem and mystery in Victorian Edinburgh.*

BY JON L. BREEN

**T**he locked-room mystery was a favorite subcategory of detective stories in the early 20th century. By 1941, it seemed all possible variations on getting a murderer into or out of a room locked, sealed, barred, closely observed, or otherwise inaccessible, without resort to supernatural agencies, had been discovered, and Howard Haycraft, in his definitive history *Murder for Pleasure*, was warning newcomers not to attempt it: "Only a genius can invest it with novelty or interest to-day."

Despite such discouragement, the device lives on in the 21st century, amid some confusion about what constitutes an example. Some erroneously call novels like Agatha Christie's *And Then There Were None*—in which 10 unconnected people are invited to a remote island by an anonymous host—"locked-room" novels when they mean "closed circle," in which possible culprits are limited to a set group of characters. The term "locked-room mystery" is confined to crimes that, to all appearances, could not have happened. The broader related terms "impossible crime" and "miracle problem" include non-door-related problems, e.g., no footprints in fresh snow apart from those of the victim.

From around 1930 to the early 1970s, the consensus master of this sort of thing was John Dickson Carr, also known under the transparent pseudonym Carter Dickson, whose novels and short stories almost invariably presented their detectives with apparent impossibilities to explain. Oscar de Muriel, a new writer in his early thirties, parallels Carr in interesting ways, beyond the obvious fact that both delight in creating

## The Strings of Murder

by Oscar de Muriel  
Pegasus, 412 pp., \$26.95

a seemingly supernatural milieu before rationally dispelling its mysteries.

Both writers are North American Anglophiles. Carr, a native of Uniontown, Pennsylvania, set most of his books in Britain and lived there for a time, including the dangerous days of World War II, until his disgust with the postwar Labour government caused him to return to the United States. The author of *The Strings of Murder* is a Mexican who went to Britain to complete his doctorate in chemistry and stayed there, now living in Lancashire.

Carr was among the pioneers of historical detective fiction, with many of his later novels set in past times, mostly in England. Oscar de Muriel chooses, as a background, Edinburgh in the 1880s. Both writers are notable for effective action scenes, broad humor, brightly drawn characters, and a commitment to fair-play detection, in which clues are provided for the reader to work out the solution.

The first-person narrator here is Scotland Yard detective inspector Ian Frey, introduced as he is called to St. Paul's Cathedral in November 1888 by Sir Charles Warren, who, in the midst of Jack the Ripper's series of murders, has recently resigned under pressure as commissioner. Frey, who studied medicine at Oxford and law at Cambridge (completing neither) is not an entirely likable character, though he gains reader sympathy as the story goes on. Somewhat fussy, snobbish, and egotistical, he sees himself in the Great Detective mode. He has a volatile temper and a knack for colorful insults: An

*Jon L. Breen is the author, most recently, of The Threat of Nostalgia and Other Stories.*

inept police photographer is a “stinking piece of rancid mutton.”

The beginning of the novel finds Frey at a low ebb. The ouster of Warren, a friend of his late mother’s family with whom he has been closely connected, leads to his firing by the new commissioner. Frey attends a dinner party where he will deliver the unhappy news to his wealthy family, consisting of an overbearing father who disapproves of his choice of career, a passive-aggressive stepmother, a full brother he has never gotten along with, and two half-brothers, the elder a lethargic slacker, the younger (and the only one he likes) a talented violinist.

The family constantly snipe at one another in a broadly cartoonish way. And after leaving this unpleasant company, Frey learns that his fiancée has broken off their engagement.

Then Frey receives a surprising assignment from Warren and the prime minister, Lord Salisbury, to go to Edinburgh to investigate the murder of violin virtuoso Guilleum Fontaine, who, though not a denizen of the East End, nor female, nor a prostitute, has had his throat cut and body mutilated in the style of Jack the Ripper. Could the Whitechapel killer be expanding his territory? Frey, whose real role in Edinburgh will be a secret, is officially seconded to Inspector Adolphus “Nine-Nails” McGray, whose police subdivision bears a title that would have delighted John Dickson Carr: “Commission for the Elucidation of Unsolved Cases Presumably Related to the Odd and Ghostly.”

McGray’s interest in the occult springs from a family tragedy that is introduced in a prologue and further explained in the course of the novel. The working-class Scot is earthier and more plainspoken than the upper-crust Englishman assigned to work with him. When Frey refers to his Protestant ancestors who were “close acquaintances of Martin Luther himself,” McGray replies: “Och, shush! Ye sound like Queen Vicky talking about the family trees o’ her hunting hounds.” Gradually attaining grudging mutual respect, Frey and McGray form a fresh variant of the odd-couple detecting team.

The murdered violinist habitually locked himself in his upstairs room to practice, and it was there that he was found. Since the victim’s internal organs were removed, Ripper-style, the problem is not only how the killer escaped the locked room but how the bloody organs were removed without leaving a trace.

The novel stakes a lot on the quality of its solution. In the ideal locked-room mystery, the answer should be as striking as the problem. This one is, offering just the right combination of drama, outlandishness, and believability. The action climax is way over the top, with a touch of the Grand Guignol, but viscerally satisfying.

Whether the author grew up bilingual or is writing in an acquired second language is uncertain; but his English prose and dialogue, including Scottish regionalisms, are faultless. He has an eye for enlightening historical details, such as the window tax imposed on Scotland in 1696. Rather than pay it, the Scots walled up their windows in protest.

Not content with that, and to make even more of a statement against the

government, people left the window frames intact, as if saying “we did have windows here, but will do anything to go against your stupid taxes.” The very façades of Edinburgh had thus become an anti-English flag.

And as Frey walks through the city in the 1880s, though the tax is long repealed, many windows remain “blocked out with the most disgraceful red brick.”

Oscar de Muriel has the combination of unfettered enthusiasm, wide knowledge of various disciplines, an ear for language, irrepressible humor, narrative flair, and a structural understanding that makes for irresistible entertainment. Frey and McGray’s second case, *A Fever of the Blood*, not yet published in the United States, has even stronger supernatural overtones, centered on apparent witchcraft. And though not quite up to the demanding standard of *The Strings of Murder*, its solution is, again, well-worked-out, with an author’s note to defend its plausibility. If de Muriel continues on course, he could be a major figure in detective fiction, a classicist for the 21st century. ♦

BCA

## Being There

*The divine, and mundane, world of Annie Dillard.*

BY DANNY HEITMAN

Last year, at age 70, Annie Dillard received a National Medal for the Arts and Humanities for, as the citation put it, “her profound reflections on human life and nature.” The presentation, made at the White House, had a valedictory air, as if capping a career that’s more or less concluded. A similar sense of summation informs *The Abundance: Narrative Essays Old and New*, which collects a sampling

Danny Heitman, a columnist for the *Advocate in Baton Rouge*, is the author of *A Summer of Birds: John James Audubon at Oakley House*.

**The Abundance**  
*Narrative Essays Old and New*  
by Annie Dillard  
Ecco, 304 pp., \$25.99

of the nonfiction Dillard has written for more than four decades, much of it about the natural world.

Annie Dillard’s career took off in 1975, when she won a Pulitzer Prize for *Pilgrim at Tinker Creek*, a chronicle of her excursions into the fields, woods, and mountains near her home in Roanoke, Virginia. The book’s blend of nature writing and cosmic speculation invited

comparisons to Henry David Thoreau, another author who found mystery and adventure just beyond the back door.

Like Thoreau, Dillard argues for mindfulness as a moral imperative, advancing intense observation as a gateway to wisdom. Chiming with Thoreau's *Walden* and *Cape Cod*, as well as Melville's *Moby-Dick* and the poems of Emily Dickinson, Dillard also acknowledges nature as not merely a benign tableau of pastel sunsets and gurgling brooks, but a complicated mix of transcendence and terror. In a passage from *Pilgrim* included in *The Abundance*, Dillard describes a day off the coast of Florida:

One late afternoon at low tide a hundred big sharks passed the beach near the mouth of a tidal river in a feeding frenzy. As each green wave rose from the churning water, it illuminated within itself the six- or eight-foot-long bodies of twisting sharks. The sharks disappeared as each wave rolled toward me; then a new wave swelled above the horizon, containing in it, like scorpions in amber, sharks that roiled and heaved. The sight held power and beauty, grace tangled in a rapture of violence.

In staring down this contradiction, or so Dillard seems to say, we find the central predicament of existence—and the chance to grasp what it means to be fully human. At another point in *Pilgrim*, Dillard wonders if beauty, like the proverbial tree that falls in the forest, registers its presence even if no one is there to perceive it: “The answer must be, I think, that beauty and grace are performed whether or not we will or sense them. The least we can do is try to be there.”

The promise of new material in *The Abundance* is fulfilled, but just barely. Of the 22 essays here, only 1 hasn't been previously published in book form. Dillard's website lists some 30 essays on various topics, a number of them quite good, that have yet to make it between covers. *The Abundance* would have been an obvious place to gather them, but Dillard has shied away from the kind of omnibus projects that bring material with no common theme under the same roof. When the essays of *Teaching a Stone to Talk* appeared in 1982, Dillard men-

tioned that “this is not a collection of occasional pieces, such as a writer brings out to supplement his real work; instead, this is my real work, such as it is.”

Like that earlier project, *The Abundance* arranges selections from Dillard's writing into a subtle narrative arc. It begins with “Total Eclipse,” where Dillard mentions miners so close to the earth's core that their hands recoil from the heat, and concludes with “An Expedition to the Pole,” in which she shifts thematically to the top of the planet.

The real subject of “Total Eclipse,” as the title suggests, is the moon's fleeting blackout of the sun, which Dillard witnessed in Washington state on “February 26, 1979, a Monday morning.” In including the date, Dillard reminds us that events of great wonder are nevertheless grounded in the temporal realm of everyday life. As the sky blackens like a mythical plague, she looks down a hillside and scans the traffic. “Four or five cars pulled off the road,” she reports.

The rest, though, in a line at least five miles long, drove on into town. The highway ran between hills; the people could not have seen any of the eclipsed sun at all. Yakima will have another total eclipse in 2039. Perhaps, in 2039, businesses will give their employees an hour off.

Although the workaday world speeds along, apparently unmoved by an event in the sky worthy of the Old Testament, Dillard hints that the divine must inevitably be tempered by the domestic, since a life of looking at miracles nonstop would be like an unblinking stare into some biblical burning bush, simply too intense for mortal eyes. “One turns at last even from glory itself with a sigh of relief,” she concludes after the eclipse ends. “From the depths of mystery, and even from the heights of splendor, we bounce back and hurry for the latitudes of home.”

Dillard compares the eclipse to a mushroom cloud, a lens cover, the lid of a pot, and a wedding ring, as if trying on metaphors for size. Vivid images inform Dillard's prose, an extension of her origins as a poet before *Pilgrim* launched

her fame. Indulging the excesses of modernist verse, Dillard can make a fetish of obscurity. She sometimes seems to go mad in midsentence, lapsing from lucidity into literary moonshine, a vaporous amalgam of Ralph Waldo Emerson, James Agee, and Kahlil Gibran. In a passage from the largely unreadable narrative *Holy the Firm* that's excerpted here, Dillard details the arrival of morning: “Every day is a god, each day is a god, and holiness holds forth in time. I worship each god, I praise each day splintered down, splintered down and wrapped in time like a husk, a husk of many colors spreading, at dawn fast over the mountains split.”

Similarly ethereal parts of *Pilgrim* prompted Eudora Welty to declare in a review that “I honestly do not know what she is talking about at such times.” Geoff Dyer quotes Welty's critique in his introduction to *The Abundance*, where he concedes Dillard's eccentricities and winkingly observes that she's

“pretty much a fruitcake.” But Welty also noted that, when Dillard isn't going off on a Tantric tangent, she can excel at straight narrative. That talent is most evident in *An American Childhood*, Dillard's charming 1987 memoir of growing up in postwar Pittsburgh. Dillard writes of her parents with striking clarity and abiding affection, and like Elizabeth Bishop and Virginia Woolf, she has a way of deftly capturing the comic strangeness of what it's like to be a child.

*The Abundance* excerpts eight chapters from the memoir, including a pitch-perfect recollection of a misadventure with snowballs and a fond remembrance of her parents' genius for telling jokes.

Although probably her best book, *An American Childhood* doesn't neatly fit into Dillard's more celebrated canon of nature writing. But its generous appraisal of family foibles tacitly acknowledges that nature also includes *Homo sapiens*, perhaps its most peculiar creation of all.

*The Abundance* reveals Dillard as a writer for whom oddity has been a creative resource—and, when embraced too freely, an occupational hazard. ♦



Annie Dillard

**“Apple has told Republican leaders it will not provide funding or other support for the party’s 2016 presidential convention, as it’s done in the past, citing Donald Trump’s controversial comments about women, immigrants and minorities.”**

—Politico, June 18, 2016

**PARODY**

So we were... right. So doesn't that make you happy?

MAY, JULY 19, 2016

ONE DOLLAR CHEAP

# GOP CONVENTION FIGHTS TECHNOLOGY DEFICIT

*“PC load letter”? What the [expletive] does that mean?”*

By DAVID LIGHTMAN

CLEVELAND — When researchers at the Trump campaign needed to access a transcript from “Meet the Press,” it took more than 15 minutes to open the site’s home page. The slow connection, according to an IT technician at the Quicken Loans Arena, had to do with the network hardware—namely, a dial-up modem manufactured in 1996 by Lucent Technologies.

“It’s not as bad as it sounds,” said the technician, who asked to remain nameless. “All those pings, all that static—why, it’s downright nostalgic. And besides, you’d be surprised how many bits per second you can get when the other telephone lines are quiet.”

Because of the boycott by Apple and other technology firms, the Republican convention has had to get by with dial-up modems, roll-paper fax machines, and even dot-matrix printers. But campaign officials stressed the setback is minor. “Our message is the same,” said Trump spokeswoman Hope Hicks. “It doesn’t matter if that message is transmitted by FaceTime, Skype, or perforated, continuous fax paper. By the way, if anyone knows where to find ink cartridges for an Okidata Microline 320, I’d be grateful.” Ms. Hicks was later seen berating an intern who printed a document in color.



Mike Matus

Fortran experts run through the basics for GOP tech-support staff in Cleveland.

“Who needs these Apple losers, anyway?” asked Donald Trump during a press conference. “We’ve got amazing computer experts, incredible operators who have degrees in computers and who can operate Fortran and COBOL systems. They’re just terrific.” Mr. Trump then interrupted

the press conference to take a call from his campaign manager, Paul Manafort. The presumptive nominee needed to exit the arena, however, in order to get better cell reception on his GTE flip-

*Continued on Page A16*

the weekly  
**Standard**

JULY 4 / JULY 11, 2016